

UN Women

Expert Group Meeting

Sixty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 63)

‘Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls’

New York, New York

13-15 September 2018

Gender, social protection and services in fragile and conflict-affected situations

Expert paper prepared by:

Rachel Slater*

Centre for International Development and Training

University of Wolverhampton, UK

* The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

1. Introduction

Drawing on the background paper on interlinkages between social protection, services and infrastructure (Chopra 2018), this paper provides insights into the interlinkages that might be found, or sought, in contexts that are in the midst of or recovering from violent conflict or that have fragile governance systems that undermine capacity to deliver social protection, services and infrastructure effectively, particularly in support of gender equality, equity and empowerment.

The overall argument presented is that, while there good reasons to seek to capture the synergies between investments in social protection, basic services and infrastructure, this is particularly challenging in fragile and conflict-affected situations where complexity and, indeed, stark contradictions are found in women's lived experiences, the dynamics that influence equality and empowerment, and the outcomes of policies and programmes.

The evidence for this argument is heavily based on 7 years of Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) research. SLRC is a multi-donor, multi-country, multi-annual, multi-partner research consortium exploring how people make a living, how they access basic services, and what can be learned from this about governance and development / statebuilding programming in fragile and conflict-affected situations. Gender was a core cross-cutting theme for the SLRC and researchers sought to both mainstream gender into all elements of the research and to identify specific pieces of work where gender was the primary focus. At the heart of the SLRC was a two-wave longitudinal panel survey in DRC, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and northern Uganda – with a third wave underway in Uganda, Pakistan and Nepal. Doing a longitudinal panel survey allowed us to understand how, when men's and women's access to services, social protection and livelihoods support changed, how far their perceptions of government actors shifted concurrently. Couple with qualitative analysis – for example, exploring how women used, with varying levels of success, social and patronage networks to access social protection in post-war resettlement areas of Sri Lanka – this provides insights into the role that social protection and services can play in statebuilding processes.

2. Key messages from the SLRC research

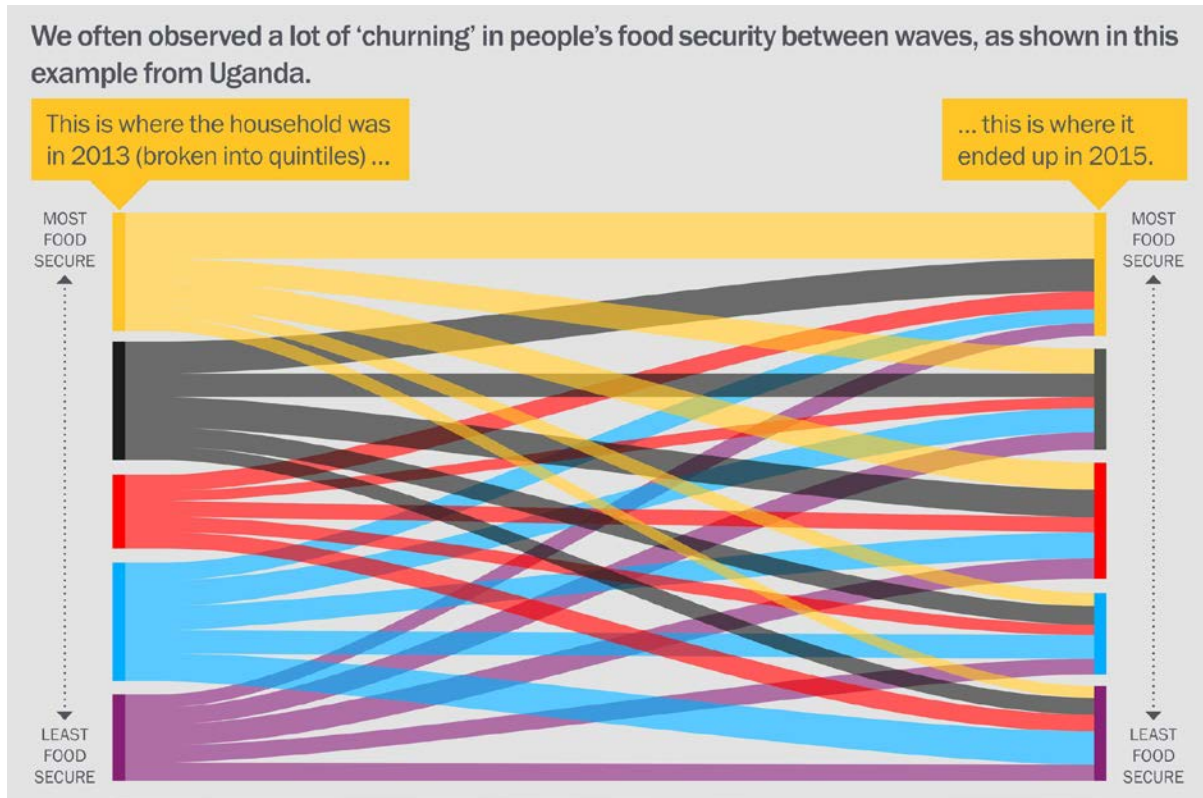
Recovery is neither automatic nor linear after conflict. Vulnerability to shocks and stresses – including those not related to conflict – persists long after wars end, sometimes causing the rapid depletion of hard-won livelihood improvements. We find no evidence that female headed households recover slower than male headed households – indeed in Uganda, there is some evidence that those who started off in a worse situation might be catching up - but more observations over time will allow a better understanding of whether in some households there is more turbulence and volatility than in others.

