GENDER-SENSITIVE PROGRAMME DESIGN AND PLANNING IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED SITUATIONS

ESCOR PROJECT R 7501

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Background and objectives
The project's goal was to contribute to the reduction of poverty and suffering through enhancing gender-awareness in the design and management of development projects in contexts affected directly or indirectly by conflict. It aimed to achieve this by increasing understanding of the gender dimension of conflict, both for the humanitarian community and for development practitioners.

The project ran from April 2000 to December 2001: field research was carried out in Sudan, Somalia, Uganda, Mali and Angola, with complementary desk studies for Eritrea and Rwanda. It builds on ACORD's experience of operating development programmes in conflict-affected areas, and on its research and policy development in the fields of gender analysis and conflict analysis.

Methods
The main milestones in the evolution of the project were three workshops:

- Timbuktu (May 2000) - researchers exchanged experiences of oral testimony collection, and developed the Timbuktu Guidelines (annex 7)
- Nairobi (September 2000) - participants acquired training in social exclusion analysis, applying it to their particular contexts as a basis for designing programme-based fieldwork (annex 8)
- London (October 2001) - the five teams shared their findings, developed joint conclusions, explored dissemination strategies, and presented the findings to an open meeting of researchers and NGOs

The research team maintained contact through correspondence, circulation of progress reports, and visits to programmes by principal researchers. Analysis of overall research findings was carried out by the whole team.

Research methods included oral testimony collection, focus group discussions and other PRA techniques, and collection of secondary data (including official reports, previous research findings, and works of literature). A hypothesis of the research was that oral testimony collection would prove to be an effective method for researching the sensitive issues likely to arise in contexts of conflict and interpersonal violence. Assessing the potential and constraints of this method was, therefore, one of the project's research objectives (see annex 7, methodology report).

Findings
The case studies, describing the experiences of ordinary citizens in armed conflict, reveal appalling human suffering, loss of livelihoods, erosion of social relations, and loss of faith in the future. Testimonies call overwhelmingly for peace. Ordinary people are knowledgeable about the factors - both local, national and international - giving rise to conflict, and make considered and pro-active adaptations to bewilderingly rapid change. Testimonies also demonstrate how violence leads to, and is fuelled by, poverty and the denial of rights. Survival strategies may themselves be destructive, leading to further socio-economic breakdown and to increased violence and militarisation. The case

studies lend weight to a cyclical view of violence and armed conflict, positing a complex chain of impacts and outcomes. They also support the view that local conflict dynamics operate in parallel with, and sometimes independently of, those at national level. Interventions looking beyond the consequences of conflict towards active commitment to stemming the cycle of violence, both locally, nationally and internationally, are therefore crucially important and will generate positive short- and long-term repercussions.

This project sought to address two particular questions, namely how do gender relations change as a result of conflict? and how might conflict itself be fuelled by aspects of gender identity?   It also examined the strategic and research implications of these findings for project design.

1. Do gender relations[1] *change as a result of conflict?*
Both the violence of warfare, and its consequences - displacement, impoverishment, demographic imbalance - give rise to changes in gender roles at the household level in all cases studied. This leads in turn to limited increases in women's decision-making power and political participation: however, the ideological bases underpinning gender relations appear to be unchanged or even reinforced. Policy-makers and planners need to be realistic about the influence they may have in encouraging changes in gender relations in situations emerging from conflict.

Consistently across the case studies, women take on increased economic responsibilities within the household. The degree of change varies: in Mali sedentary communities, for example, reduced access to resources for both men and women mean neither can fulfil their gender roles adequately, while in Somalia, women often take over from men as principal breadwinners.   Women's decision-making within the household increases as a result of men's increasing economic dependence on women, although this trend is less consistent. Reasons for changes in gender roles includes:

- inaccessibility of economic resources men previously controlled (e.g. agricultural land in Uganda)
- displacement into urban cash economies where women's income-generating opportunities are greater than in rural situations (Sudan, Angola)
- exposure during displacement to different ways of living and new skills, notable among some communities in Mali

