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# Gender-Responsive Leadership in UN Peace Operations: The Path to a Transformative Approach?

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## Executive Summary

When they lack support from leadership, initiatives to increase gender equality or implement the women, peace, and security agenda in peace operations routinely fail. In the worst case, leaders can even unintentionally reproduce institutional cultures that marginalize concerns around gender equality. Gender-responsive leadership is thus essential to the UN's efforts to promote gender equality in UN missions and the countries where these missions are deployed.

Gender-responsive leadership places the onus on leaders at all levels to be cognizant of and responsive to biases and discrimination that impact peace operations and the peacekeepers who serve in them. It requires leaders to have the capacity and incentive to implement workplace practices that mitigate and ameliorate the conditions that produce gender-unequal outcomes. It also requires the development of accountability frameworks to ensure gender responsiveness is an ongoing and institutionalized process.

The UN has taken several steps to implement gender-responsive leadership in peace operations. While the phrase "gender-responsive leadership" is not yet widely used, its fundamental principles have been integrated across several peacekeeping priority areas and policy frameworks, including training and mentoring programs, accountability frameworks, and data collection and monitoring. Yet significant shortcomings remain.

To effectively promote gender equality, the UN needs to continue fostering gender-responsive leadership through training, mentoring, online resources, and assessment frameworks. It also needs to adopt an inclusive, intersectional view of gender-responsive leadership—one that pays attention to issues such as race, ability, and sexual orientation—to ensure that leaders do not operate according to homogenized or essentialized understandings of women's experiences.

## Introduction

Fostering gender equality and integrating a gender perspective within peace operations is rooted in decades of activism and policy development. The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action affirmed early on that gender equality and gender responsiveness are essential to sustainable peace. This relationship has been further strengthened by both the UN Security Council's ten women, peace, and security (WPS) resolutions since 2000 and CEDAW's General Recommendation 30, which clarifies states' obligations under the convention before, during, and after conflict.<sup>1</sup>

However, implementation of the WPS agenda across the UN system has been sluggish, and recent trends suggest the potential for backsliding. In 2020, for example, there was a significant increase in global military and arms spending—an indicator of increased militarization, which has been strongly correlated with gender inequality.<sup>2</sup> The implementation of the WPS agenda also lags within UN peace operations: reports of sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by peacekeepers remain prevalent,<sup>3</sup> and many peacekeepers themselves continue to report facing sexual harassment and discrimination.<sup>4</sup>

To address these problems, the UN and member states must recognize how gender discrimination and bias are experienced in and perpetuated through peacekeeping structures. This requires not only paying attention to how women peacekeepers can increase the operational effectiveness of peace operations but also taking seriously the experiences and perspectives of women peacekeepers,

including how deployment impacts their personal lives, safety, well-being, and career prospects. In short, confronting these issues requires addressing the structural nature of gender inequality in peace operations—that is, inequalities that exist at the group level and can be consciously or unconsciously embedded in institutional practices.

Leadership, both within the broader UN system and within peace operations specifically, is integral to implementing this transformative approach. Initiatives to increase gender equality or implement the WPS agenda routinely fail when they lack support from leadership, either in-mission or at headquarters.<sup>5</sup> Leaders can even unintentionally reproduce institutional cultures that marginalize concerns around gender equality.

Gender-responsive leaders go beyond passively supporting gender-responsive policies; instead, they are drivers of meaningful change.

Within the context of UN peacekeeping, gender-responsive leadership places the onus on leaders at all levels to be cognizant of and responsive to biases and discrimination that impact peace operations and

the peacekeepers who serve in them. It requires leaders to have the capacity and incentive to implement workplace practices that mitigate and ameliorate the conditions that produce gender-unequal outcomes. It also requires the development of accountability frameworks to ensure gender responsiveness is an ongoing and institutionalized process.<sup>6</sup> Gender-responsive leaders go beyond passively supporting gender-responsive policies; instead, they are drivers of meaningful change.

This issue brief examines the concept and practice of gender-responsive leadership and assesses its potential to contribute to UN peace operations. It begins by examining the concept of gender-responsive leadership, the approaches and strategies envisioned by policymakers, and what outcomes it

1 Aisling Swaine and Catherine O'Rourke, "Guidebook on CEDAW General Recommendation No. 30 and the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security," UN Women, 2015.

