



# **Men, Masculinities and the Security-Development Nexus:**

## **A Summary Overview**

Steven Schoofs, Conflict Research Unit, Institute Clingendael

Rosan Smits, Conflict Research Unit, Institute Clingendael

Serena Cruz, Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights

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## Participating Partners :

Centre for Conflict Studies, University of Utrecht

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Conflict Research Unit, Institute Clingendael, (CRU)

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Steven Schoofs and Rosan Smits, research fellows at the Netherlands Institute for International Relations 'Clingendael', work on questions linked to gender in fragile states. Serena Cruz is a Visiting Scientific Researcher, consulting for the Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR). The authors would like to thank Oxfam Novib and Centre for Conflict Studies for their contributions.

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# Changing Perspectives on Gender Equality: No Longer Simply a Women's Issue?

Although equality between women and men has long been recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), it is only since the last decade that the notion of men having a specific role to play in realising this principle has become articulated more prominently<sup>1</sup>.

The potential role of men and the concept of masculinity have garnered increasing attention, both within the UN family<sup>2</sup> as well as among CSOs, (I)NGOs, governments as well as multilateral organisations such as the World Bank. This reflects a variety of internationally supported mandates and treaties that address the idea that men and boys somehow need to be engaged in order to advance gender equality<sup>3</sup>. In addition, there is a growing body of academic work conveying an increasingly sophisticated understanding of men, their identities and behaviours as well as their potential contribution to change the problematic aspects of gender relations.

The fairly recent surge of interest in men and their role with regard to the advancement of gender equality can be quite confusing, not least because for many people working in policy-oriented environments and international organisations, gender often simply means 'women'. Moreover, among women's groups and organisations, there are (legitimate) concerns that the growing focus on men will dilute attention to women and their specific concerns.

Nevertheless, there seems to be a shift in thinking underway whereby the transformation of unequal gender relations in society is increasingly framed as a shared responsibility for both women and men. In other words, if men are part of the problem, they might also be part of the solution. One of the potential consequences of such an approach is that for example gender-based violence is no longer exclusively framed as a 'women's issue', but becomes a broader societal problem that implicates men as well.

Against the backdrop of a growing interest in men and gender equality, this paper intends to explain the concept of masculinity. In addition, the paper provides some further background to men and gender equality as an emerging thematic area of potential relevance for the international peace and security agendas. The final section of this paper outlines some of the issues deemed useful for further discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> Connell (2003)

<sup>2</sup> UNIFEM, UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, ILO, WHO and the UNAIDS secretariat are beginning to explore and develop programmes for gender equality that involve men and boys.

<sup>3</sup>E.g. International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994), Fourth World Conference on Women/Beijing Platform for Action (1995), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1978), Commission on the Status of Women (48th Session, 2004)

# Masculinity as a Theoretical Concept: Exploring the Basics

There is a fairly rich and sophisticated debate on theoretical approaches to masculinity. Generally, the concept of masculinity can be seen as a way to explain men and their (group) identities as well as their social practices. However, two fundamentally different views exist of men's identities and behaviour, which are informed by, on the one hand, biological essentialism and on the other hand, socio-cultural constructivism. This section explains the concept of masculinity and summarises some of the issues that need to be taken into account<sup>4</sup>.

Advocates of the essentialist position tend to argue that masculinity is men's nature and that this is the reason for the differences and inequalities between men and women. Thus, men's political, economic and cultural privileges stem from their 'masculine advantage' over women, which finds expression in their genetic predisposition to aggression, physical strength, and sexual drives. These are the arguments typically deployed by men who seek to defend or shore up male privileges. It is therefore crucial to be aware of the political convenience to explain gender hierarchies in terms of men's supposedly natural superiority<sup>5</sup>.

Constructivist conceptions of masculinity, on the other hand, operate from the understanding that men and women's identities and behaviour are constructed and shaped by social gender norms, instead of being biologically driven and products of nature. These gender norms are understood as the socially constructed roles, expectations and definitions that are being assigned to men and women by society. Masculinity, in turn, refers to the social meaning of manhood, which is constructed and defined in social, historical and political contexts. The following social-constructivist definition of masculinity provides a useful starting point:

**Masculinity:** conveys that there are many socially constructed definitions for being a man and that these can change over time and from place to place. The term relates to perceived notions and ideals about how men should or are expected to behave in a given setting.