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[1]The project defined 'gender relations' as combining:

♦ *Gender roles:* the activities that men and women are expected to carry out within a given household or community, differing according to socio-cultural context

♦ *gender identities:* expected or idealised characteristics and behaviours of different sexes, further distinguished by other categories such as age, ethnicity, economic class and social status

♦ *gendered power structures:* social institutions which control resources (eg the household, the community, the school, the state) when examined from the point of view of how men and women respectively gain membership of them, contribute to them, are influenced by them, and receive or are denied support, status, resources or protection from them, and

♦⌡ *gender ideologies:* the system of values which underpins gender roles and identities and which validates gendered power structures

in a system of social relations, framed within a particular culture.

- growth in proportions of female-headed households (to around 30% in Sudan and Mali)

Men view women's increasing power within the household, and their own disempowerment, in various ways. While many of these differences are individual, the contexts studied display different trends. Male respondents in Somalia, for example, accept their dependence on women passively, acknowledging that women's resourcefulness and industry pulled them through crises.   In Rwanda, conflict blurred previously sharp role distinctions ('Women can do whatever men can do, while men can no longer do whatever they want…All people have become the same').   In Mali, sedentary communities declare no change in household decision-making, while Tamasheq men view women's increased responsibility for family affairs positively.   In some cases, notably Sudan and Uganda, this shift in roles has contributed to increased alcoholism and domestic violence.

Women also view their situation variously. While Tamasheq women in Mali are excited about new possibilities opening up for them, women in Rwanda speak of the desperate 'solitude' accompanying their new-found autonomy.   In other cases women deplore the burden of work, the breakdown of services, the deterioration in social relations and the risks to women's health and security implicit in new livelihoods and new expectations of behaviour.

Changes in marriage practices are particularly evident in the Uganda and Rwanda studies, with the general trend being greater freedom of decision-making for women about marriage partners and stronger legal rights to property. In Rwanda, a connection is observed between marital status and openness to notions of women's autonomy - married women and their husbands are generally more 'traditional' in their outlook. For both men and women, sexuality can become an economic strategy or secure protection in times of stress. Women marry soldiers, resort to prostitution, or re-marry frequently. Men seek to marry women richer than themselves. Young people may be prey to the advances of 'sugar-daddies' and 'sugar-mummies'. Militarisation and access to guns enhances young men's capacity to take sexual partners forcibly. Long-term consequences may include family breakdown and the spread of sexually-transmitted diseases.

Gendered power structures have changed as a result of conflict, but to a limited degree. Women's increased economic power has sometimes increased their scope for influence and action, mainly within but sometimes also outside the household. Examples exist of women taking political roles at community and national levels (Sudan, Uganda), becoming involved in trade (Angola, Somalia), and entering previously unacceptable areas of economic activity such as the arms trade (Somalia). Changes in consciousness among women has resulted in the formation of women's associations (for example, in Rwanda). However, in general, changes in gender roles at micro level have not been accompanied by corresponding changes in political or organisational influence. *De facto* gains have not been translated into *de jure* changes in women's status: they have taken on responsibility but have not been granted power.

Women's direct involvement in armed struggle was largely limited to Eritrea, where both women and men joined armed forces as fighters as well as support personnel. Women were also involved in the Rwanda genocide. These examples of challenge to essentialist stereotypes do not appear to have had a significant impact on attitudes generally, nor to have led to long-term changes.

Changes in socialisation processes as a result of the disruption of family and community relations caused by war do not appear to have led to shifts in gender identities, but rather to increasing conflicts between ideals (of masculinity and femininity) and reality. Trying to live up to people's expectations imposes increasing stress on both men and women. The Uganda case study (annex 1) show this particularly clearly. In fact gender ideologies do not appear to have changed, and may rather have become further entrenched. Stereotypes continue, backed by values as demonstrated through proverbs, songs and other socialisation methods. It could be argued that even where gender roles have changed, they have done so in line with existing gender ideologies. In this view, the increase in women's economic responsibilities results from, rather than challenges, their role as family nurturers. Furthermore, the gap between what men are and what they should ideally be only serves to underline the ideal, rather than transforming it. However, we cannot conclude that there is no scope for lasting change: changes in consciousness among women and men is in evidence and can potentially be built on: many respondents declared that things will never be the same again.