A key example comes from observing how, across our five panel survey countries, household food security changed over time. Although average scores for food security changed very little between survey waves, suggesting that there was little improvement over three years, in fact more than 90% of households experienced a change in food security. Most importantly, these changes weren't just slow, creeping change and they were in both directions (Figure 1).

So what explains this churning? Conflict and insecurity alone do not explain it. Rather, the unstable and volatile trajectories of change are strongly associated with the shocks and stresses that households continue to face, even in the aftermath of war. In four out of five survey countries

(Pakistan is the exception), an increase in the number of shocks – especially health and environmental shocks – or in the number of crimes experienced between waves is associated with worsening food security.

Figure 1 Changing Food Security in northern Uganda 2013-2015



There two key elements to this finding that warrant further attention:

In conflict-affected places, conflict isn't the only thing driving what happens to women. Nor is conflict the only thing that reinforces gender inequality or drives transformation in gender relations. Focusing primarily on conflict at the expense of other factors can have perverse outcomes. A key example is SLRC researchers Thea Hilhorst and Nynke Douma's work on health services and sexual violence in DRC. They find that although fistula in DRC is articulated, by donors in particular, as an outcome of rape being used as a weapon of war, there are substantial numbers of women seeking treating for fistula who have experienced very difficult births rather than being victims of sexual violence – either as a weapon or war, or otherwise. This 'hype' (Douma and Hilhorst 2017) has implications for how different healthcare investments are prioritised. There is a (sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit) prioritisation of health needs resulting from war over others, and a pressure for women to present themselves as victims of violent conflict. It influences what donors do and don't invest resources in - this is exacerbated by the fact that there are more resources available for investments related to conflict response or for post-conflict reconstruction than for other development programmes. For women, this influences how they are perceived – almost always as victims - and means that we use conflict to explain everything that happens to women even when so many of their experiences are rooted in the structural inequality of everyday life rather than in conflict.

Whether a household experiences a shock (especially health and environmental) or crime has a strong influence on their trajectory. But the wider evidence on crimes, violent conflict and safety is confusing. In some cases, there is a strong rise in bulky asset ownership – particularly domestic items that support women in delivering traditional reproductive roles (cooking utensils, washing machines) - corresponds with a reduction in physical fighting in households' surrounding areas. In Pakistan, for example, while 99% of households reported fighting in their area between 2009 and 2012, that share fell to 4% for the period between 2012 and 2015 (Shahbaz *et al.*, 2017). But, somewhat counterintuitively, asset accumulation is *not* associated with improved perceptions of local safety. Neither do these perceptions neatly square with improvements in physical security: even where respondents report less fighting on the whole, there is no guarantee that they correspondingly *feel* safer.

