

**Conflict Prevention, Gender and Early Warning: A Work in Progress**  
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The integration of gender specific indicators into early warning systems is crucial for sustaining an effective approach to estimating conflict potential. Conflict affects women and men differently and although these effects vary widely across cultures depending upon the role of women in a particular society, it is clear that armed conflict exacerbates inequalities (Gardam & Charlesworth 2000). The purpose of this paper is to propose measurable indicators sensitive to the experiences of women and enhance early warning capacity to account for these gendered elements of conflict. This task will be accomplished by the deconstruction of existing indicators and by the addition of indicators reflecting women's unique life experiences.

The transition from gender-blind indicators to a gender sensitive analysis is critical for the accuracy of structural risk assessment. To begin with, there is an issue of *semantics*. The use of inclusive categories such as "people", "refugees", and "internally displaced persons", "conceals the inherent gender differentiation and the gender specificity of experiences and interests" (Sorensen 1998, 65). In keeping with the notion that women experience conflict and war differently than men, it is important to deconstruct existing variables. By referring to classifications such as *refugees* and *IDPs* without distinguishing the composition of these populations, their representational and experiential components are distorted. Out of approximately 21 million refugees in the world, 75 to 80 percent are women and children (UNHCR 2001). As members of a displaced community, women experience distinctive economic problems. Forced from their homes, women are separated from their husbands and consequently, often their source of income. A lack of education and training combined with their primary responsibility as caregivers and pervasive societal attitudes prohibiting work outside of the home creates a climate of dependency and disempowerment. Women civilians are generally among the first to be evacuated and while this may be desirable in many ways, evacuees are exposed to considerable hardship. Living conditions and health services are often inadequate resulting in an increased likelihood of accidents, injuries and disease (Gardam & Charlesworth 2000). The gender specific experience of female refugees exemplifies the need for the deconstruction of existing indicators and extensive exploration of accurate and reflective gendered indicators. Further attention should be directed towards such gender neutral categories as the *armed forces* and *youth*, as women and girls increasingly serve in guerrilla armies and gain military command positions (Dirasse 1996). This male/female dissection should also extend to categories such as restrictions of civil and political rights and annual conflict related deaths. Women and men enjoy different political and civil freedoms and it is for an early warning system to account for these gender differences. Furthermore, the lack of specification in a category such conflict related deaths glosses over the reality that a significant number of deaths are due to illness and malnutrition prevalent in refugee and IDP communities.

Early warning indicators are based on the *assumption* that poverty is a fundamental cause of civil strife. However, the link between poverty and conflict requires further nuancing, especially in terms of its connection with gender and poverty. The complex structures behind women's gender specific vulnerability during times of crisis provide some insight into this relationship.

Female poverty is substantially different from male poverty because women represent the majority of the world's 1 billion people living in poverty (FWCW Platform) and are significantly poorer than men are (McGilly 1993). In industrialized countries, social security and income tax systems reflect the link between women, poverty and competition for resources. Interruption of employment, change in marital status and inequality of employment and earning differentials between men and women are the key factors contributing to women's disadvantaged position (Bakker 1988). Until recently, most women married and tended not to have lifetime work incomes and pension arrangements of their own, depending instead on their breadwinner husbands (McGilly 1993). The feminization of poverty in conjunction with a lack of remuneration for homework has significantly contributed to gender disparities in economic power sharing roles (FWCW Platform).

In developing countries, women's poverty is directly related to the absence of economic opportunities and autonomy, lack of access to economic resources, including credit, land ownership and inheritance, lack of access to education and support services and their minimal participation in the decision-making process (FWCW Platform). In some regions, widows without sons are particularly vulnerable to losing their property because widows' access to land depends on the willingness of sons to protect their rights (Byrne 1995). In addition, poverty can also impel women into situations where they are vulnerable to sexual exploitation (FWCW Platform).

An elaboration of current economic indicators could effectively include the unique experiences of men and women and reflect economic gender disparities. This expansion can be accomplished by the inclusion of gender-specific statistics, such as the *Gender-related Development Index* (GDI) and the *Gender Empowerment Measure* (GEM). Similar to the Human Development Index (HDI) used by the United Nations Development Program in their annual report; the GDI is modified to reflect disparities in achievement between women and men in terms of life expectancy, educational attainment and real GDP per capita. The purpose of the GEM index is to measure the relative empowerment of women and men in political and economic spheres of activity. It is derived by examining economic participation and decision-making, political participation and decision-making, and power over economic resources. Given the multiple manifestations of poverty, indicators of economic development might also include: *body weight*, reflecting levels of hunger and malnutrition; *illness*; *persons with no permanent address*; and the provision of *support payments* in the form of income security, employment insurance, pensions, and disability insurance.

Predictions of state belligerency and state militarism can be forecast based on domestic social factors and domestic political culture. This *domestic-international political link* "is based on the premise that states duplicate patterns of domestic politics in the international arena and apply the same political norms in both domestic and international politics" (Caprioli 2000, 52).

The evidence supports the notion that societies with high levels of family violence are more likely to rely on violent strategies for conflict resolution and more likely to be involved in wars compared to societies with lower levels of family violence (Caprioli 2000).

The use of *rape statistics* as an indicator for early warning systems is instrumental because it reflects a gendered loss of autonomy. Rape is the most common act of violence against women in wartime and it reflects the reality that women face vulnerabilities and risks during wartime that men do not (Turshen 2000). In addition to the classification of rape as social and interpersonal violence, "militarized" rape is also an act of political, economic and cultural violence. Communities may reject women who have been raped and deprive them of their social standing. "Their tarnished reputation has economic consequences in societies that base women's access to such resources as land on their relationships with fathers, husbands, brothers and sons" (Turshen 2000, 804). Customary and statutory laws control these relationships and can severely limit women's political power. Rape affects women's eligibility to marry or remain married and consequently, their ability to provide for themselves and their children. One of the tragic implications of rape is the rejection of women and any child conceived by rape by a woman's family and consequently, the loss of access to an agricultural livelihood in rural societies. It is critical that these risks and implications be documented and incorporated into early warning systems as an indicator of women's loss of autonomy, barriers human development and an overall reflection of governance and political instability.

The recognition of gender differences in early warning systems effectively enhances the system's ability to provide "empirically based dynamic indicators that capture the political processes leading to these crises or their resolution" (Jenkins & Bond 2001, 3). It is on the basis of gender that accesses to resources and power positions are limited and inequality is justified and maintained. Gender issues determine access to resources and control of roles, power relationships, responsibilities and expectations. Although the power and role of women varies across cultures, gender is a useful cross-national variable because comparisons will always reveal some degree of economic and political inequality (Caprioli 2000).

The literature supports women's increasing role in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction (Ogunsanya & Mngqibisa 2000, Pankhurst 2000, Sorenson 1998, UNRISD). However, their involvement will remain limited until their experience is accounted for during the pre-conflict or escalatory stages of conflict. Once women's experiences are rendered visible, the significance of their experiences can be recognized and their input valued.

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