2 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), "World Military Spending Rises to Almost \$2 Trillion in 2020," April 26, 2021; UN Security Council, *Women and Peace and Security—Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. S/2021/827, September 27, 2021, para. 6.

3 Sarah Smith, "Accountability and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Peace Operations," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 71, no. 4 (2017).

4 Phoebe Donnelly, Dyan Mazurana, and Evyn Papworth, "Sexual Discrimination, Harassment, and Assault of United Nations and African Union Peacekeepers," International Peace Institute, 2022 (forthcoming).

5 Virtual interviews with officials from UN Office of Military Affairs (OMA), October 2021; virtual interviews with staff at Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA), September 2021; virtual interview with official in UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) Gender Unit, October 2021.

6 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and FBA, "OSCE Gender Responsive Leadership Programme: September 2021–December 2021," 2021, p. 4.

can achieve. It then outlines why gender-responsive leadership is important to UN peace operations and how it could bring about new approaches and challenge barriers to gender equality. It also considers the steps the UN has taken to implement gender-responsive leadership at both the mission and headquarters levels.

It argues that gender-responsive leadership has the potential to change gender-unequal outcomes in peacekeeping if it is supported through training, mentoring, online resources, and assessment frameworks. Ultimately, the paper recommends a more inclusive, intersectional view of gender-responsive leadership—one that pays attention to issues such as race, ability, and sexual orientation—to ensure that leaders do not operate according to homogenized or essentialized understandings of women’s experiences.

## What is Gender-Responsive Leadership?

The Swedish government’s Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) defines a gender-responsive leader as

a person in an executive or management position who actively works towards equality for all women and men both in the workplace and in operations... They use their existing leadership and management skills to achieve their institutional goals on gender equality, taking into account the structural and systemic issues that lead to discrimination and inequality.<sup>7</sup>

Working with this definition, FBA identifies five core “actions” of gender-responsive leaders: (1) leading by example; (2) setting priorities and strategies; (3) communicating clearly and convincingly; (4) managing and developing staff, resources, and operations; and (5) holding oneself and others accountable. Through these actions, gender-responsive leadership aims to ensure that the

workplace is safe, fair, and equal and that all operations contribute to gender equality.<sup>8</sup>

Gender-responsive leadership is therefore something that should be exercised by both women and men in leadership positions. Programs promoting gender-responsive leadership should not be equated with empowerment and participation programs that seek to bolster women’s representation in leadership positions. The latter are based on gender-parity strategies that often emphasize how increasing the number of women in leadership positions can inherently sensitize missions to gender and women’s issues. Gender-responsive leadership instead emphasizes the role of both women and men in executive and management positions in creating, challenging, or perpetuating institutional cultures rooted in gendered stereotypes, assumptions, or power relations. In peacekeeping, someone in an executive or management position is understood as someone who directly manages people or program implementation both in missions and at headquarters.

The term “gender-responsive” was chosen deliberately. Gender policies for peace operations that are connected to the WPS or gender-parity agendas, such as gender trainings or quotas, often face backlash or dismissal on the grounds that they undermine the operational effectiveness of missions or are not relevant to day-to-day operations. For this reason, FBA undertook a survey to assess the most effective terminology. “Gender responsive” (as opposed to “gender sensitive”) was assessed as being more accessible to key audiences.<sup>9</sup> The “responsive” dimension in particular is used to indicate that leaders must respond to existing structural conditions. Where leaders fail to respond to existing inequalities, discrimination and gender bias are perpetuated.

Although “gender” is often mistakenly assumed to be code for “women,” those designing gender-responsive leadership tool kits have adopted a broader and more inclusive view. For example, FBA’s gender-responsive leadership initiatives

7 In 2020, FBA, together with Leslie Groves-Williams, a senior gender and leadership expert, launched a multi-year initiative on gender-responsive leadership. The initiative focuses on building the capacity of senior leaders and middle managers in international, regional, and national peace and security organizations to drive sustainable organizational development on gender equality. Virtual interviews with FBA staff, September 2021; OSCE and FBA, “OSCE Gender Responsive Leadership Programme,” p. 1.