There is a strong gender dimension to this finding. In Pakistan, while 'formal' fighting (between the government and forces associated with the Taliban and Al Qaeda) has remarkably reduced, women in particular feel less safe than previously. This apparent contradiction is explained thus: while women might in fact be safer, the presence on the street of security actors is a threat (perceived or real) to women's personal safety.

Gender matters, and intersections with other features of social identity, matter for people's access to and experiences of social protection and services.

Access to services makes very little difference to state building and state legitimacy – for both genders. SLRC finds very little evidence to support the claim that delivering services enhances state legitimacy by improving men's or women's perceptions of government. This is most apparent when we consider physical access to services: across water, health, education and social protection we find no evidence in the five countries that improvements in people's physical access to services influences men's and women's perceptions of government.

There's a critical caveat to this finding: **'It ain't what you do it's the way that you do it'– people's experiences of services, how people are treated and how satisfied they are with services has a stronger influence on relationships with the state and state legitimacy.** People routinely have more positive views of government actors when service delivery is backed up by grievance and accountability mechanisms, when people are included in decision-making, and when they are kept informed about what is happening. Importantly, given all that we know about the exclusion of women from decision-making processes, especially through participation at community level, we find that it doesn't need to be a fully participation decision-making process – in many places even an orientation meeting (that women might not even attend) seems to make a difference.

Furthermore, when people start experiencing problems with their service provision, perceptions of government deteriorate. This reflects a more widespread finding that legitimization is a precarious, long-term process that can be easily undone: trust arrives by foot but disappears on horseback' (Ferb *et al.*, 2016). And it's especially important, particularly given widespread concerns about high potential for disenchanted youth to (re)engage with armed groups. The gender dimensions are important here too – while it may well be the case that male youth are more likely to take up arms this too often leads to a simplistic assumption younger men need / want employment opportunities while younger women need / want services. This leaves programming for women's livelihoods restricted to a narrow range of activities – it's positive that these are often designed to be easily combined with reproductive

roles, particularly childcare, but views women as passive mothers and carers (and men as agitators and workers).

Getting access to social protection and basic services such as health, education and water depend on social networks and patronage. But they are often (but not always) weak for women. For donor agencies to tackle this raises questions about if and how donors work with state versus non-state actors. Interestingly, we found no evidence to support the idea that when services are delivered by non-government providers – such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), faith-based organisations, and the private sector – government actors lose legitimacy. This raises big questions about the strongly held view that an ongoing presence of non-government service providers after conflict undermines state-building and legitimation processes. Without the rationale applied nearly universally in post-conflict situations that donors must work through government, and given that there have been far more successes in tackling gender inequality through non-state actors (particularly) NGOs, there is potential to open a route to reducing inequalities of access to services for otherwise excluded gender, ethnic and other groups by working with a wider range of partners.

3. Lessons for gender, social protection and services in fragile and conflict-affected situations

The main lesson – and one which SLRC learned the hard way when the agencies funding SLRC have wanted questions to big questions like ‘should we deliver services with / through non-state actors or not’ – is that **all good things don’t go together**. We’ve tried very hard not to answer by saying ‘it depends’. But win-win situations (for example where a project or programme seamlessly achieves multiple goals) are very rare and far more common are situations where doing well against one goal undermines progress towards another.

