

Gender, Childhood, and Community Engagement in Peacekeeping

By Madeline Zutt

with contributions from Dustin Johnson and Erica Marsh

WORKSHOP REPORT – NOVEMBER 1, 2022



About the Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace and Security

The Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace, and Security was founded by General Roméo Dallaire in 2007. General Dallaire first experienced the issue of child soldiers as the Force Commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda during the 1994 genocide. During this time, General Dallaire realized that he and his troops were ill-prepared to face them.

The Dallaire Institute wants to bring the perspective of the security sector to the issue of child soldiery, while equipping them with the training and tools to prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers worldwide. Through this we hope to build a more holistic, prevention oriented approach to the issue of child soldiers that complements current efforts while providing innovative solutions.

For more information, visit. www.dallaireinstitute.org

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From 3 to 5 May 2022, the Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace, and Security (The Dallaire Institute) and the International Peace Institute (IPI) held a workshop at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Center (KAIPTC) in Accra, Ghana on **Gender, Childhood, and Community Engagement in Peacekeeping**. Thirty-two participants from eight countries convened to share lessons learned on how to fill the gaps and address the challenges in our current state of knowledge and practice on community engagement in peacekeeping with respect to gender and childhood. The topics of gender, childhood, and community engagement are distinct areas of focus, but interlinked given their focus on individuals. A goal of the workshop was to solidify the connections between these topics. Peacekeepers, researchers and policymakers

have focused on how community engagement, gender, and child protection have become increasingly important features of peacekeeping. A nuanced understanding of both community engagement and gender in peacekeeping missions is essential for mission effectiveness, particularly in areas of child protection and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). This can be seen in practice with the popularity of female and mixed engagement teams and gender strong units. Policy and academic research in this area is also demonstrating the need to move beyond adding women to peacekeeping, but instead calls for the need to examine the gender relations and power structures inherent in peacekeeping, recognizing that attention to age, race, and socioeconomic background are also important. Given the young population in

many peacekeeping host countries, the lack of attention to children and youth in peacekeeping research is of particular concern. It is in this context that the Dallaire Institute and IPI convened a workshop on Gender, Childhood, and Community Engagement in Peacekeeping.

The three-day workshop featured an initial day of panel presentations and discussions in a hybrid format followed by two days of roundtable discussions which focused on the current state of knowledge and practice of community engagement in peacekeeping and addressed the gaps, challenges, and opportunities that currently exist in policy and research on peacekeeping.

Key recommendations to address existing challenges and gaps of community engagement in peacekeeping -- particularly as it relates to child protection and gender -- emerged from the roundtable discussions. These recommendations include:

CHILD PROTECTION FOCAL POINTS (CPFPs)

- Further research, policy development, and training are needed at the UN and troop and police contributing countries (T/PCC) levels to ensure that missions have access to the right child protection expertise through the deployment of CPFPs at the appropriate level and with the right skills and experience tailored to the mission's mandate and location;

GENDER EQUITY AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACEKEEPING

- Training and education on gender equity

need to be more holistic in order to start shifting mindsets, changing behaviors, and ensuring women's meaningful participation in peacekeeping. This holistic approach requires attention to intersecting factors in identity such as race, class, and religion, avoiding gender essentialisms, and addressing masculinity.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Further research, training, and policy are needed to improve the ability of uniformed peacekeepers to carry out community engagement in a manner sensitive to dynamics within the community, politics, and gender dynamics.

The report begins with an overview of current literature from academic, UN, and NGO sources on the topics of focus of the workshop to help contextualize the discussion in the report. It then summarizes the panel discussions that took place at the start of the workshop and then provides a synthesis of and recommendations based on the two days of small group discussions that followed.

GENDER, CHILDHOOD, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN PEACEKEEPING – Current State of Knowledge

GENDER AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement in UN peacekeeping has become an important enabler of mission effectiveness, supporting key areas of the mandate including Protection of Civilians (PoC) and child protection, and improving community awareness of the mission mandate and its limits. Community engagement began to become formalized in the UN mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) in the 2000s. It has since expanded into other missions, and has become a mandated part of large peacekeeping missions and institutionalized at the UN.¹ A variety of approaches have now been formalized through policy, handbooks, orders, and training, particularly in the four large, multidimensional missions in South Sudan (UNMISS), Central African Republic (MINUSCA), Mali (MINUSMA), and MONUSCO. These include Joint Protection Teams, which integrate military, police, and civilian personnel and are “deployed to volatile locations to analyze and respond to protection needs”², Community Liaison Assistants, who are national staff within battalions serving

as “intermediaries between the mission and communities”³, and Community Alert Networks, which allow civilians in the host population to provide early warning of protection concerns directly to the mission.⁴

Following an early and ad hoc implementation in MONUSCO, the UN has begun institutionalizing the use of Engagement Teams (ETs) and Engagement Platoons (EPs) within the military component. These are groups of military peacekeepers, generally all women or mixed gender, who are deployed as part of a patrol with the specific purpose of engaging the community, particularly women and children.⁵ The use of ETs began in UN missions based on their original use by the US and British militaries during their occupations and counterinsurgency missions in Afghanistan and Iraq.⁶ Their use started in MINUSCA as well and has now been institutionalized through the latest edition of the UN Infantry Battalion Manual, and soon-to-be-released guidance and training from

1 Henigson, “Community Engagement in UN Peacekeeping Operations.”

2 Ibid, p. 2.

3 Ibid, p. 2.

4 Ibid.

5 Baldwin, “From Female Engagement Teams to Engagement Platoons: The Evolution of Gendered Community Engagement in UN Peace Operations”; Henigson.

