Millions of children are affected by violent conflict and insecurity worldwide. As they face increasing and protracted crises, UNICEF is committed to helping children live in peace, free from violence and fear. This requires exploring new approaches and investing in programmes that address underlying risk and build resilience to reduce children's vulnerability to violent conflict.1

Evidence demonstrates that effective and sustainable strategies to build resilience must address gender inequalities, and that failing to consider gender-related structural barriers and unequal power dynamics can reinforce vulnerabilities for the entire population.2 To address gender inequalities and build long-term, sustainable peace, UNICEF uses social services as an entry point, with education representing a good example of this approach.

Gender equality: Fundamental to transformative and sustainable peacebuilding

Effective peacebuilding requires addressing the dynamics and underlying causes of conflict, and it cannot be accomplished if half the population is excluded from the process. Addressing gender inequalities, which are often an indicator of unresolved underlying conflict drivers, is an integral part of building long-lasting peace. Evidence indicates that improving gender equality in peacebuilding initiatives has a positive impact on both their outcome and durability.3

This brief is intended to inform policy discussions among education and peacebuilding actors on relevant gender considerations across both fields. It provides an introduction to the issues and serves as a precursor to the ‘Update Brief’ to be published 2016. The update will outline evidence generated under ‘Learning for Peace’ – the four-year Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy programme implemented in 2011–2016, in partnership between UNICEF, the Government of the Netherlands, the national governments of 14 participating countries and other key supporters.
Among other benefits, it offers peacebuilding processes and society as a whole new levels of inclusiveness, human and social capital recovery, and more durable economic growth.4

Reflecting the rights, needs and concerns of all societal groups is fundamental to the sustainability of peace. Women, men, girls and boys experience conflict differently, with a range of gender-related impacts that must be effectively taken into account. Women and girls are uniquely and often disproportionately affected by violent conflict. For example, while conflict situations may lead to women and girls undertaking non-traditional activities that provide opportunities for economic participation, the already disproportionate burden of care they typically face can become exacerbated in the post-conflict context and negatively affect their economic empowerment. Without clear gender-transformative strategies, such dynamics can reduce the contribution of economic growth to peacebuilding.5

Global evidence further demonstrates that a country’s level of gender equality is a key indicator of peacefulness (see Box 1). This is arguably linked to social or community norms of tolerance and inequality that are mirrored in behaviours throughout a population, from the individual through to the whole society, as the blueprint for interaction between humans with different characteristics is learned from female-male relationships in every society.5

Gender-transformative peacebuilding approaches must go beyond simply including women and girls, to understanding and responding to how gender roles and relationships work across various contexts. Ensuring the equal participation of women and girls in efforts to promote peace and security and their engagement in decision making on conflict prevention and resolution are crucial for sustainable peace. This principle is embodied in the landmark United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325,9 which is considered to be central to advancing the international peace and security agenda.

Gender-responsive approaches to peacebuilding have traditionally been based on the assumption that women face greater levels of vulnerability and marginalization. While Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security10 have made efforts to refocus attention towards women’s participation and protection, this has tended to result in ‘just add women and stir’11 approaches in which women and men are treated as homogeneous groups. In practice, little attention is paid to the multiple conflict roles and experiences of men and women as both survivors and perpetrators of violence, or as change agents, and how their gender intersects with other sociocultural identities (see Box 2).12

Box 1 Gender and peacebuilding

Among the evidence reviewed for this brief, it has been found that the greater the level of gender inequality in a country, the more likely a country is to be involved in intra- and inter-state conflict.(1)

The best predictor of a state’s peacefulness, on the other hand, is how well women are treated, rather than the status of wealth, democracy, ethnicity or religious identity.(2) Based on the Gender Equality Index, and for countries with available data, 69 per cent of armed conflicts occur in areas with severe gender inequalities.(3)

Although the social upheaval experienced during violent conflict may present an opportunity for peacebuilding approaches to redress gender inequalities and set new precedents during post-conflict transition, data show consistently low levels of gender equality in peacebuilding initiatives – both in terms of equal participation of women and girls, and in the limited application of strategies to promote shifts away from harmful gender norms.7 Gender-transformative peacebuilding efforts to date have had limited impact due to the lack of systematic uptake at scale, minimal dedicated financing, and limited expertise on the ground. As a result, interventions have largely failed to analyse, understand and address the norms dictating gender relations and power dynamics that can fuel violence.8

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To promote gender equality effectively and ensure the durability of peacebuilding efforts, social service providers must understand how women and men jointly reproduce gender norms that dictate rigid gender roles and related power dynamics, and how these can either fuel conflict or promote peace. Gender must be understood in terms of its links to a range of identities, power dynamics and norms across various social groups, which in turn lie at the heart of peacebuilding (see Box 3). Adopting a broader and deeper understanding of power relations is an important factor in facilitating women’s equal participation in social transformation that promotes benefit sharing and solidarity, and can produce peaceful outcomes. For example, men’s willingness to share power and promote women’s presence at the peace table or in negotiations/discussions in the public sphere is also a prerequisite for women’s equal participation.

