Gender Equality and Good Security Sector Governance

Gender equality for state and human security

About this series

The SSR Backgrounders provide concise introductions to topics and concepts in good security sector governance (SSG) and security sector reform (SSR). The series summarizes current debates, explains key terms and exposes central tensions based on a broad range of international experiences. The SSR Backgrounders do not promote specific models, policies or proposals for good governance or reform but do provide further resources that will allow readers to extend their knowledge on each topic. The SSR Backgrounders are a resource for security governance and reform stakeholders seeking to understand but also to critically assess current approaches to good SSG and SSR.

About this SSR Backgrounder

This SSR Backgrounder is about gender equality and the principles of good security sector governance (SSG). Gender equality means ensuring that women and men have equal access to opportunities, resources and participation. The principles of good governance cannot be applied to the security sector without gender equality, because good SSG requires that the specific security and justice needs of men, women, boys and girls are addressed in the provision, management and oversight of security. This SSR Backgrounder explains why gender equality is a constituent part of good SSG.

This SSR Backgrounder answers the following questions:

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development and
the rule of law

What does gender equality have to do with good governance of the security sector?

Gender equality is an international norm that stipulates the equal right of women and men to opportunities and resources irrespective of their gender or the sex with which they were born. In the context of the security sector this means that women and men have equal opportunities to participate in the provision, management and oversight of security, and that the security needs of women, men, girls and boys are equally addressed. **Gender equality is a constituent part of each of the principles of good SSG because these principles cannot be achieved if the rights of men and women are not respected on an equal basis.** Figure 1 shows why the security sector cannot meet the standards of good governance without gender equality.

The relevance of gender equality for good SSG is sometimes misunderstood.
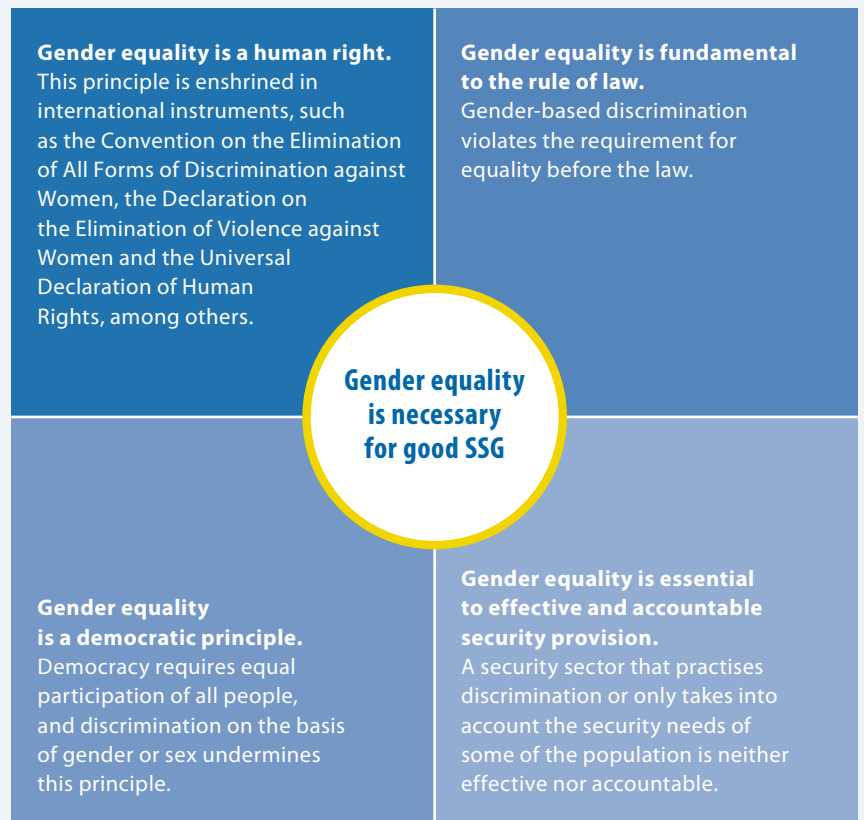
– *Gender equality is not an attempt to apply Western values to non-Western social contexts.* The goal of gender equality is to expand choices and opportunities and remove barriers and limitations based on gender, but how this goal is reached can differ greatly between contexts. Gender equality is consistently reflected in national legislation and is an internationally established norm.