6 Baldwin.

the Department of Peace Operations (DPO).⁷ Overall, community engagement has been officially recognized and mandated by the UN as a key enabler of peace operations' success, while gaps remain in monitoring the effectiveness of community engagement, implementing it in a gender-sensitive manner, and providing sufficient training to enable peacekeepers to carry it out effectively while avoiding unintended harms.⁸ In particular, community engagement should not be seen as only a task for women peacekeepers and only targeting certain parts of the population. Discussions around the gender dynamics of peacekeeping often stem from the WPS agenda and the related UN Security Council resolutions. However, the gender dynamics within peacekeeping cross across different topics including a focus on the internal dynamics of peacekeeping (specifically the inclusion of women peacekeepers), gender-responsive peacekeeping (a related DPO strategy), and the ways in which gender relates to community engagement. Both gendered protection concerns, such as sexual violence, and the gender dynamics of community engagement such as whether women are better placed to engage with women in the community, are areas that have received increased policy attention. For instance, this can be seen in the development of the community alert networks to respond to conflict-related sexual violence,⁹ or the original intention of engagement teams to gain intelligence from women in the community.¹⁰ While conducting community engagement in

7 Baldwin.

8 Baldwin, Henigson.

9 Henigson.

10 Dyvik, "Women as 'Practitioners' and 'Targets'"; McBride and Wibben, "The Gendering of Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan."

a gender-sensitive manner is vital in order to both reach a broader range of the community and address the often-problematic gendered dynamics of military-civilian interaction, the discussion, and implementation of community engagement in peacekeeping have often relied on gendered stereotypes and essentializations that undermine its effectiveness and can potentially lead to harm. This is particularly prevalent in community engagement by the military component.¹¹

The original framing of female engagement teams (FETs) in US and British counterinsurgency and in UN peacekeeping focused on the idea that women and children in the host community would be more likely to approach, talk to, and share information with soldiers or peacekeepers who were women. This assumption was based both on cultural and religious assumptions, and an essentialized, assumed similarity between women and children, and difference with men.¹² With the institutionalization of ETs and EPs in peacekeeping policy, there has been a shift towards the use of mixed-gender engagement teams and an emphasis on gendered engagement practices allowing access to the whole community. While this is a positive shift, it needs to be backed up with sufficient training and education to ensure that the use of mixed-gender ETs does not continue to rely on gendered stereotypes.¹³ For instance, the assumption that women are inherently better suited to engaging with other women can lead to insufficient training, especially for sensitive topics like conflict-

11 Baldwin; Dyvik; Henigson; McBride and Wibben.

12 Baldwin; Dyvik; McBride and Wibben.

13 Baldwin; Johnson, 2022, "Women as the Essential Protectors of Children?"

related sexual violence (CRSV),¹⁴ to men refraining from taking part in engagement even though they may be qualified,¹⁵ and assumes a natural solidarity between all women that in reality is often challenged by race, class, religion, national origin, or other factors of identity.¹⁶ The intersection of gendered and racialized stereotypes in community engagement can lead to a view of peacekeepers as “saviors,” flatten and generalize diversity in host communities, and reduce the acknowledgement of local civilians’ agency and input.¹⁷

For a more comprehensive overview of community engagement, engagement teams, and gender dynamics in peacekeeping, see IPI’s reports: [“From Female Engagement Teams to Engagement Platoons: The Evolution of Gendered Community Engagement in UN Peace Operations”](#) by Gretchen Baldwin; [“Community Engagement in UN Peacekeeping Operations: A People-Centered Approach to Protecting Civilians”](#) by Harley Henigson; [“Blue on Blue: Investigating Sexual Abuse of Peacekeepers”](#) by Phoebe Donnelly, Dyan Mazurana, and Evyn Papworth; and [“Woman First, Soldier Second: Taboos and Stigmas Facing Military Women in UN Peace Operations”](#) by Lotte Vermeij.

CHILDHOOD

Child protection has been an important component of UN peacekeeping missions since the development of the children and

14 Holmes, “Situating Agency.”

15 Singleton and Holohan, “The Case for ‘Trust Awareness.’”

16 Baldwin; Henry, “Peacexploitation?”

17 Baldwin.

armed conflict agenda (CAAC) at the UN in the late 1990s and has evolved to be a mandated and dedicated element of the UN’s four large multidimensional missions.¹⁸ Monitoring and reporting on grave violations of children’s rights, and preventing violence against children during armed conflict, are important parts of the child protection mandate that rely in part on community engagement.¹⁹ Relatedly, the focus on women peacekeepers taking part in community engagement by the military component has in part been argued for by their assumed ability to better engage with children in the community.²⁰ Compared to the focus on gender dynamics and women in UN peacekeeping, and the broader CAAC mandate there has been comparatively little research done on child protection in UN peacekeeping.

Training, policy, and guidance from the UN generally discourage engagement with children, particularly by the military component. For instance, the UN Infantry Battalion Manual states that engagement should only be used for advocacy and preventing grave violations of children’s rights, and conducted carefully to avoid further risks to children.²¹ Similarly, the Specialized Training Materials on Child Protection for the military caution against engaging with children due to the risk they may face from being perceived as associated with the UN.²² DPO’s Manual on

18 Johnson, 2022; Kullenberg, “Overlapping Agendas.”

19 Johnson, 2022.

20 Johnson, 2021, “A Critical Feminist Approach”; Johnson, 2022.

21 Department of Peace Operations, UNIBAM.

22 Department of Peacekeeping Operations, “STMs.” Note: between the writing and publication of this report, the UN released an updated version of the STMs. This report refers to the older edition.

Child Protection emphasizes that in the more sensitive case of interviewing children to collect information about grave violations of their rights, interviews should only be carried out by properly trained civilian staff in a gender and age-sensitive manner and with regard to potential risks to children.²³ At the same time, it should be acknowledged that children are likely to approach and engage peacekeepers of their own volition, and military peacekeepers often operate without civilian staff present, such as on patrols, where they may need to engage with children. Hence, attention to how to communicate with and safely engage children is important, but is largely lacking from peacekeeping training.

Children face many specific threats during armed conflict and can be particularly vulnerable depending on their age. However, the broader international approach to CAAC, and the language in UN peacekeeping-related documents, view children no matter their age or other factors as entirely vulnerable and lacking any meaningful agency.²⁴ Such a view neglects children’s experiences of agency and vulnerability during armed conflict and sets up an artificial binary between adults and children.²⁵ Children especially, and civilians more broadly, are often viewed as more or less passive recipients of protection, rather than one of many actors who work to improve their protection in various ways, and hence failing to appreciate children’s agency may miss ways in which they can participate in

their own protection.²⁶ While caution and do-no-harm principles are required, there may be better ways in which children can be engaged in peacekeeping to enhance their protection.