8 OSCE and FBA, “OSCE Gender Responsive Leadership Programme,” p. 1.

9 Virtual interviews with FBA staff, September 2021; virtual interview with Leslie Groves-Williams, September 2021.

strive for equality for both women *and* men and provide space to incorporate more nuanced understandings of how power and discrimination operate in peace processes. Focusing solely on discrimination against women in relation to men ignores how individuals can be marginalized due to their sexuality, age, race, religion, socioeconomic status, or ability and how these factors interact in ways not captured by a binary comparison.<sup>10</sup> These intersecting forms of discrimination cannot be addressed through gender-responsiveness alone. In taking a more inclusive and intersectional approach, gender-responsive leadership initiatives have drawn on other frameworks such as the UN Refugee Agency's Age, Gender and Diversity Policy.<sup>11</sup>

## Why is Gender-Responsive Leadership Important to UN Peace Operations?

As the UN's System-Wide Strategy on Gender Parity notes, achieving gender equality has been "hampered by a lack of sustained political will and accountability, absence of accompanying measures and enabling conditions for real reform, and resistance at different moments from key stakeholders."<sup>12</sup> Gender-responsive leadership focuses on some of these barriers, including the roles and attitudes of key stakeholders and leaders.

Gender-responsive leadership moves beyond gender-parity efforts focused narrowly on increasing women's representation in peacekeeping. These efforts are often based on assump-

tions about the innate capabilities of women without considering how to substantively include them, ensure that they can fulfill their roles effectively, and address the discrimination they may face. Recent research has found that simply increasing the number of women in peacekeeping has done little to challenge the patriarchal environments that can be hostile to women's presence.<sup>13</sup> In these environments, women military and police peacekeepers continue to report harassment, lack of promotions or career development, and taboos and stigmas.<sup>14</sup> As the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peacekeeping Operations aptly summarized, "Women often find themselves doing menial jobs in a hostile work environment in which the senior leadership does not demonstrate any commitment to gender equality."<sup>15</sup>

Gender-responsive leadership can also combat negative views of gender-parity strategies that are prevalent in the security sector. Some security sector practitioners have questioned these strategies by raising the physical risk facing women peacekeepers and the potential for reduced operational effectiveness if gender equality is prioritized over operational goals.<sup>16</sup> This is due in part to the belief that women are given opportunities to meet representational goals rather than because they have the requisite skills. However, evidence suggests that the inverse is true: women peacekeepers are underutilized or placed in roles that do not match their experience and expertise.<sup>17</sup> For example, there is a prevalent assumption that women peacekeepers contribute innate "feminine" qualities to missions, which can result in their appointment to gender or protection roles even if

10 For example, UN staff surveys have shown that racism is also a prevalent issue.

11 Virtual interview with Leslie Groves-Williams, September 2021. Though focused on UNHCR, this policy takes an intersectional view of identity, acknowledging "different values, attitudes, cultural perspectives, beliefs, ethnicities, nationalities, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, health, social and economic status, skills, and other specific personal characteristics." UNHCR, "UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity," March 2018, p. 19.

12 United Nations, "System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity," October 6, 2017, p. 5.

13 Robert U. Nagel, Kate Fin, and Julia Maenza, "Peacekeeping Operations and Gender: Policies for Improvement," Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS), May 2021; Natasja Rupesinghe, Eli Stamnes, and John Karlsrud, "WPS and Female Peacekeepers," in *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security*, Sara E. Davies and Jacqui True, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

14 Liezelle Kumalo, "Perceptions and Lived Realities of Women Police Officers in UN Peace Operations," International Peace Institute, June 2021.

15 Marta Ghittoni, Léa Lehouck, and Callum Watson, "Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations: Baseline Study," Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF), July 2018, p. 43.

16 Eleanor Gordon, Ciara McHugh, and Jane Townsley, "Risks Versus Transformational Opportunities in Gender-Responsive Security Sector Reform," *Journal of Global Security Studies* 6, no. 2 (June 2021).

17 For example, the use of all-women engagement teams in peacekeeping operations has seen women siloed into roles with a narrow focus on community engagement with women, regardless of their areas of expertise. Virtual interview with UN OMA official, October 2021; virtual interview with UN DPO official, October 2021; virtual interview with military official in the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), November 2021. Moreover, the emphasis on women's (negative) impact on operational effectiveness is not matched by a corollary evaluation of the impact that men or masculinities have on peacekeeping. The author would like to thank Robert U. Nagel for pointing this out.

they do not have a background in these areas.<sup>18</sup> When leaders understand how such gendered assumptions and attitudes shape peacekeeping, they can proactively tackle them.