*Source: Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2005*

The contribution of social constructivist gender theory is that it sees gender norms, behaviour and identities as socio-cultural constructs that define the social expectations around men and their behaviour in a given context. Hence, a social constructionist understanding of masculinities is a potential way to overcome a still widespread tendency to "naturalise" male privilege. In marked contrast to perspectives informed by the biological determinism of gender essentialism, the adoption of a constructivist perspective suggests that there is indeed scope to change unequal gender relations and address potentially harmful gender identities. One of the implications of constructivist gender theory is also that women play a role in (re)producing gender norms and expectations for men<sup>6</sup>. This means that masculinity is not just about men, but involves women as well.

Unpacking the notion of masculinity a bit further, the table below summarises some of the issues that should be taken into consideration.

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<sup>4</sup> See suggestions for further reading, in particular McCarry 2007 for a useful critique of the concept.

<sup>5</sup> Greig et al. (2000): 3

<sup>6</sup> IDS Symposium Report (2007): 19

Key Issues to Pay Attention To <sup>7</sup>	
- Plurality and diversity	There is not a single version of masculinity. What it means to be (considered) a man differs across cultures, lifestyles and social roles. Apart from commonalities, there are considerable diversities among men and forms of manhood that need to be taken into account.
- Hegemonic masculinity and different social positions between (groups of)men	There is a social pecking order of masculinities. Often, one form of manhood –“hegemonic masculinity” <sup>8</sup> – is socially dominant and deemed the most desirable, whereas other forms of manhood are considered inferior (e.g. gay men). Gender and manhood involve exclusions and hierarchies between and within different groups of men.
- Social learning and (re)production	Masculinities (and femininities) are the product of complex social influences. They exist both at the individual and collective level and play a role at the level of ideology and discourse. Organisations (army, bureaucracies, sports club) and institutions (family, religion, mass media) play a diffuse and often unnoticed role in the (re)production of gender identities.
- Specific costs and vulnerabilities for men and people around them	Narrow social definitions of manhood and the perceived failure of living up to societal expectations can compromise men’s health and result in potentially harmful anti-social behaviours.
- Power and the "politics of masculinity" <sup>9</sup>	Gender hierarchies involve power relations, which can manifest themselves in misogyny, homophobia, racism, privilege and other forms of discrimination. These ‘politics of masculinity’ are deployed by men to claim power over women, but also over other men.
- Dynamic change of gender norms	As social constructions, gender identities and hierarchies can change over time. This can occur due to economic restructuring, war, generational turnover and broader socio-cultural processes taking place in society.
- Intersection with other markers of social differentiation	Men’s gender identities and their social position are structured by class, social status, race, ethnicity, sexuality and age. This means that there can be considerable differences between men as they do not equally benefit from male privilege (e.g. young men in patriarchal societies)

<sup>7</sup> Contents of table loosely based on Lang (2000) and Kaufman (2003)

<sup>8</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt (2005)

<sup>9</sup> Greig et al., (2000): 6

## Applying the Concept to Development Policy and Planning: Lost in Translation?

The pioneering work of academics during the last two decades represents a crucial resource, but the challenge faced by practitioners is to translate theoretical concepts into workable programmes that can have impact on the ground. Although there appears to be an opening to include men and masculinities in the agenda for gender equality, much work remains to be done. In order to get a firmer grasp on some of the practical challenges involved, this section will briefly discuss the fundamental change in thinking about women and gender in the field of development assistance.

In basic form, this paradigm shift essentially involved an attempt to replace the *Women in Development* (WID) approach with the *Gender and Development* (GAD) approach<sup>10</sup>. Reflecting the state of thinking in the 1970s, WID is based on the conception that women are marginalised in development-oriented interventions, with the result that women are often excluded from the benefits of development. With its focus on women's disadvantaged position in the development process, the overall objective of WID is to ensure that resources and interventions for development are used to improve the condition and position of women. The fact that WID approaches do not analyse and address power differentials in the relationship between women and men is generally seen as one of the major shortcomings of this approach. It is often argued that WID is treating symptoms with add-on interventions rather than transforming power differentials as the source of inequalities between men and women. Men are not considered in WID-informed analyses.

GAD came into being as a response to the perceived shortcomings of WID. Reflecting the social constructionist approach, GAD-oriented interventions are essentially based on three premises; 1) gender relations are fundamentally power relations; 2) gender is a socio-cultural construction rather than a biological given; and 3) structural changes in gender roles and relations are a concrete possibility. Central to GAD is the belief that transforming unequal power relations between men and women is a prerequisite for achieving sustainable improvements in women's lives. The implication of this conception is that the onus is on women *and men* to address and reshape the problematic aspects of gender relations.