CHILD PROTECTION FOCAL POINTS

Given the range of community engagement practices carried out by the civilian, police, and military components of peacekeeping missions²⁷ and their relevance for child protection, coordination and information sharing between them is important. Unfortunately, there are often silos between the different components of the mission, and between different agendas and focus areas, inhibiting such coordination.²⁸ One key enabler to overcoming some of these issues is the network of child protection focal points (CPFPs) within the mission. They are mandated in the 2017 policy on Child Protection in United Nations Peace Operations, with the requirement for a CFPF at the HQ level, and in each battalion and company.²⁹ The HQ-level CFPF is required to “coordinate and work closely with CPAs [child protection advisors] and child protection staff”³⁰ and the lower-level CPFPs work to channel information to CPAs among other tasks. Similarly, CPFPs are required in the police component at HQ and in each field office to help coordinate information sharing.³¹ Presently, many of the CFPF positions are

23 Department of Peace Operations and Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Manual for Child Protection Staff.

24 Johnson, 2022; Tabak, *The Child and the World*.

25 Brett and Specht, *Young Soldiers*; Denov, “Child Soldiers and Iconography.”

26 Drumbi, *Reimagining Child Soldiers*; Johnson, 2022; Levine, “Some Considerations for Civilian–Peacekeeper Protection Alliances.”

27 Henigson.

28 Kullenberg.

29 Department of Peace Operations, Department of Field Support, and Department of Political Affairs, “Policy: Child Protection.”

30 *Ibid*, p. 7.

31 *Ibid*, p. 8.

combined in the same person along with gender focal points and other roles. For instance, the UN's four large multidimensional missions presently have an HQ-level military gender and protection advisor with responsibility for child protection, PoC, gender mainstreaming, and preventing sexual exploitation and abuse.³² The Vancouver Principles and their accompanying Implementation Guidance similarly call for the deployment of trained CPFPs in the military and police components of missions in line with the policy on child protection in UN peace operations. The Vancouver Principles also call for CPFPs' inclusion in national doctrine, policy, and training, and to ensure that they are properly educated, trained, and selected for deployment into these roles.³³

With the general lack of research publicly available on child protection within UN peacekeeping, there is a gap in understanding the effectiveness of CPFPs, the best structure for their role including whether or not to combine the position with the gender focal point or other protection focal point roles, the required education, training, and skills for selected CPFPs, and the extent to which they are implemented already by troop and police contributing countries (T/PCCs). Consequently, further research is needed by both academia and civil society to support the UN's internal lessons learned processes, and T/PCC military and police forces.

In this context, the Dallaire Institute and IPI, with support from KAIPTC, hosted a three-day workshop that featured an initial day of panel presentations and discussions in a hybrid format followed by two days of roundtable discussions. The workshop brought together

researchers, practitioners, and security sector actors to discuss the current state of knowledge and practice on community engagement and how the research and practitioner communities can work together to address the challenges and gaps that exist in this area of study and practice.

32 Johnson, 2022.

33 Government of Canada, Implementation Guidance.

OPENING REMARKS

The workshop opened with remarks by the commandant of the KAIPTC who spoke to the importance of holding workshops of this kind, highlighting that this workshop on Gender, Childhood, and Community Engagement in Peacekeeping will help improve peacekeeping practices by exchanging lessons learned and best practices.

Dr. Catherine Baillie Abidi, Director of Research and Learning at the Dallaire Institute offered her own remarks thanking IPI for their support in convening the workshop and acknowledging the importance of the 2017 Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations – a project that is developing and testing approaches to increase the meaningful participation of women in UN peacekeeping operations. In her remarks, Dr. Baillie Abidi spoke about how important the workshop is to bring together security sector actors, community members, and researchers to help fill some of the critical gaps in peacekeeping.

Her Excellency Kati Csaba, High Commissioner of Canada to Ghana, emphasized the importance of adopting an intersectional approach to gender, children, and community engagement in UN peacekeeping missions. High Commissioner Csaba spoke about how this workshop is particularly important for the government of Canada given its feminist foreign policy and its deep commitment to the women, peace, and security agenda. In closing, High Commissioner Csaba acknowledged that while over a hundred countries have implemented the Vancouver Principles, more need to do so moving forward and expressed hope that the workshop would facilitate dialogue on how

to encourage more countries to endorse the Vancouver Principles.

Dr. Phoebe Donnelly, Director of IPI's Women Peace and Security Program, closed the session, recognizing the partnership with the Dallaire Institute and KAIPTC and the ways in which this workshop will inform IPI's future work, especially its work around women in peace operations.

PANEL SUMMARIES

PANEL 1: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN PEACEKEEPING: EXPLORING GENDER, CHILDHOOD, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The first panel, moderated by Dr. Shelly Whitman, the Executive Director of the Dallaire Institute, focused on current challenges and existing gaps when it comes to engaging children and addressing child protection concerns in peacekeeping. Dr. Whitman reiterated the importance of ensuring that all children are prioritized equally in peacekeeping missions so that no child is left behind. To introduce the conversation and present some of the main points of this discussion, Dr. Whitman invited three panelists with research and policy expertise to share their experiences and reflections.

Gretchen Baldwin was, at the time of the workshop, a research fellow at the International Peace Institute's Women, Peace, and Security Program, where her work focuses on gender and community engagement in UN joint peace operations. Ms. Baldwin presented findings from her research on the evolution of gendered community engagement in UN peacekeeping operations – reflected in the shift from military engagement teams (ETs) to engagement platoons (EPs). ETs are currently being used at the UN and will continue to be used even as EPs begin to deploy.

In practice, ETs can serve four important roles in UN peacekeeping missions: information gathering, building trust and serving as positive examples, responding to CRSV and protecting civilians, and providing ad hoc assistance in other areas. Ms. Baldwin remarked that

with an increased focus on community-level peacekeeping, ETs have been used frequently to gather information from the communities they are supposed to protect. In gathering this information, ETs have been characterized, anecdotally, as the “alert system” for threats specifically targeting women and children and have been cited as being particularly important when it comes to engaging with women in host communities. However, ETs are not always well connected to the rest of the mission – reporting lines may be unclear, and ETs may not be adequately equipped to analyze the information they have gathered, or they may not have the necessary language skills to ensure meaningful engagement with the communities.

Ms. Baldwin argued that ETs and EPs can play a role in protecting local communities from grave violations and providing ad hoc assistance to peacekeeping missions beyond their military mandates. When it comes to protecting communities from violence, ETs and EPs can act as valuable focal points and resources for survivors to report incidents of sexual violence (given the high levels of stigma around CRSV). That said, it is worth noting that there is little concrete data to support the notion that ETs are more effective than other teams or missions that engage with communities on CRSV prevention.