In addition, gender-responsive leadership can help lift the burden of “gender sensitivity” off individual women. Women peacekeepers consistently report the double burden that falls on them as they are seen as physical embodiments of gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping. Gender-responsive leadership can also push back against the idea that gender mainstreaming is only a responsibility for gender focal points and gender advisers rather than for all mission personnel.<sup>19</sup> However, these individuals often occupy lower levels within the peacekeeping hierarchy, inhibiting their ability to enact change. Gender-responsive leadership can ensure that these officials have support and oversight from management.

Gender-responsive leadership could also help protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) peacekeepers. Peacekeepers often operate in environments that are less culturally, legally, or politically accepting of LGBTQ+ identities. LGBTQ+ peacekeepers can also face discrimination and other risks from within peace operations, including from members of other national contingents.<sup>20</sup> Applying the principles of gender-responsive leadership to LGBTQ+ peacekeepers will require leaders to be aware of and attentive to the challenges they face.

Beyond its importance to changing the work environment for peacekeepers, gender-responsive leadership can assist missions in implementing their WPS mandates.<sup>21</sup> For example, gender-responsive leaders could include gender experts in the mission planning process and engage with broad networks of women leaders, peacebuilders,

rights defenders, and ex-combatants. When leaders systematically engage with, exert ownership over, and legitimize missions’ WPS mandates, they can help move missions beyond ad hoc or ineffective approaches to gender mainstreaming.<sup>22</sup>

## What Steps Has the UN Taken to Promote Gender-Responsive Leadership in Peace Operations?

The UN has taken several steps to implement gender-responsive leadership in peace operations. While the phrase “gender-responsive leadership” is not yet widely used, its fundamental principles have been integrated across several peacekeeping priority areas and policy frameworks, including training and mentoring programs, accountability frameworks, and data collection and monitoring.

Gender-responsive leadership moves beyond gender-parity efforts focused narrowly on increasing women’s representation in peacekeeping.

### Training and Mentoring

Recently, the UN has begun providing training on gender-responsive leadership. In 2020, the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) and Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) jointly piloted a gender-responsive leadership training program at UN headquarters. A similar training program is also underway for the senior leadership team in the UN Verification Mission in Colombia.

Designed to implement the UN gender-parity strategy and mitigate sexual harassment within the workplace, the DPO-DPPA pilot training was held over twelve weeks, primarily for civilian staff at the P5 level or higher. Mirroring FBA’s framework on gender-responsive leadership, it focused on

18 Lotte Vermeij, “Woman First, Soldier Second: Taboos and Stigmas Facing Military Women in UN Peace Operations,” International Peace Institute, October 2020, pp. 13–16.

19 Nina Wilén, “Female Peacekeepers’ Added Burden,” *International Affairs* 96, no. 6 (November 2020); Sabrina Karim and Kyle Beardsley, *Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping: Women, Peace, and Security in Post-Conflict States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

20 Annica Kronsell, *Gender, Sex, and the Postnational Defense: Militarism and Peacekeeping* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 102–103.

21 However, as recent research has shown, the Security Council and the broader UN system often do not live up to their promises on the WPS agenda, with the language of the agenda adopted sporadically and inconsistently in country-level resolutions. Sarah Kenny Werner and Elena B. Stavrevska, “Where Are the Words? The Disappearance of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the Language of Country-Specific UN Security Council Resolutions,” Women’s International League of Peace and Freedom and the London School of Economics and Political Science’s (LSE) Centre for Women, Peace and Security, May 2020.

22 Virtual interview with official from UN DPO Gender Unit, October 2021.

building leadership skills in relation to both the internal workplace culture and the implementation of the WPS agenda. The training focused on strengthening five core leadership skills related to gender equality:

1. Leading by example through the mitigation of gender biases and stereotypes (e.g., calling out day-to-day sexism);
2. Prioritizing and addressing gaps in gender equality;
3. Communicating on gender equality initiatives with gender-inclusive, convincing language;
4. Building staff capacity and developing resources to promote equality; and
5. Holding oneself and one's team accountable for implementing gender-equality mandates.<sup>23</sup>

Lesson plans are framed around recognizing pervasive gender stereotypes, developing institutional resources to achieve gender-equal outcomes, providing tools for individuals to intervene in cases of everyday sexism, and setting priorities and targets for gender-equality outcomes in peacekeeping workplaces.

Rather than locating gender as something that is only experienced by or relevant to women, the training emphasizes that everyone can and should be gender-responsive in their everyday actions.