The significance of the shift from 'women' to 'gender' is that it points directly at the need for a more differentiated understanding of gender relations in the context of development. However, acknowledging the variety and complexity of interactions between women and men is merely a first step in the development of concrete programmes. The key challenge still to be overcome is that the framing of gender as a holistic concept that should include men, clashes with the need of practitioners for practical strategies and conceptual tools that are indeed applicable in development policy and planning. Having witnessed the rise of GAD, Chant and Gutmann concluded in 2000 that 'GAD still remains a theory in need of a methodology for implementation'<sup>11</sup>. In the absence of practical and concrete strategies to engage men in gender-focused development programmes it is no wonder that in practice the discredited women-only approach of WID comes across as a safer alternative. A related problem with GAD is that it requires a much longer and larger commitment of resources, given that the overall objective is to transform cultures with long-standing patriarchal practices.

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<sup>10</sup> See Razavi et al. (1995) for an extensive discussion on the shift from WID to GAD.

<sup>11</sup> Chant and Gutmann (2000)

Overall, practical methodologies (such as WID or GAD) need to be informed by a clear vision about the position and role of men in gender and development. So far the development of a concrete vision to translate theory into practice is clouded by the many doubts and uncertainties that exist around the idea of engaging men as potential change agents for gender equality. The table below lists a number of arguments that are being used by advocates and opponents in the discussion on the question whether it is worthwhile and sensible to focus on men as part of work for gender equality.

Why engaging men in work for gender equality?	
Arguments in Favour	Arguments Against
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- men often occupy strategic decision-making positions at different levels (household, community and state) and often control the resources required to achieve more gender equality</li> <li>- men's attitudes and behaviours need to change in order to advance gender equality</li> <li>- women-only approaches have very limited impact and merely address the symptoms of unequal gender relations</li> <li>- removing men from the gender equation means that they can shirk their responsibility for positive change</li> <li>- men play a crucial role in perpetuating sexist practices and maintaining unequal gender relations</li> <li>- men can play a positive role in advancing women's position in society and foster more gender equality</li> <li>- a combination of women and men working together can help transform the image of gender as "women-only" as well as take advantage of complementary roles</li> <li>- men can sometimes reach and influence other men more effectively than women</li> <li>- working with men can potentially complement on-going work for the advancement of women</li> <li>- Involving men represents another entry point for exposing and addressing gender blind policies and practices</li> <li>- men themselves represent a largely untapped resource in work towards achieving equality and reducing poverty</li> <li>- keeping men out can also limit prospects for capturing a larger share of development resources</li> <li>- excluding or ignoring men in interventions may have detrimental effects as it can provoke male hostility and retaliation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- men and women have fundamentally different approaches and interests, which cannot be reconciled</li> <li>- emphasising the need to target men as well may convey a false sense of equivalence between the position of men and women: men as the "new victims"</li> <li>- work with men can take, or be seen as taking away resources from the empowerment of women</li> <li>- investing in men for gender equality simply ignores the capabilities and agency of women as well as their negotiating power. This may also result in a reversion to a traditional state of "men's guardianship" over women</li> <li>- boys will always be boys: engaging and addressing men is a lost cause right from the start</li> <li>- giving more attention the position of men may create an anti-feminist backlash</li> <li>- work with men can be (seen as) a muddling or a distraction from the fundamental work of empowering women and ending inequality</li> <li>- work with men can be (seen as) an attempt by men to co-opt existing gender work for their own purposes</li> <li>- programming in this area is still relatively new, and strong impact assessments have not been undertaken to indicate the effectiveness of working with men</li> <li>- many men will not be willing partners in the process of change</li> <li>- men (and women) will be resistant to changing ideas, behaviours and beliefs – especially if the proposed changes are perceived as imposed from other cultures or parts of the world</li> <li>- external actors cannot engineer fundamental changes to problematic gender structures in society.</li> </ul>

# Potential Entry Points in the International Agenda for Peace and Development

Within the thematic fields of peace-building, security and development there is still relatively little policy interest in a more holistic approach to gender equality that would include a focus on engaging men. However, there are encouraging signs that the idea of including men in gender equality programmes and policies is gradually picked up. In policy and academic texts on international peace and security one finds occasional references to the supposition that marginalised young men in developing countries are likely to use violence as a mechanism for social advancement and thus represent a potential security risk in so-called fragile states<sup>12</sup>. This highly gendered perspective invokes the threat of an aggressive and deviant masculinity from which fragile states need protecting through a security-dominated approach to fragile states. However, it is important to ask whether this perception of certain men as a security risk is the product of conjecture and self-evident truths instead of solid empirical evidence.