While our understandings of ETs and EPs have become more refined, gendered assumptions continue to shape how we approach community engagement broadly and the engagement of women peacekeepers specifically. Women peacekeepers are still too often viewed as better at community engagement – and in need

of more protection – as compared to their male counterparts simply by virtue of their gender. Moreover, there are harmful, sometimes racist, gendered stereotypes of host communities, particularly in Africa, that members of ETs and EPs may perpetuate, and which may severely impede meaningful community engagement.

To conclude, Ms. Baldwin noted that while ETs and EPs can and often do advance gender-sensitive community engagement, improve information gathering and strengthen early warning mechanisms, there are operational challenges (e.g., short deployment times, lack of standardized engagement team training) and cultural or institutional barriers that can prevent members of these teams from engaging meaningfully with local communities. Addressing these challenges is needed to make community engagement in peacekeeping more effective.

Lt Col Lausanne Nsengimana Ingabire is a military gender advisor in the office of military affairs at the UN Department of Peace Operations (UNDPO) and has had extensive experience working with Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC).

Lt. Col. Ingabire spoke about the recent evolution of EPs. Together with 20-25 states, she is working on developing a handbook that will be used to train personnel deployed to EPs and hopes that the handbook will be approved in the near future. In addition, she mentioned that the UN DPO is developing a “Training of Trainers” to build the capacity of trainers from TCCs with units deployed in missions that have mandates to protect civilians. Within this development, particular attention is being paid to the language used, recognizing that communities are characterized

by differences in culture and language, differences in interactions between men, women, and children as well as differences in TCCs, and in order to create dialogue and build trust with local communities we must be sensitive to these differences. To conclude, Lt. Col, Ingabire reminded the audience that community engagement is everyone’s responsibility, not simply that of the ETs and EPs.

Leilah Gordon-Bates is the Program Manager within the Gender and Security Division at the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF), which focuses on transforming approaches to gender in peacekeeping operations. To begin, Ms. Gordon-Bates spoke about the Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP) Methodology – a tool that was developed to measure the level of women’s participation in peacekeeping missions from the perspectives of T/PCCs. The tool, developed with support from Global Affairs Canada and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has been piloted in eight countries including Ghana. The implementation of the tool then led to a series of evidence-based policy recommendations for T/PCCs and relevant UN entities on how to enhance opportunities for women in peace operations. The policy series is the result of 1,917 surveys that include 997 men and 920 women, and as such is the first survey that includes the perspectives of both men and women.

In addition, MOWIP data showed that preconceived attitudes about women and the unequal treatment of female personnel within military, police, or peacekeeping institutions are impediments to mission effectiveness. As a result, gender training that increases

awareness about gender sensitivity has become standard practice of T/PCCs in line with UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Ms. Gordon-Bates noted that, according to MOWIP data, there is no correlation between attending gender trainings and views supporting gender equality. In addition, she highlighted that “gender dynamics in peace operations are linked to internal dynamics of security sector institutions” and so gender training that targets discriminatory behavior within these institutions is likely to also help improve the peacekeepers’ attitudes and behaviors towards local communities.

Rigid or essentialized ideas of gender also impact what skills we look for in a peacekeeper. There is still a tendency to prioritize hard skills such as combat and tactical skills when looking at deployment criteria. Yet, when former peacekeepers were asked what skills were most important, they consistently ranked communication and interpersonal skills above other militarized skills. Ms. Gordon-Bates concluded by stating that peacekeepers today should have a combination of combat and tactical skills, knowledge of the cultural context, communication skills, a commitment to the rule of law and the protection of human rights as well as the ability to build and maintain trust with the local communities they are mandated to protect. Achieving a balance of both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ skills will be a critical step towards transforming approaches to peacekeeping as missions work towards a ‘fit for future’ model.

Ambassador Martin Vidal is the Uruguayan Ambassador to Canada, has been a career diplomat with over twenty years in the Uruguayan foreign service, and is a key advocate in the area of Women, Peace and

Security as well as the implementation of the Vancouver Principles.

In his remarks, Ambassador Vidal emphasized Uruguay’s longstanding commitment to UN peacekeeping, highlighting Uruguay’s strong collaborative relationship with Canada over the last few years when working to address challenges regarding gender, child protection, and community engagement in peacekeeping. Ambassador Vidal stated that Uruguay has been a core group of the Elsie Initiative and more recently has been one of the first pilot countries to complete an assessment of the barriers in its armed forces that prevent women from meaningfully participating in peace operations. When it comes to community engagement, Uruguay has collaborated with military advisors in New York, colleagues in various capitals, Canada, and the UN Secretariat to develop an Ep manual. Moreover, Ambassador Vidal noted that Uruguay was an early adopter of the Vancouver Principles and through the country’s partnership with the Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace and Security has established a Latin American Centre of Excellence to lead regional efforts to prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed violence across the region.

Ambassador Vidal highlighted that while gender, child protection, and community engagement are key aspects of peacekeeping, each with their own distinct characteristics, they are connected in important ways and the challenges associated with these issues do not occur in a vacuum. They are part of a broader challenge that encompasses the protection of civilians in peacekeeping settings. Ambassador Vidal noted that whether looking at these issues from a humanitarian, military

or political perspective our discussions always include the mention of multi-dimensional efforts are needed when dealing with a complex set of actors in order to achieve sustainable peace. Ambassador Vidal emphasized that community engagement should be a broader mindset that is put into practice by many different actors, whether they be part of civilian staff, a military component, a T/PCC, and the UN Security Council.

When it comes to issues like gender and child protection, Ambassador Vidal expressed the need to focus on transformative practices and solutions that address the root causes of conflict and put children's rights upfront when addressing child protection issues. Similarly, when dealing with gender equity, shifting mindsets towards local populations to better understand their perspectives and concerns is an important step to help build trust with local populations to improve community engagement in peacekeeping and achieve sustainable peace.

PANEL 2: EXPLORING GENDER, CHILDHOOD & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN MONUSCO

The second panel focused on the experiences of researchers, civilian, police, and military peacekeeping efforts in the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), was moderated by Arsene Tshidimu, the Dallaire Institute's Country Representative in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Mozambique. Participants spoke about the specific challenges, opportunities, and lessons learned from MONUSCO's work on community engagement, child protection, and gender mainstreaming.