To what extent do changes in gender relations brought about by conflict represent positive opportunities for change? Which changes are to be deemed 'positive', and by whom? In Malian Tamasheq and Maure communities, for example, few people doubted the value of women acquiring new skills and ideas as a result of displacement: indeed, men and women, young and old, considered their old life to have been characterised by isolation and ignorance. On the other hand, in Uganda there was in evidence a 'rights backlash' in which respondents blamed 'the West' or 'television' or 'education' for perceived trends by which children and women have become uncontrollable as a result of rights legislation. This they saw both as a product of conflict (the resistance of Acholi culture to its incorporation into the Ugandan state) and as a factor contributing to future conflict.

Gender ideologies seem resistant to change even when their outward manifestations are re-ordered. Interventions aiming to take the opportunity of rapid change in conflict and post-conflict situations to encourage transformations in gender relations may therefore be unrealistic. Conflict may create space to make a redefinition of social relations possible, but in so doing it rearranges, adapts or reinforces patriarchal ideologies, rather than fundamentally changing them.

2. Can gender identity influence or contribute to conflict?
The research offered indications towards addressing this question, which requires further analysis. Empirical data showed that the distinction between these research questions is not clear-cut, since causes and effects are intertwined.

The case studies describe violent struggles for resources (land, trade, women, children, labour, natural resources, cultural identity and access to state power). The view from the ground, as expressed through testimonies, sees war as a conflict between patriarchies or established power interests. Violence leads to and is generated by poverty, humiliation, frustration, loss of livelihood, failures of governance, political manipulation, and breakdown of inter-communal relations (trade links, shared labour/production arrangements, intermarriage). Gender differences, within and between groups, are threaded through all these. Distorted, threatened gender ideologies encourage aggressiveness and revenge.

The Uganda study lists amongst internal causes of the conflict: erosion of the negotiating power of Acholi culture in general and traditional leadership in particular, thus weakening mechanisms for conflict resolution; the value placed on aggressiveness in the socialisation of children; impoverishment and the consequent frustration felt by both men and women at being unable to provide for and protect their families, i.e. to fulfil their gender roles - hence:. '… aggressivity and militarisation represent both a vision and strategy to restore the possibilities of ethnic and gender identity' (annex 1, p. 27). This same sense of frustration leading to violence and militarisation appears in the Sudan case, where researchers concluded that gender and other identities link at the ideological level to fuel ongoing violence. Some respondents made such a link explicitly, referring to 'gender-based conflict: man against man fighting for position' (annex 3, p. 23).

Conflict appears to exacerbate tensions and inequalities between generations and between communities. Cycles of violence perpetuate themselves over generations: the impact of war on future generations, with the vision of a permanently militarised society as children grow up in violence, is a massive challenge, and emerges clearly as the major concern of informants. Respondents believed that elders' influence is declining; in some cases youth are assuming new roles; in others, their lack of opportunities and prospects has a deeply depressive effect on them. Conflict may also contribute further to intergenerational splits by forcing distortions in gender identities among the young, paving the way for socially unacceptable and destructive behaviour on their part. Institutionalised socialisation processes (such as the Acholi firesides, for example) fall into disuse, partly as a result of parents' inability to fulfil their gender roles, contributing further to intergenerational tension.

Similarly, war erodes local-level inter-communal relations, even if it originates elsewhere. Northern Mali is a case in point, where inter-communal differences previously under control have erupted into outright mistrust. In the Somalia case, previous power hierarchies between the leading clans have been rearranged according to the fortunes of the war nationally, while discrimination against the 'minority' clans has been accentuated further. Conflict exacerbates the powerlessness of the poor and targets of discrimination, whether they are men or women.