The UN's gender-responsive leadership trainings have been explicitly modeled on the Swedish Gender Coach Programme. Launched in 2006, this program targeted people in leadership positions in the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Swedish Armed Forces, Swedish Police Authority, Swedish Association of Military Officers, Swedish Defence University, and Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency. Its inclusion of leaders from the Swedish Armed Forces was ground-breaking. The program established a roster of "gender coaches" (mainly comprised of experienced gender experts) who were appointed as partners and personal "coaches"

Using gender experts as coaches can change the mindset of leaders, and the development of individual action plans can help them apply new knowledge in practical ways.

to the majority-male participants. With the coaches' assistance, participants developed personal action plans to mainstream gender and implement the WPS agenda within their institutions, meeting with their coaches regularly to monitor progress. The program has been lauded as an example of good practice and is credited with giving leaders the motivation and competence to bring about institutional change.<sup>24</sup> The UN's gender-responsive leadership training has integrated a modified version of this approach by assisting participants in designing their own action frameworks and providing ongoing support to their development.

The Swedish program demonstrates the importance of sustained and personalized coaching for leaders rather than one-off programs. Using gender experts as coaches can change the mindset of

leaders, and the development of individual action plans can help them apply new knowledge in practical ways.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, coaching can be conducted with leaders despite their limited time and availability, as mentors work alongside them while they

carry out their day-to-day activities without requiring them to set aside dedicated time for training.

Beyond trainings focused explicitly on gender-responsive leadership, there have been efforts to integrate gender perspectives into existing leadership trainings. For example, a gender module has been included in the Senior Mission Leaders course.<sup>26</sup> Including material on gender responsiveness in existing leadership trainings ensures that this concept is introduced to all leaders—not just those who self-select to participate in a "gender training." It can also reinforce the idea that all leaders are responsible for responding to gender dynamics and implementing the WPS agenda. Overall, however, incorporation of gender responsiveness into existing trainings is inconsistent.<sup>27</sup>

23 Kristin Valasek, "Time for a Joint Vision on Gender-Responsive Leadership," FBA Blog, February 10, 2021.

24 Louise Olsson and Anna Björsson, "Gender Training for Leaders: The Swedish Gender Coach Program," GIWPS, 2017.

25 Ibid., p. 6.

26 Lesley Connolly and Sarah Taylor, "Incorporating Gender into UN Senior Leadership Training," International Peace Institute, March 2019.

27 Ibid.

## Accountability Frameworks for Individual Leaders

Another way the UN has promoted gender-responsive leadership is by developing frameworks to hold leaders accountable for gender-related goals. Holding senior leaders accountable should, in turn, encourage them to hold missions accountable. The 2017 UN System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity finds that “rapid organizational transformation can be achieved when underpinned by dedication from senior leadership and accountability measures.” It also emphasizes the necessity of “real accountability, backed by consequences.”<sup>28</sup>

Toward this end, the UN System-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment, the second iteration of which was launched in 2018, provides concrete recommendations for holding leaders accountable for gender responsiveness.<sup>29</sup> One indicator within this action plan is on “gender-responsive performance management.” To meet this indicator’s requirements, the action plan calls for “accountability mechanisms, such as gender balance strategies, manager compacts and scorecards, or enhanced performance objectives.”<sup>30</sup> In line with this recommendation, the secretary-general’s compact with senior managers, including the heads of peace operations, now encompasses implementation of gender equality and WPS mandates.<sup>31</sup>

More recently, the High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM) of the UN Chief Executives Board’s released a list of “Senior Leadership Commitments for the Future of Work in the United Nations System” in 2021. The first commitment is to “[foster] employee engagement and inclusion by putting people first.”<sup>32</sup> While this commitment is not explicitly anchored in gender, it

calls on leaders to advocate for “gender equality, freedom from sexual harassment, advancing the concerns of marginalized groups and being particularly mindful of women, persons with disability, minorities and LGBTQ+ employees who may be more likely to experience discrimination.” Leaders are also expected to “shape an inclusion culture” and “align... organizational and individual purpose.”<sup>33</sup> The emphasis on fostering an inclusive culture and assigning roles to staff that match their expertise and expectations is also embedded in gender-responsive leadership. Those working to implement gender-responsive leadership training courses within peace operations have drawn on the HLCM’s broader framework to support their efforts to institutionalize accountability frameworks on gender responsiveness for individual leaders.