The first panelist was **Alec Wargo** who is currently a Senior Child Protection Advisor at NATO and who was the first child protection advisor (CPA) appointed to the UN mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2001, before gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping operations was formally recognized as being integral to mission effectiveness. When he started as a CPA, gender was mainly important in two contexts; the first was the gender of the victims who were killed in conflict (mainly boys) and the second was the gender of the victims of conflict-related sexual violence (mainly girls). In 2003, Mr. Wargo's understanding of the conflict-gender nexus shifted when he met a fourteen-year-old girl in the Ituri province of the DRC. The girl had become pregnant as a result of being raped repeatedly by the commander of an armed group, but she also carried a gun and had enslaved other boys and girls at the behest of her commander. Mr. Wargo noted that the overlapping violations against this girl as well as her role in abducting and commanding other children gave him a more nuanced view of gender that went beyond simply seeing girls as victims and boys as abusers or perpetrators.

Interestingly, there were also gender considerations when assessing what sources of information were most valuable when trying to gather information about what was happening to boys and girls in the DRC. For example, in the South Kivu province's city of Shabunda, Mr. Wargo discussed how he would often seek information about children in armed conflict in the region from women who worked in the markets, finding that these women had excellent situational awareness about what was going on with children in their own communities.

There has always been a need within child protection teams to have both men and women in these roles, both within national and international staff. Mr. Wargo notes that historically CPA posts have achieved relatively good gender balance which may have set them apart from other components of peacekeeping missions. While there is a general agreement that ETs and EPs should be gender balanced, Mr. Wargo noted that there is still very little information on whether ETs and EPs are useful when it comes to dealing with children in armed conflict.

Finally, Mr. Wargo noted that there are currently significant tensions and structural difficulties in having military personnel deal with children directly. As a result, civilian peacekeepers who specialize in child protection have become essential personnel in peacekeeping missions. This does not mean that military peacekeepers cannot be what Mr. Wargo referred to as the “initial eyes and ears” on the ground but rather that all information gathering directly from children should be done by child protection specialists. Moreover, military personnel should not be responsible for creating solutions that respond to the needs of children – this should be handed over to child protection officers who have the specialized knowledge and skill set to address these challenges.

The second panelist was **Col Maureen Wellwood** of the Canadian Armed Forces who is currently a Deputy Chief of Staff Operations and Planning in MONUSCO. During her presentation, Col. Wellwood spoke in detail about her experiences looking at the issues of sexual exploitation and abuse in Canada and in MONUSCO, noting a stark difference between what she had seen in Canada and what she had observed on the ground in DRC. She noted

that there were incidents of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse within UN peacekeeping missions themselves which was and continues to damage the reputations of these missions and undermine what these missions set out to achieve. Sadly, there were also incidents of conflict-related sexual violence in the affected communities. There were allegations of incidents of rape of women, girls, and boys by government forces on a regular basis. In addition, it was not uncommon for women, girls, and boys to be taken by groups and used as fighters, sex slaves, cooks, porters, etc. This trend of recruiting children had a large impact on the capacity of armed groups to the extent that combatants were able to supply their needs.

Col Wellwood remarked that a lack of representation of women within MONUSCO and an inability to operationalize gender issues within the peacekeeping mission (in part due to a lack of resources) were two key obstacles that prevented effective gender mainstreaming within MONUSCO. Finally, she mentioned that there are challenges to the communication between civilian and military personnel which often result in information silos making coordination and collaboration exceedingly difficult.

The last panelist to speak was **Commissaire de Police General Mohamed Matmti**, a Gender, Child Protection, and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Officer in MONUSCO. Commissaire Matmti noted that women in MONUSCO make up only 3% of the mission and that much more work has to be done to increase women’s meaningful participation. He also spoke about the socioeconomic challenges women and children in the DRC face and how these challenges increase the vulnerabilities

of women and children, particularly to sexual violence. In such cases, the stigma associated with sexual violence and the resulting alienation of some of these children from their communities adds another layer of trauma they have to endure. MONUSCO has been looking at ways to reorient its approach on this to better address the stigma around some of these violations against children. One of the ways it is doing this is through the establishment of radio programs that seek to foster dialogue on these issues.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

Over thirty (30) professionals from the security sector, international organizations, NGOs, and researchers convened to discuss the current state of knowledge and practice on gender, childhood, and community engagement as well as existing operational challenges and recommendations on how to address these challenges. Following the panels, the participants were divided into smaller groups to discuss one of the following questions:

CHILD PROTECTION FOCAL POINTS

- What distinct skills, capacities, and responsibilities should child protection focal points (CPFPs) have and how should their roles be structured in mission settings?

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

- What are the best practices to successfully implement gender mainstreaming in UN peacekeeping missions?

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- What guidance is needed to enable gender transformative and child-centered civil and military operations?

The breakout sessions highlighted the need to better examine and, in some cases, challenge key assumptions underlying terms like “gender”, “child protection” and “community” to gain a more comprehensive understanding of community engagement in peacekeeping operations. Four key points emerged from these discussions:

IMPROVING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF CHILD PROTECTION FOCAL POINTS (CPFPS)

The first theme addressed by the workshop was the role of child protection focal points (CPFPs) in peacekeeping missions. This discussion focused on the required training and skills needed for CPFPs to carry out their child protection mandates as well as how to best structure CPFPs within peacekeeping missions, drawing on the experience of military, police, and civilian personnel with experience in peacekeeping missions.

Child protection is a shared responsibility across UN peacekeeping missions between the military, police, and civilian components. This requires cooperation between them, which is significantly aided by civilian child protection advisors (CPAs) working with uniformed CPFPs. CPFPs work to embed the mission’s child protection mandate into the day-to-day activities of all uniformed peacekeepers. CPFPs should be present at all levels of a UN mission (in a patrol, platoon, company, and battalion as well as at mission headquarters; as noted above, they are currently mandated at the HQ, battalion, and company levels) and they should communicate and coordinate with civilian CPAs. They need to be nominated by member states, both as an integral part of battalions deployed to missions as contingent troops and as individual staff officers. Having these CPFPs helps increase both the individual and institutional operational effectiveness of the security sector to better prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed violence and to better respond to other grave violations against children. Three primary areas of further

development for the use of CPFPs were discussed: the various levels at which CPFPs should be deployed in missions depending on their mandate and location, the training and standards needed for CPFPs at different mission levels, and the relationship of CPFPs to other uniformed focal points such as those for gender.

