



Africa Study Group | Groupe de réflexion sur l'Afrique

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The Africa Study Group presents: “Recommendations on Sexual and Gender Based Violence Prevention and Treatment in Sub-Saharan Africa: How Canada should contribute to Post-conflict recovery and ending cycles of sexual violence and abuse”

DATE: Wednesday, May 26th, 2016

TIME: 17:30 pm - 19:30 pm

LOCATION: St. Paul's university, 223 Main Street, Amphitheatre

1. Opening remarks by Louise Ouimet:

1. Event at UOttawa coming up on June 29th: “Natural Resource Governance and Economic Diversification in Africa - La gouvernance des ressources naturelles et la diversification économique en Afrique”
2. As most of you know, there is an on-going international assistance review by Global Affairs; GAC has in fact approached ASG for consultations. Do we want to create a working group? There are five themes (available on the government website) that are to be addressed.

2. Presentation by Gwen Temmel:

Introduction:

Gwen's research was an innovative course completed as part of my master's degree at NPSIA, as well as contributing to the ASG. The next step is to use the research to create a policy brief for GAC.

Background:

Rape as a weapon of war was the major impetus behind the research including particularly high levels of violence in post-conflict situations, as well as a high level of impunity. The WHO reports that 1 in 3 women suffers violence in their lifetime. There are large impacts in terms of SGBV on women in the post-conflict recovery period as well as other individuals. However, there has not been enough focus on preventative measures and there are also huge data shortfalls in measuring who are the perpetrators and survivors of SGBV.

Survivors of SGBV face high levels of stigma and shame. There has recently been an ideological shift from women focused “gender based violence” policies to sexual and gender based violence policies which also include violence against men and the LGBTI community. Overall, the motivation behind the violence is similar. Having this broad of a definition can be problematic as it may sway the focus from the majority of the survivors of SGBV (who are women), but it is important to be inclusive, especially since focusing only on the treatment of one group can contribute to their re-victimization if perpetrators are not prevented from committing SGBV. Also, male victims are even more stigmatized, since they are not only victimized, but may also be labelled as homosexual etc, and this demonstrates a high level of intolerance around shifting gender roles and different sexualities. It is also important to examine the root causes of the violence, such as resource extraction and regional instability in the post-conflict situation.

Focus Country: The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

The DRC was chosen due to the relatively high level of research available about the country. Armed groups are often seen as the perpetrators of violence because that fits into a simple narrative, however one study showed that over 60% of perpetrators are intimate partners or people in positions in power, while just over 30% of perpetrators are armed actors. Over 70% of the funds for SGBV violence go towards treating survivors, while perhaps more should go towards prevention. A danger of stereotyping armed groups causing rape is that if armed groups see that rape is what is in the media, they may rape to get attention and to get a seat at the negotiating table.

Also, if we do not look at the perpetrators, we forget that SGBV is not regarded as a ‘good’ or ‘natural’ thing by almost anyone; and we have to learn why this is happening in the first place in order to stop it.

Tentative Conclusions:

Using a simplistic narrative tends to strengthen gender inequalities. After a conflict, a culture may adhere to a cycle of violence and power abuses as a coping mechanism for the damage done. There is much work being done currently: many civil society groups and NGOs work to end SGBV, and Canadian organizations and projects can partner with local groups.

Policy recommendations:

- 1: Policies should not separate sexual violence against women from other kinds of sexual and gender based violence, and the issue of data collection should be addressed
- 2: Institutions must engage in Security Sector Reform (SSR), Judicial system reform and government system reform to make state institutions more gender sensitive
- 3: There needs to be a full range of sexual and reproductive health education and services
- 4: Psychological and emotional counselling and support need to be provided to prevent the cycle of violence including support for behavioural change through promoting positive and equitable relationships
- 5: Programming must engage with locals to ensure contextual and cultural understanding

6 : Projects and programs should promote economic, political and personal empowerment of all members of society, helping people improve their personal security and economic empowerment through lowering their risk of social marginalization

Conclusion:

Canada's programs could be expanded: CEFM, MNCH, police officer training, human resource training; there is a lot of good work being done, but the focus and emphasis can change, especially towards preventative measures.

Discussion and Comments from the Audience:

1. It may be more useful to be more specific to garner more attention by the government.
2. It is important to consider that the DRC is so corrupt that SGBV is often not followed-up on.
3. The link between poverty and SGBV was made, but there are richer areas where there is still SGBV. In the DRC, the greater issue is perhaps impunity and the government that does not discourage SGBV. SGBV also exists in non-conflict countries.
 - Gwen: Yes, the leadership should definitely receive education on SGBV, perhaps by expanding Canada's peace operations (Police capacity building) in the area.
4. The DRC is studied so much because it is one of the worst examples in terms of SGBV; to what extent is it representative of the rest of SSA? Can lessons be drawn that are relevant to the rest of SSA, or is it an isolated case? Also, what are you recommending that is different from what is already being done at GAC?
 - But the angle being used is culture, which is so often ignored
 - There are more and more cases in Mali, too
 - Gwen: Unfortunately, although the DRC is an extreme case, there are many similar past and current examples which demonstrate many of the same themes, especially the need for further prevention work to stop continued cycles of violence after a conflict as officially ended. I suggest focusing more on the prevention to complement the treatment initiatives, and a focus on communities and groups which seek to prevent SGBV.
5. The Canadian military has been accused of SGBV themselves, so it's a delicate balance when comes to practicing what we preach.
 - Gwen: it is true that in Canada, SGBV is also very present, and it is an issue that comes up within our own institutions. In terms of peace operations and capacity building around SGBV, there is an important distinction between the military and the police. I think the police can help build sustainable police forces who respond well to SGBV through providing training overseas.
6. The issue of culture has to do with the universality of sexism against women; where they have not yet attained equality, like illiteracy and power issues, women do not report SGBV.
7. Gwen: It is important, especially in Canada (and the public service), to have more education about "gender": we need to understand gender issues & SGBV to better implement projects.

Closing remarks by Louise Ouimet:

Thank you for a very engaging discussion; there are clear policy recommendations that can be made from your research. Here is a copy of David Black's book as a token of gratitude.