– *Gender equality does not undermine the effectiveness of security provision, oversight or management.* Gender equality does not require putting people into positions for which they are not qualified in order to achieve a 50:50 balance of men and women in the security sector. Gender equality means that women and men have equal access to opportunities on the basis of their future potential and existing abilities, irrespective of their gender. For more on gender equality and effective security provision, please see the SSR Backgrounder on "Gender Equality and Security Sector Reform".

▶ **Good security sector governance (SSG)** Good SSG describes how the principles of good governance apply to security provision, management and oversight by state and non-state actors. The principles of good governance are accountability, transparency, rule of law, participation, responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency. Good SSG means that the security sector provides state and human security, effectively and accountably, within a framework of democratic civilian control, rule of law and respect for human rights. Good SSG is a specific type of security governance based on a normative standard for how the state security sector should work in a democracy.

For more information on the security sector and SSG, please refer to the SSR Backgrounders on "Security Sector Governance" and "The Security Sector".

Figure 1   Gender equality and good SSG

Gender equality is a human right.
This principle is enshrined in international instruments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, among others.

Gender equality is fundamental to the rule of law.
Gender-based discrimination violates the requirement for equality before the law.

Gender equality is necessary for good SSG

Gender equality is a democratic principle.
Democracy requires equal participation of all people, and discrimination on the basis of gender or sex undermines this principle.

Gender equality is essential to effective and accountable security provision.
A security sector that practises discrimination or only takes into account the security needs of some of the population is neither effective nor accountable.

How is gender equality part of each of the principles of good SSG?

Gender equality is a constituent part of the each of the principles of good SSG. The following list gives some typical examples:

– *Effectiveness requires gender equality.* Effective security institutions meaningfully engage women as well as men. This enables them to deliver security services that can meet the needs of both sexes, making them more effective. Operationally, gender equality allows security sector institutions to identify and meet the security needs of the entire population instead of serving only a part of it. This includes determining the different risk factors for crime perpetration or victimization among men, women, boys and girls. Institutionally, this means ensuring that the workplace environment is free from sexual and gender-based harassment and discrimination, while offering equal opportunity for a diversity of men and women based on their qualifications and capability to perform.

– *Efficiency requires gender equality.* Efficient security institutions maximize human and financial resources. This is not possible without gender equality because efficient use of human resources includes fully utilizing the capabilities and expertise of both women and men and ensuring that investments in human capital are retained (through gender-sensitive retention, promotion and professional development), and not lost for lack of policy infrastructure (for example, family-friendly working conditions) or a discriminatory workplace environment (due to sexual and gender-based harassment).

▶ **The security sector**   The security sector is composed of all the structures, institutions and personnel responsible for security provision, management and oversight at national and local levels, including both:

– **security providers,** such as the armed forces, police, border guards, intelligence services, penal and corrections institutions and commercial and non-state security actors, among many others;

– **security management and oversight bodies,** such as government ministries, parliament, special statutory oversight institutions, parts of the justice sector and civil society actors with a stake in high standards of public security provision, including women's organizations and the media, among others.

There are different definitions of the security sector, but SSR is based on a broad understanding of the sector which incorporates all security provision, management and oversight bodies, including both military and non-military security institutions and state and non-state actors.

For more information on the security sector, please refer to the SSR Backgrounder on "The Security Sector".

– *Accountability requires gender equality.*
Accountability mechanisms exist to ensure that the legitimacy and resources of the security sector are used exclusively to achieve security institutions' mandates to fulfil their mission. Women and men from all backgrounds must have equal access to accountability mechanisms, otherwise the security sector risks reinforcing existing gender inequalities by allowing more powerful members of society (including security institutions' own staff) to dominate others.

– *Transparency requires gender equality.*
Transparency makes information accessible to those who are affected by decision-making processes and their implementation. Gender equality is essential to transparency because ensuring that both men and women within security provision, management and oversight bodies (including the public at times) have equal access to information can help ensure that decisions are made impartially, responsively and in accordance with relevant laws and policies.

– *Participation requires gender equality.*
Participation means that the public has the opportunity to participate in decision-making and service provision on a free, equitable and inclusive basis, either directly or through legitimate representative institutions. Gender equality is essential in making participation free, equitable and inclusive because men tend to be vastly overrepresented within security sector institutions and security-related decision-making bodies, including parliaments and national security committees.