3. Implications of the findings for programming strategies and policy
Whereas the participating programmes had always attempted to support populations affected by conflict, this research has strengthened their resolve to work directly and pro-

actively towards peace. The research highlights the importance of programming to create conditions for peace and reconciliation, guided by an in-depth understanding of the complex factors involved, by a 'view from below', and by a commitment to working towards an end to discrimination and exclusion at local as well as other levels.

The research has implications for gender policy. The negative impacts of conflict are felt by all - men, women, children, adults and the elderly. People's ability to recover from the shocks of war is determined, at least in part, by their position in evolving power structures: in this sense women are more likely than men to have to struggle to survive. However, this applies equally to members of minority or subordinate groups generally. The research thus confirms the importance of embedding gender analysis in the cultural and social context, and of seeing gender as an analytical 'lens' through which wider social relations can be understood. It further indicates that if gender analysis is to 'dismantle patriarchy', as one workshop participant put it, it needs to forego a narrow focus on women's autonomy and instead adopt broader, more inclusive parameters. This would permit context-specific analysis of masculinity alongside femininity, and of the relationship of both to violence and militarisation.

Participation in this project has offered researchers a rich experience, underlining the importance of research in framing the scope of programme design. The use of oral testimony for research in contexts requiring sensitivity to personal feelings and security has been validated. Oral testimony may not be useful for collecting verifiable data relating to pre-defined questions: rather, it helps define the scope of an issue, which may be addressed or triangulated using other methods. Testimonies represent one version of the 'truth', presented through the prism of an individual's own personality, history, memory, interests, and purposes, and have to be interpreted in this light. Testimonial information requires iterative and reflective approaches to analysis. The research has been an acknowledgedly extractive exercise to date; the upcoming dissemination phase will enable material to be returned to the narrators and for joint advocacy projects to be designed.

The development of appropriate analytical frameworks for use by project workers was only partly achieved. The impact analysis matrix (annex 7) was found useful by some in ordering findings, unwieldy by others. Frameworks with predefined boundaries and categories are unlikely to capture the complexity of interrelationships involved in such an analysis; more flexible frameworks, such as impact flow charts, demand future attention.

The research has begun a process of hypothesising the interrelationships between gender and conflict, a complex subject which requires further in-depth research. Issues for the future include constructions of masculinity and its relation to militarisation and the state. The interrelationship between gender and other factors of difference, notably ethnicity and age, in a context of rapid social upheaval, is another. Further research might also explore the scope for lasting transformation in gender ideologies resulting from changes in gender roles and identities, as a basis for developing NGO interventions and strategies. Are new or alternative masculinities and femininities emerging, and if so, should they be

encouraged, and how? Finally, the voices of youth and children have not been adequately heard in this research and should be pursued as a key issue for the future.

Dissemination

The original project proposal foresaw that, owing to the open-ended nature of the data, dissemination activities would be hard to plan in advance.   This has proved to be the case, and follow-up proposals are being drawn up. Dissemination activities already carried out include:

♦ Timbuktou Guidelines on ACORD's website (www.acord.org.uk)
♦ Panel presentation to CODEP conference: 'The economics of war and peace: addressing the dilemmas' London, June 2001
♦ Round Table, October 2001 (annex 8); project researchers shared a platform with representatives of Oxfam, International Alert and CIIR working on similar themes, presenting their findings to a group of about 50 people from other development organisations
♦ Paper extracted from Sudan research presented to Middle East and North Africa Award Forum, Yemen, May 2001
♦ Presentation to seminar at Centre for Cross-Cultural Research on Women, Oxford University, February 2002

The final project workshop, held in London in October 2001, included a four-day workshop on dissemination and advocacy, in which participants acquired skills in report-writing, internet use and dissemination, theatre and video for research and advocacy, and developing advocacy strategies. These skills are now being put into effect through the design of programme-level dissemination and advocacy strategies