**Harnessing the potential of education**

Alongside promoting gender equality, leveraging the opportunities presented by education in the post-conflict period to promote gender-transformative interventions is a crucial prerequisite for building sustainable peace. Education can be transformative when it is equitably available, of good quality, relevant and conflict-sensitive, and can touch the lives of every citizen. UNICEF’s Gender Action Plan 2014–2017 highlights the differential impact of conflict on girls and boys and underscores the need for tailored programmatic responses as part of strategies to mainstream gender equality in education and the importance of peacebuilding interventions to this end.

Education is more than a social service, it can serve to develop identities and influence deeply seated cultural norms, and plays a vital role in shaping the understanding of gender roles and responsibilities, and internalizing positive gender norms during childhood and adolescence. Conversely, education that legitimizes potentially harmful gender stereotypes at an early age can pose a challenge to education access and quality – and can undermine boys’ and girls’ ability to contribute to peacebuilding, possibly even fuelling violence.

The education system and teachers thus play a critical role in the process of promoting gender equality and providing opportunities for boys and girls to contribute equally and positively to peacebuilding processes for future generations.

UNICEF’s strategic focus on girls’ education goes beyond parity to aim at achieving gender equality. Girls in conflict-affected areas face higher barriers to accessing education due to such issues as child marriage, lack of security and threats of violence related to attending school, gender-based violence within schools, and lack of essential ‘girl-friendly’ infrastructure (see Box 4). Resulting gender disparities in access to education and completion of schooling deny children...
The Learning for Peace programme

UNICEF’s innovative, cross-sectoral Learning for Peace programme, supported by the Government of the Netherlands, has been a catalyst for exploring how social services, particularly education, can break the cycle of conflict by addressing the root causes and contribute to long-term, sustainable peace. Learning for Peace aims to embed gender considerations into education for peacebuilding interventions by utilizing education to address gender inequalities that are exacerbated by conflict, and as a tool for advancing gender equality and promoting sustainable peace.20

Despite mounting evidence at the macro level, causal connections between gender-responsive approaches to programming and advancing the goals of peacebuilding remain weak.21 Emerging evidence generated under Learning for Peace, however, is demonstrating a link between attitudes related to gender equality in education and strengthening social cohesion at the country level.22 Experience gained through the programme is generating important lessons for gender-transformative peacebuilding and highlighting the transformative role of the education, as outlined under the following points:

- ‘Build Back Better’ – Promoting positive gender relations and social norms

Despite the potential benefits of education, school practices commonly undermine gender equality, teaching materials can reinforce gender stereotypes, and systems often perpetuate or are unable to prevent school-related gender-based violence.23 The recovery period following violent conflict presents the opportunity to ‘build back better’ – transforming institutions, structures and relationships in societies affected by violent conflict.

Given that violent conflict often leads to significant shifts in gender roles and responsibilities, the transitional period presents an opportunity to influence education systems to adopt strategies aimed at reformulating negative gender and social norms. In addition to improvements such as girl-friendly infrastructure, the supply of qualified female teachers, and specific measures to prevent and address gender-based violence, approaches to promote positive gender socialization in schools are emerging as an important element of peacebuilding.

To this end, building teachers’ capacities to adopt conflict-sensitive, gender-transformative pedagogic approaches and developing complementary teaching and learning materials are being tested by Learning for Peace. While such approaches have traditionally focused on addressing inequalities faced by women and girls, the scope of interventions is increasingly expanding to reflect the importance of understanding the limitations placed on men and boys by narrow or rigid constructions of masculinity. These interventions
also take account of the ways that society and social norms are gendered and interlinked with a range of identities such as ethnicity, religion and age.