While these frameworks suggest an increase in attention to leaders’ accountability for implementing gender-equal and non-discriminatory policies, gaps between rhetoric and reality remain. This is in part because commitments to accountability are often vague. For example, to meet the UN-SWAP indicators, senior managers must “internally and publicly champion gender equality and the empowerment of women,” and to exceed them, they must “proactively promote improvements [in] indicators that are not met/exceeded.”<sup>34</sup> Similarly, the commitments contained in leadership compacts can be formulaic, vague, or focused exclusively on parity targets, and they sometimes require little action from the leaders themselves.<sup>35</sup> In addition, some interviewees noted that the sections of compacts that deal with gender equality are often written not by the leaders themselves but by lower-level staff, such as the gender adviser, who tend to confirm that gender equality is being put in practice, whether or not there has been concrete

28 United Nations, “System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity,” pp. 17–18. The UN’s 2018 policy on gender-responsive UN peacekeeping operations also contains a section on accountability. See: UN DPO and Department of Field Support (DFS), “Policy: Gender Responsive United Nations Peacekeeping Operations,” February 1, 2018, paras. 16–19.

29 See: UN Women, “Promoting UN Accountability (UN-SWAP and UNCT-SWAP),” available at [www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/un-system-coordination/promoting-un-accountability](http://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/un-system-coordination/promoting-un-accountability).

30 UN Women, “Accountability Framework for Mainstreaming Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in United Nations Entities: UN SWAP 2.0 Framework & Technical Guidance,” November 11, 2021, p. 12.

31 See: Namie Di Razza, “Accountability for the Protection of Civilians: Compacts for Senior Leaders Factsheet,” December 2020, available at [www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Compacts-Factsheet.pdf](http://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Compacts-Factsheet.pdf).

32 See: UN Secretary-General Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), “Senior Leadership Commitments for the Future of Work in the United Nations System,” UN Doc. CEB/2021/HLCM/6/Add.2/Rev.1, March 12, 2021, p. 5.

33 Ibid.

34 UN Women, “UN-SWAP 2.0 Framework & Technical Guidance,” p. 15.

35 Virtual interview with UN OMA official, October 2021; virtual interview with official from UN DPO Gender Unit, October 2021.

action. For accountability frameworks to be successful, they must move beyond a formulaic approach and instead require consistent and concrete actions from leadership that are subject to review.

Moreover, the repercussions for failure to deliver on the gender dimensions of leadership compacts remain opaque. As with other components of the compacts, it is unclear what, if any, significant consequences exist for those who do not meet these indicators.<sup>36</sup> Personal willingness (or lack thereof) remains a determinant of the degree to which gender responsiveness is embedded in organizational culture.<sup>37</sup>

Another gap in the UN's accountability framework for gender-responsive leadership is the assessment of programs by those most impacted by UN actions and policies, including diverse women's networks in the countries hosting peace operations. This is arguably the most overlooked and imprecise element of the UN's accountability framework and is still based mostly on UN-driven indicators.

## Data and Monitoring

The collection and analysis of data are integral to monitoring and assessing all aspects of peace operations, including their gender-responsiveness. What data is collected and how it is analyzed fundamentally shapes the design and development of any policy intervention. As a result, ongoing gaps in gender-related data and the failure to incorporate gender expertise or gender-sensitive methodologies into data analysis present a barrier to effective gender-responsive leadership.

One of the main monitoring frameworks for peace operations is the Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System (CPAS). CPAS, which has been gradually expanded across peacekeeping operations since 2018, is an online

platform where data “is compiled by and shared among a mission's sections, providing a basis for analysis that helps assess the impact of peacekeeping operations.”<sup>38</sup> It is part of a UN effort to harness the power of digital technologies to monitor the accountability, effectiveness, and impact of UN peace operations.<sup>39</sup> Although CPAS is primarily a tool to hold missions, rather than specific leaders, accountable, it has become the main platform for gathering data on peacekeeping. However, gender considerations have not been central to the development and implementation of CPAS.<sup>40</sup>

Beyond CPAS, the DPO's Gender Unit assesses missions' effectiveness and level of gender responsiveness using fifteen core indicators grouped into one of five categories: the four pillars of the WPS agenda (participation; protection; prevention; and relief and recovery) and management.<sup>41</sup> Reports on these indicators provide quantitative data, which is supplemented with quarterly qualitative reports. This allows DPO to assess the progress and challenges of missions' gender-responsive strategies over time. This data can help identify promising practices by mission leaders, such as political advocacy, strategic collaboration with gender experts, engagement with women's networks, support for dedicated budgets for gender programs, and overall prioritization of gender and the WPS agenda.