– *Responsiveness requires gender equality.*
Responsive security sector institutions are sensitive to the security needs of the population and demonstrate a culture of service. Without gender equality responsiveness is impossible because security provision may be based on gender stereotypes or a culture of masculinized values and behaviours that can lead to harassment and discrimination. Gender equality allows the security sector to take a proactive interest in responding to the specific and changing needs of women, men, girls and boys.

▶ **Mainstreaming gender equality** Gender mainstreaming is a strategy for achieving the goal of gender equality. Sometimes other terms are preferred to gender mainstreaming, for example:

– gender responsive

– gender sensitive

– integrating gender

– adopting a gender perspective

– applying a gender- or gender-differentiated analysis

– using a gender lens.

These terms all focus on the fact that different people have different needs, concerns and experiences, and gender is one of the main aspects of identity (though not the only one) that influences this. **Strategies for integrating gender equality into security provision, management and oversight are a fundamental aspect of SSR regardless of the particular terms used to describe such strategies.**

For more information on gender mainstreaming, please see the SSR Backgrounder on "Gender Equality and Security Sector Reform".
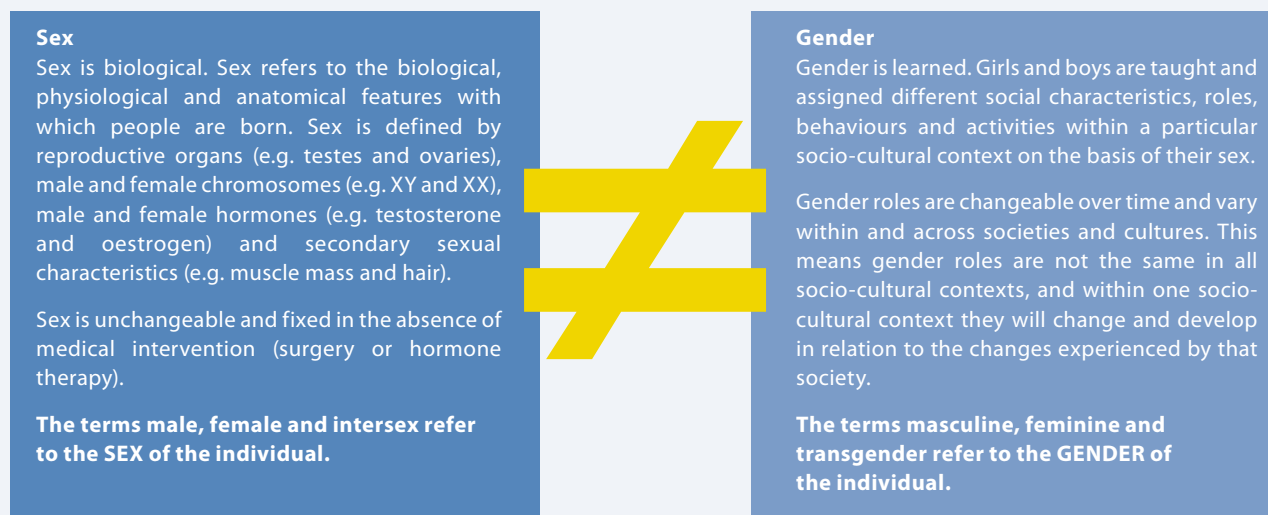
– *Rule of law requires gender equality.*
All individuals, regardless of gender, sex, age, religion, class, sexual orientation or ability, should be protected by and accountable to laws that are known publicly, enforced impartially and consistent with international and national human rights norms and standards. Gender equality is essential to rule of law because it is part of international and national human rights norms and standards and because all men, women, girls and boys must be equally protected by and accountable to the law and justice processes.

Why is gender equality relevant in every context?