The first area of discussion was on CPFPs at the patrol level and their structure. Patrols of various forms are a key element of peacekeeping practice and contribute to force presence, information gathering, and community engagement. They may be carried out by the military or police individually, jointly, or with civilians, depending on the mission and needs of the patrol. The discussion opened with the example of police-only patrols done by the Ghanaian police deployment in the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Sudan (UNAMID). These patrols included dedicated officers with expertise in child protection and in gender-based violence and thus were particularly effective at being able to properly address issues related to child protection encountered on patrols. This patrol structure was derived from Ghanaian police procedures rather than UN guidance, demonstrating the importance of learning from the practice of different T/PCCs while encouraging the adoption of good practices both in UN guidance and training, and in national doctrine, policy, and training. This will however depend in each mission on several factors. One is how central child protection is to the mission mandate and the level of grave violations that children face. For instance, a traditional peacekeeping mission primarily tasked with ceasefire monitoring in a frozen conflict with minimal violations will require much less child protection expertise at the patrol level

than a multidimensional stabilization mission with a specific child protection mandate. Another is whether a patrol is conducted only by the military or police, or integrated with civilians. In integrated patrols, specialized civilian staff will be better placed to interact with children and address child protection issues. Police-only patrols may already be equipped to address child protection concerns directly, as in the Ghanaian example above, due to existing training, policy, and practice domestically. Military-only patrols tend to have the most access due to their ability to operate in higher-risk locations, and hence have a higher need for a well-trained CFPF, along with general training for all military personnel involved.

Beyond the patrol level, the structure of CPFPs within a mission was discussed. While it may be ideal to have CPFPs present at each level of a mission, different organizations and different force structures employed by T/PCCs may have different views on how to structure CPFPs within a mission setting. For instance, NATO considers child protection a headquarters-level responsibility while other organizations may highly value CPFPs at the patrol level. The current policy mandating a CFPF down to the company level of a mission was seen as a minimum, so that commanders may be advised on how to recognize and mitigate the risk of engaging with children when planning for current and future operations. There is also a need for child protection expertise at the strategic and operational levels in T/PCC security organizations to ensure it is factored into predeployment planning.

Further discussions considered what skills are important for all peacekeepers, and for CPFPs at various levels, to have. Given that

patrols are the units that have first contact with children in local communities, patrol members including CPFPS need to have the proper skills for engaging with children. CPFPS at the patrol level must know how to communicate ethically with children, which means they should have a good understanding of the local customs and culture, they should work closely with individuals who speak the local language such as Community Liaison Assistants, and they should know when and when not to communicate with children. Given the trauma that many children exposed to armed violence may experience, some participants suggested that social workers and/or psychologists should be included in the patrols to ensure that children's needs are being adequately addressed. While this might be practical on some integrated patrols, it would likely not be as standard practice.

As a result, some participants suggested uniformed personnel be given basic training on how to engage with children who have been traumatized. CPFPS in patrols, and military and police peacekeepers in general, also need to understand peacekeeping policy on engaging with children, and when to call for specially trained civilian backup. Having dedicated child protection expertise in engagement teams is especially vital since they are directly tasked with communicating with children, among others, about grave violations, while other patrols may communicate with children more incidentally. Aside from communicating with children, uniformed peacekeepers also need to understand the relevant content in their rules of engagement or directive on the use of force for encountering children associated with an armed force or armed group.

CPFPS in patrols must also know how to gather information for the UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms (MRM) to ensure that accurate and reliable information on grave violations perpetrated against children is gathered systematically and with integrity. Finally, it is important for CPFPS to be very familiar with more general reporting protocols so that the appropriate staff in the mission can take action on child protection concerns. For instance, handover protocols should be widely known – e.g., when transferring children associated with armed forces or armed groups (CAAFAG) to CPAs who can then give children access to appropriate services (e.g., psychosocial support, reintegration support, etc.) When it comes to CAAFAG, the handover to CPAs remains fundamentally important to prevent re-recruitment and further violations against children (e.g., detention). Or, CPFPS need to know what information to report to a higher level CFPF for them to make the appropriate decision on how to address an issue encountered on a patrol through informing humanitarian organizations, mission leadership, or others.

Police and military personnel on mission operate under a complex legal structure; they are subject to the host country's law, the T/PCC law, and international law. As such, legal training must be a part of pre-deployment training and orientation on arrival so that police and military are able to fully grasp how to conduct themselves within these legal structures. Participants agreed that the minimum legal and normative skillset for CPFPS should include:

- Having a working knowledge of the Convention on the Rights of the Child;

- Being aware of their (CPFPs') national country's laws on child protection as well as those of the host country;
- Being well versed in specific articles or directives that relate to the protection of children in international humanitarian law and rules of engagement, respectively;
- And, having at least a basic understanding of the normative principles on child protection listed in frameworks like the Vancouver Principles, Kigali Principles, etc.

CPFPs at different levels within a mission will have different responsibilities and so they will require different levels of child protection expertise. The level of knowledge and expertise will also depend on how central child protection is to the UN mission's mandate – this may vary from mission to mission as noted above.

At the platoon level, CPFPs need to have the child protection skills that those at the patrol level have, and they also need to have extensive knowledge of the legal and normative obligations of peacekeepers in protecting children in their mission areas. At the battalion and sector levels, CPFPs should have all of the skills that patrol and platoon CPFPs have but they also need to have analytical skills on child protection and the skills to engage with key UN agencies (e.g., UNICEF, UNHCR) and NGOs to ensure that the necessary information gathered on the ground gets to the international and national organizations responsible for child protection. As well, they need to be able to provide input on how to address security concerns related to children that may fall under matters of force protection or protection of civilians to ensure that children are considered in operations and planning. Finally, they need to be able to work with the mission leadership in their location (battalion, sector, or HQ) to

ensure the importance of children's protection is included in planning.

Effective training of police and military personnel before they are deployed on mission remains challenging given the fact that they must be trained on a wide range of issues (e.g., sexual exploitation and abuse, normative commitments to international frameworks and principles, the status of force agreements, etc.) in a short period of time. Consequently, to ensure that peacekeepers receive adequate training on child protection (and other important parts of the mandate), it is important to have well-designed and sufficiently in-depth training during predeployment training. In line with the Vancouver Principles, child protection should be further integrated into the national training systems of T/PCCs to ensure that peacekeepers are already acquainted at least with these skills before predeployment training.