Overall, there remains a gap in data on gender responsiveness in peace operations. Most data collection has focused on gender parity, and this data has demonstrated an increase in women's representation. However, there is a dearth of data related to the quality of women's promotion opportunities, their ability to effectively employ their expertise, and, most pertinent to gender-responsive leadership, their level of satisfaction in peacekeeping workplaces.<sup>42</sup> Data on the number of

36 For more on this, see: Di Razza, “Compacts for Senior UN Leaders Factsheet,” p. 7.

37 Virtual interviews with UN OMA officials, October 2021; virtual interview with official from UN DPO Gender Unit, October 2021.

38 Malcolm Cavanagh, “The Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System (CPAS)—A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Approach to Peacekeeping,” LSE Department of International Relations Blog, June 3, 2021.

39 Data-driven peacekeeping is also a focus of the secretary-general's Action for Peacekeeping initiative (A4P) and A4P+ priorities. CDA Institute, “Marion Laurence: The Promise of Data-Driven Peacekeeping,” August 8, 2021. See also: UN DPO, “Strategy for the Digital Transformation of Peacekeeping,” August 15, 2021.

40 Nagel, Fin, and Maenza, “Peacekeeping Operations and Gender: Policies for Improvement,” p. 3.

41 Virtual interview with UN DPO Gender Unit, October 2021.

42 Ibid.



women and men peacekeepers alone does not provide the insight needed to develop gender-responsive policies.<sup>43</sup> Beyond this lack of internal gender-related data, some missions still do not carry out gender analyses of the peacekeeping context or gather gender-related and gender-disaggregated data on the impact of their activities.<sup>44</sup> Ultimately, support from leaders is key to enabling missions to gather substantive data, analyze it, and use it to enact change.

## Conclusion

As a concept and a practice, gender-responsive leadership holds significant promise for changing organizational cultures within UN peacekeeping operations. It challenges some of the barriers to implementing UN gender policies and the WPS agenda by focusing on the role and accountability of leaders. In this way, gender-responsive leadership can challenge and alter the patriarchal structures that shape peace operations.

The UN has taken some initial steps to institutionalize gender-responsive leadership. It has developed training courses on gender-responsive leadership that promote an expansive understanding of gender and integrate both an external, operational focus with an internal, workplace focus.

Gender-responsive leadership can challenge and alter the patriarchal structures that shape peace operations.

Incorporating mentoring into these trainings programs also provides a bridge between theory and practice.<sup>45</sup> Frameworks for holding leaders and missions accountable for their gender responsiveness through indicators and targets are another welcome initiative.

Nonetheless, significant shortcomings in the UN's approach to gender-responsive leadership remain. To further institutionalize this concept in peace operations, the UN should continue integrating gender-responsive leadership into existing trainings while also institutionalizing stand-alone trainings with a long-term mentoring component. The

UN should also develop uniform guidelines for collecting and analyzing data related to gender, including qualitative data on peacekeepers' experiences, not just sex-disaggregated data on the number of peacekeepers. This data will be essential to holding leaders accountable for being gender-responsive and, in turn, holding missions accountable.

Finally, trainings and other efforts to institutionalize gender-responsive leadership should not focus only on gender. The UN should adopt an intersectional approach focused on "inclusive leadership" that acknowledges the structural conditions, barriers, and experiences that may or may not be shaped by gender or experienced primarily by women.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> See, for instance, the gender-parity dashboard that was recently launched as part of the UN's System-wide Strategy for Gender Parity: United Nations, "UN Secretariat Gender Parity Dashboard," available at [www.un.org/gender/content/un-secretariat-gender-parity-dashboard](http://www.un.org/gender/content/un-secretariat-gender-parity-dashboard).

<sup>44</sup> Virtual interview with official from UN DPO Gender Unit, October 2021.

<sup>45</sup> See: Olsson and Björsson, "Gender Training for Leaders."

<sup>46</sup> See, for instance: Sarah Smith and Elena B. Stavrevska, "A Different WPS is Possible? Intersectionality in WPS Resolutions and NAPs," *European Journal of Politics & Gender* (February 2022).





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