- It is therefore necessary to research to what extent a better understanding and empirical grounding of men and masculinities in fragile contexts generate an alternative analytical narrative of the causes and consequences of 'fragility'.
- In addition, insight is needed in the question to what extent masculinities can be integrated in gender analysis of peace and security and security processes.

This section briefly discusses potential entry points related to violence, reproductive health and female leadership to include a focus on men and masculinities within the policy development and programmatic interventions in fragile contexts.

## Engagement in Situations of Fragility: Peace-building and Violence Prevention

Peace-building and violence prevention represent a crucial thematic area in which a focus on men is long overdue. The reason for this is uncomfortable, but nevertheless obvious: men are the main protagonists of violent behaviour. Violence is an important means through which power differentials between and among men and women are produced and maintained. Violence against women, but also homophobic and racist violence, can be regarded as products of power hierarchies and narrow societal conceptions of masculinity. Violence against women, for instance, is both a key determinant and manifestation of gender inequality. The foregoing suggests that creating spaces for the development of alternative non-violent masculinities should be regarded as a crucial element in building sustainable peace. After all, violent masculinities are a fundamental source of insecurity for both women and men. This also confirms the point that 'gender' needs to be rescued from its "women's issues ghetto".

Both peace-building and violence prevention need to pay more attention to the intersecting of violence with male identities. For instance, the demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration of former combatants (DDR) offer a potential albeit largely unexplored entry point. After all, one problematic element in the aftermath of civil conflict is the presence of men well trained and socialised in violent behaviour, which may have repercussions for peace and stability during post-war transitions. The

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<sup>12</sup> Relevant publications include: Richards (2006), Sommers (2006), Collier (2007), Hendrixson (2004) and Kaplan (1994)



frequently cited example is the increased level of domestic violence when demobilised soldiers return to their homes. Another entry point is United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. Challenging the assumption that gender means women and securing the participation of men in efforts to realise gender equality remain two key priorities for the successful implementation of SCR 1325. Overall, a concern with violent and problematic masculinities may contribute to anti-violence programmes, peacemaking and security strategies. This observation hints at the need to develop interventions that engage men specifically in non-violent methods of conflict resolution<sup>13</sup>.

- Key elements for exploring the relationship between masculinities and fragility are questions linked to the social construction of violent and non-violent behaviour as critical determinants of the male identity and its relation to the production of violent conflict, as well as the potential space for men and women to negotiate less problematic gender identities.

## Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights (RSHR)

In this section priority is given to policy prescriptions with relevance to the needs of state security and development. How then do the issues of masculinity and RSHR overlap with these priorities for policy? A critical look at one example, drawn from the issue of Internally Displaced People (IDP), illustrates how particular environments are capable of creating contexts where security is capable of breeding insecurity. RSHR concerns itself not only with issues related to population or family planning. Indeed, emphasis is placed on health, rights, and justice that include access and advocacy for sexuality and reproductive rights and wellbeing. In the case of IDPs, what exists is a situation crafted by vulnerabilities, where women and girls are susceptible to “blatant violence and mutilation, demoralization and dehumanization (...) conditions of unequal power, dependency, crowding, sub-standard housing and lack of privacy [which in turn] make rape and abuse a constant threat”<sup>14</sup>.

Conditions such as these make possible the linkages between real circumstances and the need for concrete outcomes based on policy and programmatic initiatives. Additionally, what is uncovered by the situation of IDP women and girls is the “*impossibility* of isolating reproductive and sexual health and rights from a complex web of circumstances often hidden in more ‘normal’ settings” [italics added]<sup>15</sup>. Discussing this issue not only involves contributions from literature, but also narratives from individual experience—information that is essential to understanding the realities connecting RSHR, Masculinity, and Gender and Conflict. “[Within Pakistan] internally displace people (IDPs) and life within refugee camps, have many women facing unwanted, unplanned, and poorly spaced pregnancies due to a series of issues: lack of access to contraceptive services and supplies; overburdened providers with little time to educate or counsel clients; pressure from husbands or other family members to re-build the population; and increases of rape and prostitution”<sup>16</sup>.