Finally, it was discussed whether the roles of child protection focal points and gender advisors should be combined or kept separate in mission settings. Currently, these roles are combined at the HQ level in the military component in most missions as the Military Gender and Protection Advisor, and this is often the case for sector and battalions as well. Participants noted that there are benefits and challenges to both options. Some believed that because gendered and children's protection issues overlap and intersect in important ways, it may be beneficial to deploy one individual with the necessary training on child protection and gender. If combined, there needs to be a very clear delineation between child protection roles and responsibilities and the roles and responsibilities of a gender advisor. Others cautioned against combining the two roles because communicating with children is

significantly different than engaging with adults and therefore requires a different skill set. It should be acknowledged that one reason for combining these roles in the military and police components is the limited budget available for dedicated protection roles, and it would likely be ideal to have an overall office dedicated to child protection, gender, and other issues, with specialists in it dedicated to a particular field. This is an important area for further research, drawing on the experiences of the individuals who have served in these roles.

IMPROVING HOW WE THINK ABOUT GENDER

During the breakout session on gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping missions, many of the participants remarked that the term ‘gender’ tends to be conflated with women and girls given how the term has developed within academic scholarship and policy discourse. As a result, our default understanding when discussing gender in UN peacekeeping contexts is that we are talking about the roles of women. However, in order to shift attitudes and mindsets on gender, men need to be targets of these discussions as well. A way to incentivize men to buy into these discussions is to unpack the term ‘gender’ so that it becomes more inclusive and therefore more accessible.

Some participants suggested that convening one-on-one workshops that are not framed as “gender training” could help challenge gender stereotypes, shift mindsets and change attitudes and behaviors. While good intentions often underpin “gender training”, the training risks being a box-ticking exercise that simply gives the illusion that gender inequality has been addressed within UN peacekeeping missions. Moreover, some may resent coming

to these training courses if they feel as though the courses are compulsory and/or they may be unduly criticized for sharing their opinions and perspectives. Instead, some participants suggested that reframing these trainings as one-on-one research workshops may be more effective at creating an environment conducive to learning. Workshops where men and women are encouraged to come together to exchange ideas and learn from one another rather than being told what to do may be more effective at changing attitudes and behaviors. Part of encouraging men and women to exchange ideas is giving them the space to express their concerns and/or fears. One way to address this is by giving men the opportunity to talk about their own fears and/or mental health concerns among one another. Ensuring that both men and women are listened to, and their concerns are considered, is a way to encourage that a safe space is established for men and women to then come together to exchange ideas.

Another way to challenge gender stereotypes and shift the mindset around gender is to give men the opportunity to occupy roles that are outside of their “traditional” gender roles. For example, in some mission settings, men will get to take cooking classes or take on the role of being a nurse, etc. Participants agreed that allowing both men and women to develop skillsets that are fit for purpose, rather than simply assigning roles to men and women, was a better strategy to help challenge perceptions of gender because the focus is on developing the skillset of any peacekeeper.

Another area of discussion was how to ensure that gender sensitization is systematically integrated into UN peacekeeping pre-deployment training so that it is not simply seen as a box-ticking exercise. Participants

generally agreed that how gender training is implemented is just as important as why it is needed. Training needs to be planned carefully; the purpose and goals of the training must be clearly articulated, and the benefits of the training must be communicated effectively. Importantly, organizations and individuals that are supposed to benefit from the training must be engaged throughout the training process. This includes engaging the organizations or individuals right from the start, but it also means following up with the participants and engaging with them to see what worked and what needs improvement. Using a participatory approach to evaluate the impact of the training process is key to ensuring that participants are engaged. One way to get individuals to engage in this training is through awards. For instance, in Nigeria, men who are actively involved in the UN “HeForShe” campaign are given a scarf that is officially recognized by the government. The public recognition of these men as “HeForShe” advocates has helped encourage other men to become champions for gender equality in Nigeria.

Several participants noted that for gender mainstreaming to be successful, it is important that varying levels of management within, for instance, a security organization are given gender training and, importantly, that they buy into the training. In some cases, senior management may buy into the training but those operationalizing the gender training recommendations are those in middle management, a group that often may be overlooked. In addition, some participants discussed how individual beliefs on gender affect how peacekeepers would respond to a situation with the use of violence. For example, some researchers noted that individuals with more rigid views on gender roles tended to

escalate violence more quickly than those who had flexible views on gender. Moreover, participants agreed that gender training should not be seen as the end goal, it is instead the beginning of a longer process that involves continuous monitoring and evaluation, sharing lessons learned and best practices through a community of practice, etc.

The session on gender concluded with a discussion on how to improve women’s meaningful participation in peacekeeping settings. Several participants expressed the need to look beyond simply the number of women included in a mission, noting that by focusing on women’s participation based on their gender alone, rather than their skills or capabilities, women risk being infantilized or disempowered. In light of this, organizations like the UN and multilateral initiatives like the Elsie Initiative have tried to increase women’s meaningful participation in UN peacekeeping operations citing that their participation strengthens operational effectiveness.³⁴ On the other hand, some participants challenged the claim that the presence of women peacekeepers increases operational effectiveness and noted that this argument risks instrumentalizing women and may in fact have the unintended consequence of reinforcing gender stereotypes by placing unfair expectations on women. Recent research has also highlighted how important it is that a gender analysis of women’s participation in peacekeeping includes how other intersecting factors (e.g., socio-economic class, race, religion) contribute to the experiences that women have as peacekeepers. A more comprehensive view of gender requires us to move beyond essentialized notions

³⁴ Government of Canada, “Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations.”

of both women and men. This includes a recognition that gender is formed within cultural, historical, and social settings and is therefore context-specific and able to change over time. In addition, a holistic view of gender in peacekeeping missions requires increased discussion and further research on the role of men in peacekeeping, and, in particular, how militarized masculinity defines peacekeeping operations.³⁵ Without situating a discussion of men and masculinity within a broader discussion on gender in peacekeeping, we will not be able to effectively challenge the prevailing masculine culture of peacekeeping missions and include women's meaningful participation in these missions.