- **Empowering women and young people to promote and participate in building sustainable peace**

  Analysis points to changes in the roles, responsibilities and aspirations of women resulting from their experience of armed conflict. These shifts present the potential for women's empowerment, and linked to this, recovery at the household and community levels.\(^{24}\) Education presents the opportunity to harness such transformative dynamics through adopting an empowerment approach to engaging women and girls. Approaches ensuring that girls receive education of a quality comparable to boys and supporting women to engage closely with education delivery can reinforce fundamental facets of building sustainable peace, given that:

  ◊ Educated women and girls are more likely to engage in and own peacebuilding processes, which leads to more sustainable results. Girls’ lack of formal education is a structural barrier to women’s productive community participation and leads to challenges such as lack of opportunities for employment. Data have shown this to be particularly evident in public administration, where women’s limited presence can affect how well the issues that affect women and girls are represented in governance.\(^{25}\)

  ◊ By reflecting gender-related conflict experiences and priorities in peacebuilding approaches, strategies become more relevant to an entire population. Peacebuilding initiatives can, for example, benefit from women’s particular skills – and leverage the skills that they often developed during conflict, such as agency and activism.\(^{26}\)

  The meaningful participation of the entire population will contribute to overall increased productivity, greater investments in children’s education, and more diverse representation in governance.\(^{27}\)

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**Box 5** Promoting gender equitable school environments in Uganda’s Karamoja region

In Uganda’s conflict-affected Karamoja region, Learning for Peace is piloting a training model that aims to build primary school teachers’ capacities to incorporate gender-equality principles in their teaching and to promote more gender-equitable norms and positive models of masculinity and femininity. A complementary component includes the use of mobile phone technology to reinforce learning through ongoing interaction with teachers via Short Message Service, as well as to obtain feedback to inform the development of additional teaching aids and refresher courses.

An impact evaluation of the intervention will ascertain the extent to which it has encouraged teachers’ acceptance and promotion of positive gender norms, and identify initial indications of how this may contribute to social cohesion. The findings are expected in 2016 and will inform an up-scaling strategy to be led by Uganda’s Ministry of Education and Sports.

Source: UNICEF Uganda

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**Box 6** Côte d’Ivoire: Women’s empowerment and social cohesion via early childhood development services

In Côte d’Ivoire, Learning for Peace is empowering women as peacebuilders through their engagement in the delivery of early childhood development services. ‘Mother and Early Childhood Clubs’ have been established by uniting women from various national, ethnic and social backgrounds around the common goal of their children’s well-being. As part of the initiative, women are receiving training on basic literacy, numeracy, and income generation and management, as well as conflict resolution.

Ongoing programme monitoring is showing that activities have fostered increased levels of trust between women across different groups and are also promoting women’s empowerment through building capacity on managing income-generating activities. Women in targeted areas are showing increased engagement in reconciliation activities, which is being observed to contribute to mending the social fabric of communities divided by conflict.

Source: UNICEF Côte d’Ivoire
• **Invoking positive models of masculinity and supporting at-risk male youth**

Although men and boys are often constrained by gender norms that perpetuate discrimination and violence, issues of masculinity and male vulnerabilities are seldom addressed in the peacebuilding context. Other groups’ perceptions of the threats posed by young men often link gender, social class and age, for example, stereotyping young male ex-combatants as ‘irresponsible and violence prone’. It has also been shown that men with less education are more likely to express discriminatory views on gender, more likely to be violent in the home – and less likely to be involved in caring for their children. As reflected in prominent provisions in the United Nations Security Council resolutions, addressing gender-based violence is widely accepted as an essential element of peacebuilding. The global epidemic of violence is often integral to and exacerbated by conflict, and the normalization of such violence extends into post-conflict recovery. Gender-based violence also commonly serves as one of the drivers of conflict. This ‘continuum of violence’ undermines the violence reduction efforts that are central to peacebuilding interventions.21

As a manifestation of unequal power relations, addressing gender-based violence means tackling the causes of gender inequality, which are linked to social norms and values reflected in structural discrimination. Evidence suggests, for example, that increasing women’s access to productive resources and to socio-economic rights reduces their susceptibility to violence in certain circumstances, but in others can increase susceptibility to violence, at least in the short term.22

Access to relevant, quality education can contribute to the prevention of gender-based violence and serve as an important long-term strategy to address the structural inequalities that impede women’s empowerment. Unless the economic, social and psychological effects of gender-based violence on survivors, witnesses and perpetrators are considered, social cohesion can be undermined, given the effects on individual functionality that carry great socio-economic costs for society as a whole.23