By looking at the issue of IDPs, specifically the circumstances of women and girls’ safety and access to RSHR, we are capable of linking security and conflict to material needs that arise when rape, battery, and terror occur every day. In turn, these realities allow policy makers and funders to understand the connection between gender, violence, and RSHR; while also recognizing the material effects of unhealthy and dangerous masculine practices. Essentially, the example of IDPs is one way to explore how

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<sup>13</sup> Connell (2003b)

<sup>14</sup> Petchesky (2008): 6

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> The example of IDPs and RSHR involves contributions from Muhammad Aslam Panhwar of Peace Foundation Pakistan (Panhwar, in “RSHR in Fragile States” WGNRR Case Study Exercise).

unhealthy and dangerous masculine practices impede the survival and safety of vulnerable individuals, which most often are women and girls.

- From this example, in the case of IDPs, policies must not only provide protective opportunities for survivors of sexual violence (e.g. women, girls, men, and boys)<sup>17</sup>; they must also address the link between men and masculinity through cultural and informational opportunities that explore how unhealthy and dangerous masculine practices should not be conflated with all males (e.g. not all men/boys rape);
- Policies should be unpacked in terms of how the differing security needs in conflict and post-conflict areas can produce spaces of confinement; trapping individuals for indeterminate periods of time producing indescribable acts of violence.

Measurements for security should report how well women and girls RSHR needs are met during times of crisis; increasing the likelihood that policy-directives will find outcomes delivering safety, prosperity, and development.

## Female leadership

Deeply rooted gender asymmetries within society are also reflected in the political domain. Men often occupy strategic positions at both the formal and informal level, thereby dominating the realm of decision making. Such a patriarchic social and political system is not conducive to endeavours that are geared at gender-positive change.

This observation leads external stakeholders in governance assistance programs to encourage female leadership, in order to arrive at a more gender-sensitive leadership composition at state and local level. In practice, this leads to a variety of women empowerment programs, consisting of civic education programs and leadership training for (potential) female leaders, which all have as common denominator that they explicitly define women as their intended beneficiaries.

What has been neglected to consider is the extremely gendered understanding and expectations of leadership that predominates among both men and women who live in patriarchic societies. Leadership is often intuitively understood as a masculine capability by nature.

- It is important to ask to what extent this gendered understanding of leadership impacts on the success of women empowerment programs.
- Furthermore, when gender equality is the ultimate aim of encouraging female leadership, a thorough analysis is needed on the implications of training female leaders in the context of a patriarchy system, where leadership and authority is deeply embedded in a specific construct of a hegemonic masculinity.

For one, further encouraging female leadership may well depend on addressing social expectations around men in leadership positions, getting men to make space for women and mobilizing men in gate-keeping positions to act as gender champions for women leaders.

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<sup>17</sup> E.g. In post-rape circumstances one can think of emergency contraception, choices for barrier methods in contraception like IUDs and diaphragms, confidential counselling and testing for HIV/AIDS and other STIs, and access to safe abortions and post-abortion care.

## Concluding Remarks: Bringing Men and Masculinities into Policy and Programming

Policy discussions relating to gender have predisposition towards the question how women in fragile states as a marginalised group should be addressed. The drawback of this approach is that it does not take gender as a strategic analytical consideration about power relations within society, but as a female add-on to existing policy analysis. This explains why in practice it seems so difficult to support gender-equality in fragile states. Looking at gender as the relation between men and women, and between men and women among themselves - thus taking masculinities into account - may in effect turn out to be critical to easing and improving the implementation of a gender perspective in all fragile states policies. Since policy discussions have only recently begun to concern themselves with men and masculinities in relation to the security-development nexus, it unclear yet how efforts to engage men for gender equality can be linked to policy.

Entry points for bringing masculinities into policies relate to questions such as how existing policy frameworks can be deployed to promote and sustain creative strategies for the engagement of men for gender equality. In addition, more work has to be done in order to overcome the limited conceptual frameworks guiding the gender interventions that are currently being implemented. Some of the pivotal questions to ask here are how and to what extent a concern with gender equality can become part of men's identities. In addition, what exactly can and should be the role of men in advancing gender equality? Further elaboration is also needed on scope for addressing the negative aspects of male socialisation, particularly within security realm.

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