IMPROVING HOW WE ENGAGE HOST COMMUNITIES

Although there is significant emphasis on the importance of community engagement in peacekeeping, there is a lack of clarity around who we speak of when we refer to the "community." Participants emphasized that the definition or composition of the community is not apolitical and that the term itself is problematic because it connotes a "one-size-fits-all" approach that simply does not work in practice. Referencing local populations in this way can also perpetuate a stereotype that strips groups of their agency, instead viewing local people as only vulnerable victims in a conflict setting. Moreover, the term community may mean different things to different people based on e.g., ethnicity, tribe, religion, socioeconomic class, etc.

There is therefore a need to think in a more structured way about who these communities are at the mission level and the overall

objective of community engagement. This is particularly important given that community engagement is often viewed as an enabler of mission effectiveness. Successful community engagement requires a deep awareness and understanding of the cultural and linguistic contexts, strong relationships with local groups, a level of trust with community members, and local participation in and ownership of peacekeeping missions.

Challenges occur when community engagement is viewed as a box to tick rather than a necessary part of mission success. In such cases, organizations may be more concerned about the optics of community engagement rather than a commitment to relationship and trust-building with members of the local community. Uniformed peacekeepers need to be equipped with the analytical skills, language abilities, knowledge of the local context, and connections with relevant organizations to be able to meaningfully carry out community engagement in a sensitive manner. They need to recognize the security risks for themselves and community members of engagement, how to handle the politics of engagement and have access to national staff with the cultural, political, and language skills to make engagement successful. Trust and confidence building with communities is vital but can be easily undermined by failing to fulfill promises to the community, protection failures by the mission, and unethical conduct by peacekeepers such as sexual exploitation and abuse.

Similar to the discussion on CPFs above on engagement with children carried out by both uniformed and civilian peacekeepers, there needs to be continued consideration of roles and responsibilities for community engagement

35 Whitworth, "Men, Militarism, and UN Peacekeeping".

more broadly. Engagement will continue to be an important task for the uniformed components of missions, as emphasized in the latest edition of the UN Infantry Battalion Manual, and hence military and police peacekeepers need to have sufficient training and skills in this area, particularly in engagement teams. T/PCCs should continue to support this work, with further inclusion of such training in national doctrine and policy, and further research on how to improve community engagement by the security sector, especially on its gendered dimensions and the politics of engagement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following key recommendations emerged from the roundtable discussions for further research and changes in policy, training, and practice:

CPFPs

- Further research, policy development, and training are needed at the UN and T/PCC levels to ensure that patrols of all forms in peacekeeping missions have sufficient child protection expertise through the deployment of CPFPs and training for all peacekeepers, tailored to the mission mandate and location;
- CPFP roles should be further integrated into UN peacekeeping policy and practice by requiring their deployment at the platoon and patrol level where needed and including CPFPs as a standard requirement for contingents;
- The training and integration of CPFPs, and high-quality training on child protection, should be integrated into the normal training and education of T/PCC security sector organizations to better prepare peacekeepers beyond the standard

predeployment trainings;

- Further research is needed to understand the best setup, depending on mission context, for different uniformed focal point roles such as child protection and gender to ensure that missions have access to the right skills, experience, and collaboration in these roles.

Gender equity and women's participation in peacekeeping

- Gender is still often equated with women in UN peacekeeping, and a shift in mindset and education is needed to change this. Changes in how training on gender is conducted are vital so that courses can change peacekeepers' attitudes and behaviours and not be seen as just a box-ticking exercise.
- Training also needs to be situated better in a more holistic approach to gender equity. This includes measures such as ensuring the change in attitudes and beliefs of and buy-in from leadership and especially middle management levels in security sector organizations and encouraging men to become champions for gender equity.
- Increasing the meaningful participation of women in peacekeeping is important to improve community engagement work through gender balancing and diversity. Doing so requires a thoughtful approach that notes the improved operational effectiveness of women's meaningful participation without instrumentalizing them or placing an unfair burden on women. This particularly requires attention to intersecting factors in identity such as race, class, and religion alongside gender,

avoiding essentializing men or women, and addressing masculinity.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Further research, training, and policy are needed to improve the ability of uniformed peacekeepers to carry out community engagement in a manner sensitive to dynamics within the community, politics, and gender dynamics.

CONCLUSION

The Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace and Security builds bridges between researchers, policymakers and security sector actors in order to prevent the recruitment of children in armed violence and build and implement a global children, peace and security agenda. The International Peace Institute is dedicated to managing risk and building resilience to promote peace, security, and sustainable development, through a mix of policy research, strategic analysis, publishing, and convening. The roundtable on gender, childhood, and community engagement in peacekeeping brought together participants from different sectors and gave them the opportunity to explore the current challenges to community engagement in peacekeeping. Key lessons learned and best practices were shared within and across sectors.

The recommendations that emerged from the roundtable discussions focused on the need to think more holistically about childhood, gender, and community engagement and how they intersect, the importance of establishing clear roles and responsibilities for child protection

focal points in mission settings, the need to move beyond essentialized views of gender and the importance of engaging with community actors in meaningful ways. While important work has been done to highlight the importance of community engagement in peacekeeping, there is still work to do. This roundtable played an important role in advancing our collective understanding of community engagement, childhood, and gender in peacekeeping and facilitated important discussions on these topics among key stakeholders.

The participants noted that, historically, peacekeeping has been associated with negative peace (i.e., the absence of conflict), the de-escalation or prevention of violence, maintaining order, and protecting human rights. As peacekeeping has moved towards peacebuilding and capacity building it has increasingly focused on positive peace – the presence of components or structures that enables sustainable peace. The opportunities that emerge from a greater focus on peacebuilding include greater resilience and local ownership of peace and capacity-building processes. Moreover, this new emphasis on peacebuilding encourages community empowerment and transformative work on gender and child protection.

That said, current peacebuilding missions continue to suffer from several key challenges. They remain largely UN-centric, which can mean that bureaucratic hurdles and the priorities of “mission success” tend to overshadow the concerns and priorities of the local communities these missions are mandated to protect and empower. In addition, the missions’ mandates are the result of political compromises which can sometimes undermine the effectiveness of these missions.

Finally, there are still information silos and operational silos within and across peacekeeping missions that hamper the ability for institutional cultural learning on several issues related to peacekeeping, childhood, community engagement, and gender. To address these gaps, there is a need to think about the issues of gender, childhood, and community engagement in a more nuanced way and to view these issues as inextricably linked to each other and to the overall success of UN peacekeeping missions. This is particularly urgent given the current crises of legitimacy and community support facing multiple UN missions.

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