Gender equality is relevant in every context because gender inequality is present in all countries, cultures and contexts. *Gender inequality* refers to unequal treatment and access to resources, opportunities and autonomy based on gender, and it happens in every country in the world. Gender inequality exists because the gender roles assigned to women and girls are associated with less power and resources than the gender roles assigned to men and boys (see Figure 2 on the difference between gender and sex). Although women and girls are most often disadvantaged and/or harmed by gender inequality, men and boys also experience disadvantage and harm as a result of gender roles. For example, while domestic and sexual violence disproportionately affect women and girls, men and boys may find it difficult to seek or access support if they are victims of violence, due to socio-cultural expectations that they can defend themselves – or cannot be victims of certain types of violence. **Gender is therefore an important factor in determining the particular forms of insecurity a person is likely to experience, as well as the roles people are likely to perform as security providers and as perpetrators of violence.**

Gender is not the only aspect of social identity that affects security. Other factors, like ethnicity, age, socio-economic status, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity and religion, also determine how individuals and groups experience security. **Prioritizing gender equality does not mean neglecting diversity: recognizing how gender affects security highlights how a range of social factors can have either a direct or an indirect effect on security.** For example, in the case of age, because there is a universally accepted distinction between childhood and adulthood, there is also a distinction between the gender roles assigned to women and men, and to girls and boys. Thus gender, in combination with other intersecting social factors, constitutes an important determinant of security as well as rights and access to resources. Establishing gender equality within the security sector can help to improve security service provision, management and oversight by increasing awareness of other types of social factors as well.

Figure 2   Sex and gender are not the same

Sex
Sex is biological. Sex refers to the biological, physiological and anatomical features with which people are born. Sex is defined by reproductive organs (e.g. testes and ovaries), male and female chromosomes (e.g. XY and XX), male and female hormones (e.g. testosterone and oestrogen) and secondary sexual characteristics (e.g. muscle mass and hair).

Sex is unchangeable and fixed in the absence of medical intervention (surgery or hormone therapy).

The terms male, female and intersex refer to the SEX of the individual.

Gender
Gender is learned. Girls and boys are taught and assigned different social characteristics, roles, behaviours and activities within a particular socio-cultural context on the basis of their sex.

Gender roles are changeable over time and vary within and across societies and cultures. This means gender roles are not the same in all socio-cultural contexts, and within one socio-cultural context they will change and develop in relation to the changes experienced by that society.

The terms masculine, feminine and transgender refer to the GENDER of the individual.

What problems does gender inequality cause?

Gender inequality contributes to poor governance of the security sector. This can result in a wide range of problems for individuals, communities and the sector itself, potentially contributing to political and socio-economic instability, underdevelopment and high levels of structural and institutional violence and crime.

Gender inequality causes institutional problems for the security sector. Inequality in the workplace undermines the effectiveness of security provision through sexual and gender-based harassment and discrimination; a hostile work environment for some employees, particularly women; and a failure to represent the diversity of the community. In addition, a security sector that does not fully utilize the human resource capacities and capabilities of all its employees – men and women – limits its own ability to be effective and efficient institutionally and operationally.

Gender inequality compromises security provision and threatens the security of the population. Security sector providers that are only responsive and accountable to a portion of the population leave others members of the society vulnerable to security threats. Gender-based violence includes rape, trafficking in human beings, female genital mutilation and child brides, which are all security threats that disproportionately affect women and girls and are often overlooked, underprioritized or even condoned by security providers. Creating security risks for one group can contribute to broader instability, unrest and sometimes conflict within the population.

Gender inequality contributes to political, economic and social instability. A security sector that lacks democratic civilian control and is not representative, responsive, effective, efficient or accountable, can become a support mechanism for an authoritarian regime. Powerful groups and/or leaders may use the security sector to subjugate portions of the population and enforce their understanding of, among other things, proper and appropriate gender roles. Under these circumstances, gender inequality helps to perpetuate the impunity, corruption and human rights abuses that endanger democratic processes, economic development and social stability.

▶ **Gender-based violence** Gender-based violence (GBV) is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females. GBV also includes violence based on a person's (perceived) sexual orientation or gender identity.

GBV exists in all societies and is one of the most prevalent threats to human security.

Forms of GBV include:

– domestic violence, including domestic abuse, family violence or intimate-partner violence;

– gender-selective murder, including female infanticide;

– forced marriage, forced pregnancy, forced abortion and forced sterilization;

– harmful practices that are accepted and justified as culture or tradition, e.g. crimes committed against women in the name of "honour", dowry-related violence, child marriage and female genital mutilation;

– sexual harassment, e.g. in the workplace, public spaces, educational institutions or in sport;

– sexual violence, including sexual abuse, rape, sexual exploitation, forced prostitution, gang rape and sexual slavery;

– stalking;

– trafficking in human beings.