Some of these trade-offs are clear from Deepta Chopra’s background paper in relation to social protection, for example, productive versus consumption goals in social protection, and assumptions that men prioritise different services to women. But tackling trade offs is difficult. And it’s combined with complexity and contradictions. The SLRC worked in distinct parts of 8 different countries, all with trajectories of gender inequality, conflict and recovery that have elements in common and elements that are vastly different. As a result, contradictions abound in the SLRC findings both generally and in relation to gender:

- Women simultaneously have agency and are victims / victimised
- Women are always in a desperate struggle to survive but they also have enormous capacity to navigate shocks and get by
- Women are safer. Women feel less safe.
- The poorest households (especially female-headed) are left behind. The poorest households are catching up.
- Conflict / fragility is hugely important. Conflict / fragility isn’t that important at all.
- Health and education are the most important things to invest in for women. Health and education aren’t important at all – it’s livelihoods that matter.
- Women’s experiences and needs in FCAS are really different to elsewhere. Women’s experiences and needs in FCAS aren’t really that different at all

This creates a big challenge for us in FCAS. The interlinkages that Deepta has so clearly outlined are almost always underpinned by contradictory evidence and experiences when we look at the SLRC

countries. For policy-makers that's tough to deal with. How can we make linkages and synergies when there's no clear pathway or 'right answer' and when the evidence is inherently contradictory?

The first recommendation is to continue to work towards better evidence, but without pin anything on this overcoming these contradictions. It will never be possible to fill all the knowledge gaps and fully understand in order to find a single answer – fragile and conflict affected situations are too complex and too volatile.

The second recommendation is to seek a better balance between high level declarations, agreements and normative frameworks on the one hand, and bottom up, flexible programming on the other. Resolution 1325 and the Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals can help with framing this as a local problem (e.g. 'start with the context') but it's important to avoid this becoming normative in itself. There's a lot of work to do to make social protection and service delivery policies and programmes be more adaptable for context. Social protection in particular is pretty poor at adaptation and context-specific design. It's not well suited to localised, context-specific approaches – as the challenges of delivering social protection in decentralised / devolved contexts shows. Social Protection Floors don't, on paper, discourage or prevent localised context-specific approaches – in fact they encourage 'nationally-appropriate' SP policies, systems, programmes – but translating that into practice, especially at the sub-national level, is still challenging. Donors continue to have (and sometimes push) their preferred social protection instruments and the instruments toolbox remains relatively limited.

Some possible ways to navigate forward (which are themselves contradictory of course):

Don't set aside FCAS for different or specific treatment (there is still much to learn from elsewhere and it might be more important than conflict) but ...

... recognise that doing SP in FCAS need to be different (i.e. beyond government-owned, government-drive).

Take the opportunities and try new things, for example, recognise that some peace agreements and post-conflict political settlements will provide opportunities to put women at the centre of SP and basic service provision but ...

... remember that 'trust arrives on foot and leaves on horseback' (beware of doing harm, recognise that putting women at the centre of SP and basic service provision may trigger grievances and create resentment).

Recognise complexity and the importance of interlinking social protection, basic services and infrastructure programmes in order to tackle gender inequality and achieve empowerment but ...

... avoid overcomplicating programmes so that they suffer 'premature loadbearing' or asking too much, of too little, too soon, too often.

Ferf, A. and Thieme Groen, E. with Mashanda, M., Milabyo, P. and Sturge, G. (2016) Tracking change in livelihoods, service delivery and governance: evidence from a 2012–2015 panel survey in South Kivu, DRC. SLRC Working Paper 51. London: SLRC (http://www.securelivelihoods.org/publications_details.aspx?resourceid=430).

Hilhorst, T. and N. Douma (2018) 'Beyond the hype? The response to sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2011 and 2014' *Disasters* 42(S1): S79–S98.

Mallett, R. and R. Slater (2017) 'Tracking change in fragile and conflict-affected situations: Lessons from the SLRC panel survey' Synthesis Briefing 1, Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, London.

McCord, A. and R. Slater (2015) 'Social Protection and Graduation through Sustainable Employment' *IDS Bulletin* 46 (2): 134-144.

Slater, R. and R. Mallett (2017) 'How to support statebuilding, service delivery and recovery in fragile and conflict-affected situations: Lessons from six years of SLRC research' Synthesis Briefing 2, Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, London

Sturge, G., Mallett, R., Hagen-Zanker, J. and Slater, R. (2017) 'Tracking livelihoods, service delivery and governance: panel survey findings from the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium'. London: SLRC (http://securelivelihoods.org/publications_details.aspx?resourceid=462).