Efforts to address gender-based violence through formal and non-formal education approaches are crucial contributions to building sustainable peace. In order to shift social norms that condone gender-based violence, parallel efforts beyond the school and classroom are required. Reducing societal violence necessitates engaging multiple stakeholders, including working with men and women to understand and address socialized behaviour held in place by the values and norms that lead to violence. Both formal and non-formal educational interventions can be used to catalyse behaviour change by creating or reinforcing positive social norms, and establishing or reinforcing legal norms.24

The way forward for gender equality, education and peacebuilding

During the past two decades, we have witnessed substantial advancements in the normative framework on gender equality and peacebuilding. But significant gaps remain in knowledge on good practices as a result of limited direct investment in strategic programmes operating at scale, and a lack of rigorous evaluation and documentation.25 Important ongoing processes – from the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (see Box 9) to the 15th anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 – offer the momentum to drive new approaches and strategies to close these gaps.

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**Box 7 The ‘Living Peace’ model**

In Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Living Peace model uses best practices in social group therapy and gender-transformative education to engage men in post-conflict settings to promote social restoration. Evidence from the test sites shows that activities have resulted in significant positive changes – including improved and more peaceful partner relationships, improvements in the control of men’s anger and frustration, and greater income sharing by men with their wives, as well as happier children and improved health outcomes.

Learning for Peace is poised to contribute to building evidence on the role of education as an entry point for addressing gender inequalities in peacebuilding. To this end, emergent learning indicates that concerted efforts are required to:

• Ensure that all learners – particularly girls – are provided with the opportunity to gain skills and competencies needed for civic and political engagement and to make an active contribution to peacebuilding. In areas affected by violent conflict, this requires the dual approach of specific strategies to improve gender equality in education that allow all learners to reap the full benefits of education, and efforts to address barriers impeding access to education where parity remains largely unachieved.

• Leverage the opportunities presented by education in the post-conflict period to promote gender-transformative interventions as a prerequisite for building sustainable peace alongside promoting gender equality. Interventions must build upon the United Nations ‘Women, Peace and Security’ agenda to reflect a broader and deeper understanding of gender and conflict issues. This must incorporate an understanding of harmful concepts related to masculinity, as well as how society and social norms are gendered and interlinked with a range of different identities such as ethnicity, religion and age.

• Ensure systems-level school and classroom-based strategies to promote gender-equitable environments that are designed to be cognizant of and complement wider community-based initiatives and informal education approaches aiming to shift social and gender norms. This should include such initiatives as prevention of gender-based violence in conflict-affected areas.

By mid-2016, good practices generated from Learning for Peace are expected to be available to inform the design of at-scale, evidence-based programming on gender equality in education for peacebuilding. To this end, the majority of international donor support for gender equality in fragile states is allocated to social sectors, including education. This presents a significant opportunity to leverage existing resources to build on knowledge generated from Learning for Peace and invest in gender-transformative services that address the root causes of conflict and promote peace.

UNICEF is piloting a community-based model in Somalia and South Sudan to transform social norms on gender, power and violence towards building sustainable peace within families and communities. By harnessing community dynamics following the intense social upheaval of conflict, the Communities Care initiative aims to alter engrained attitudes and beliefs that lead to sexual violence. The initiative seeks to promote positive shifts in the way people interact, and to contribute to the evidence base on the role of formal and non-formal education in preventing sexual violence in conflict-affected areas.

Preliminary findings show a reduction in intimate partner violence, in the social norm of protecting family honour through violence when a women or girl has experienced sexual violence, and in acceptability of a husband’s right to use violence against his wife. Additionally, emerging evidence indicates that ‘community discussion dialogues’ are promoting local engagement and action to build safer, more peaceful communities. Trained community discussion leaders are demonstrating increased awareness and understanding of sexual violence and the negative impact it can have on community cohesion, and they are supporting communities to undertake collective action against sexual violence. Service providers are also demonstrating improved awareness and understanding of the specific needs of survivors of sexual violence and the positive changes they can make as organizations and role models in their communities.

Source: UNICEF Somalia and South Sudan

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Endnotes


2 See, for example: Mercy Corps, ‘Rethinking Resilience: Prioritizing gender integration to enhance household and community resilience to food insecurity in the Sahel’, Mercy Corps, Portland, Ore., 2014.


34 It is important to note that existing evidence does not point to causal links between different forms of violence, and such a line of enquiry may over-simplify the complex dynamics surrounding SGBV which are tied to broader violent renegotiations of societal power and identities (see Eriksson-Baaz and M. Stern (2013). Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War? Perceptions, Prescriptions, Problems in the Congo and Beyond. London: Zed Books and Myrttinen, H., et al (2014) Re-thinking Gender in Peacebuilding).