GBV reflects and reinforces inequalities between men and women, and for this reason most GBV is inflicted by men on women and girls. However, gender relations intersect with many other social factors, meaning that men and boys can also be victims of GBV and women, girls and boys can also be perpetrators.

Improving the capacity of the security sector to prevent and respond to GBV is a priority of SSR.

How are gender equality and good SSG related to SSR?

Good SSG, which by definition includes the aims of gender equality, constitutes a set of ideal principles and good practices. SSR is the actual process of reforming the provision, management and oversight of security institutions in light of these principles and practices. Good SSG is the goal of SSR; and gender equality is a constituent part of both the principles of good SSG and the reform strategies involved in SSR.

Improving gender equality by applying the principles of good SSG through a process of SSR involves:

– promoting and protecting the equal rights of women, men, girls and boys;

– ensuring that equal consideration is given to their different security needs;

– providing equal opportunities for both men and women to participate in security and justice provision, management and oversight.

Assessing the implications for women and men within each principle (also called gender mainstreaming) at the political, institutional and operational levels is a critical element in striving towards a security sector that can meet the needs of the entire population – all men, women, boys and girls.

Different contexts will apply the principles of good SSG and gender equality in different ways and with different priorities. **While the core elements of gender equality as a constituent part of good SSG always remain the same, the processes, approaches and priorities are likely to be different from context to context.**

▶ **Security sector reform (SSR)**   SSR is the political and technical process of improving state and human security by making security provision, management and oversight more effective and more accountable, within a framework of democratic civilian control, rule of law and respect for human rights. The goal of SSR is to apply the principles of good governance to the security sector. SSR concerns all actors involved in security provision, management and oversight, and covers all their roles, responsibilities and actions. SSR programmes may focus primarily on only one security actor or on the way the entire system functions, as long as the goal is always to improve both effectiveness and accountability. Efforts to improve the efficiency or effectiveness of the security sector cannot be considered SSR if they do not enhance civilian democratic control, rule of law and respect for human rights.

For more information on SSR, please refer to the SSR Backgrounders on "Security Sector Reform" and "Gender Equality and Security Sector Reform".

Further resources

On the international legal basis for gender equality and the equal rights of women:

– United Nations General Assembly
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
18 December 1979 (United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1249, p. 13).

– Global Justice Center
The International Legal Framework of Peace Negotiations: Requirements and Recommendations for Enforcing Women's Rights
Global Justice Center Factsheet, June 2014.

– United Nations
Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,
adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, 27 October 1995.

– United Nations Security Council
Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) (on Women, Peace and Security)
31 October 2000, S/RES/1325 (2000).

On how women's and girls' empowerment can contribute to achieving the third Millennium Development Goal on gender equality and the post-2015 framework:

– Naila Kabeer
Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Critical Analysis of the Third Millennium Development Goal
Gender and Development, 13(2), 2005.

– A. Brody and H. Corbett
Achieving Gender Equality through a post-2015 Framework
IDS Policy Briefing 43
(Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 2013).

– Sharon Smee and Jessica Woodroffe
Achieving Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in a post-2015 Framework
Report of the Gender and Development Network (GADN), 2013.

On gender equality as a constituent part of good governance:

– United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
Gender and Good Governance
in Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World (New York: United Nations, 2005).

– Alyson Brody and Maritona Victa-Labajo
Gender and Governance
BRIDGE Overview Report, Institute of Development Studies, April 2009.

For an overview of the general consensus on the need to promote gender equality in SSR:

– UN SSR Taskforce
Gender-Responsive Security Sector Reform
in Security Sector Reform Integrated Technical Guidance Notes (United Nations, 2012, pp. 35–60).

– OECD Development Assistance Committee
Section 9: Integrating Gender Awareness and Equality
in OECD DAC Handbook on Security System Reform: Supporting Security and Justice (Paris: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2009).

More DCAF SSR resources

– DCAF publishes a wide variety of tools, handbooks and guidance on all aspects of SSR and good SSG, available free-for-download at **www.dcaf.ch** Many resources are also available in languages other than English.

– The DCAF-ISSAT Community of Practice website makes available a range of online learning resources for SSR practitioners at **http://issat.dcaf.ch**

Notes