

Inputs in the ‘Elsie Initiative’ from the Women, Peace and Security Network-Canada

December 21, 2017

The following note is in response to the Government of Canada’s announcement on November 15, 2017 of the new ‘Elsie Initiative’ and Global Affairs Canada’s invitation to civil society organizations to submit comments and insights. As a network, the WPSN-Canada benefits from a wide-range of views and expertise and this note does not necessarily represent the view of all members. This note consolidates inputs from Network members Margaret Jenkins, Danielle Stodilka, Kristine St-Pierre, and Beth Woroniuk. The note also incorporates comments from Anne-Floor Dekker (WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform) and a retired senior female military officer with peacekeeping experience.

Context

According to the Government of Canada, the [Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations](#) will:

- Support the development of a systematic approach to deploy more women in peace operations.
- Design tailored technical assistance support for countries that contribute peacekeepers to ensure the right conditions are in place for the deployment of women.
- Provide assistance to designated UN missions to improve their ability to support and benefit from women’s increased participation in peace operations. Canada will provide \$6 million toward this goal.
- Launch a global fund to support the deployment of women peacekeepers. Canada will provide \$15 million to establish this fund.
- Monitor and evaluate so the Elsie Initiative can be adjusted as needed and help build a solid base of evidence for the development of a more comprehensive approach that could be fully integrated within the UN peacekeeping system.

Key Considerations

We welcome the initiative as one with the potential to make a real difference at different levels, including the UN DPKO, Troop and Police Contributing Countries (T/PCCs), in peace operations and in building more sustainable peace.

Given the limited information available to date on the Elsie Initiative, we’ve decided to focus our inputs on considerations we believe are key going forward.

Despite long-standing efforts to deploy more women in peacekeeping operations (at all levels), progress remains elusive. It is crucial to get this initiative right. It is essential that favourable conditions are in place to ensure the success of women peacekeepers. This includes transforming the culture of peacekeeping missions (not just bringing more women into a problematic system and expecting these women to drive change); building on good practice; and ensuring that evidence-based approaches are the norm.

Issues to consider:

1. **Deploying more women cannot be separated from broader efforts to ensure attention to the full range of gender mainstreaming issues.**

It will be important to:

- **Increase awareness and understanding of the full suite of issues (including - but not limited to - women’s participation, gender analysis/expertise in operations, sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), and sexual violence and harassment in militaries and security institutions) and their inter-connectedness.** For all too many people ‘gender issues’ is conflated to only referring to the deployment of women. Yet the agenda is much broader than simply increasing numbers. Issues related to the culture of peacekeeping missions and how they relate to local populations, leadership styles, gender stereotypes, sexual harassment, and impunity strategies are all linked and important to address.
- **Fund and ensure gender expertise** (gender advisors) is strategically located within missions. The HIPPO recommendations on gender expertise remain relevant. This included: conduct gender sensitive analysis, planning, implementation, review, evaluation and mission drawdown processes, and integrate gender expertise within all mission components.
- **Build leadership commitment to gender mainstreaming more broadly within peace operations (among P/TCCs, DPKO, peace operations leadership, etc.).** Experience shows that leadership is crucial to progress on this issue. There must be support from the top levels that goes beyond a superficial statement.
- **Develop new guidelines for the integration of gender perspectives** as part of UN missions based on examples from the field and doctrine development in recent years. These guidelines need to be disseminated among T/PCCs who will also require advice on how to integrate them into national training curricula.
- **Strengthen competencies in conducting gender analysis, addressing sexual exploitation and abuse, consulting with local women’s organizations, and creating institutional cultures that work for all.** P/TCCs, training institutes and other players require advice and direction to integrate gender perspectives into institutional policies, guidelines, and curricula.
- **Address ‘blue on blue’ violence.** Sexual violence within militaries remains a serious issue that must be tackled head on. Sexual assaults within military/police institutions in general and in peacekeeping missions are still very much under reported, under researched and rarely discussed.

2. The perspectives of peacekeepers (especially women peacekeepers) and others with on-the-ground experience with peacekeeping missions should inform the Elsie Initiative.

The Elsie Initiative should be informed by the experience of women peacekeepers as well as other women who have worked with, or had experience with P/TCC institutions and peacekeeping missions. They are often best-placed to identify barriers that exist and opportunities for improvement. Understanding the perspectives and experience of male peacekeepers with respect to gender issues is also critical to inform both training and capacity building strategies. ‘Gender perspectives’ and issues should not be seen as something only affecting women. There is a need to gain a strong understanding of gender expectations and stereotypes faced by both women and men serving on peacekeeping missions.

3. Canada should lead by example. The role of CAF/DND requires further elaboration.

How will Canada’s efforts to deploy more women peacekeepers fit into this initiative? Will CAF have the resources, support and means to deploy more women at all levels? How will Canadian lessons inform the broader initiative? Canada’s credibility as a leader in this area must be backed by more than providing money. Yet the announcement was surprisingly silent

on what role the CAF would play and whether or not there would be resources to support Canadian-based initiatives.

A key issue (but not the only one) is whether or not CAF will fully address sexual violence, harassment and abuse within the CAF. How will the lessons from the implementation of Operation Honour inform the Elsie Initiative?

4. The research component would be strengthened by funding and reaching out to a diverse group of researchers.

We believe it would be extremely valuable to incorporate diverse perspectives (both military and non-military) as part of the research component for this initiative. Research should include the perspectives of women peacekeepers and women in countries where peace operations are, or will be deployed. Doing so would ensure greater credibility and effectiveness on the ground.

On this issue, Margaret Jenkins specifically notes that “very little is known about how to deploy more women, or the conditions that need to be in place to ensure their full and equal participation in different contexts (the “tailored” part of the technical assistance referred to above). We know the objectives (equal numbers, increase women in high positions, prevent and respond effectively to sexual harassment and abuse, commitment of high-level leadership) but the specific “how-to’s” in different contexts and under different conditions is more difficult. For over 20 years, there have been calls to increase women’s participation in peace and security operations and peace processes but the advocacy has not been that effective.”

We need rigorous evidence-based research on best practices for increasing the numbers of women deployed (for example: How did the T/PCCs with highest numbers of women deployed recruit and attain the numbers they have? What have we learned so far on effectiveness of different recruitment techniques?).

We also need evidence-based research on gender-training. What training works and what doesn’t? Research should also inform interventions to address other gender issues on UN missions. For example, what UN missions (or national militaries) have had the lowest levels of sexual exploitation and violence, and what might explain this variation between UN missions (and/or militaries) the rates of gender-based violence? Steps forward with the Elsie Initiative should be informed by knowledge of what works and under what conditions. In order to make this happen, there needs to be funding and prioritization of research on gender issues related to peace and security; so far, support for this research has been minimal compared to other aspects of peace and security research, especially if one considers attention given to gender in military research budgets.

5. Training/capacity building strategies should be addressed from numerous perspectives.

Training has been highlighted as a key strategy. Yet more work is required to ensure that training is effective and meets its established goals/objectives. As mentioned above, more evaluation of what makes for effective training is also required.

The focus is often on training for women: leadership training, basic skills, and surviving in difficult environments. Yet it is also important to invest in training to ensure that all peacekeepers (civilian and military - male/female) understand why/how gender perspectives are important, meet minimum standards on gender analysis, understand norms and codes of conduct relating to SEA, as well as codes of conduct relating to sexual violence and harassment.

6. The structure of the ‘global fund to support the deployment of women peacekeepers’, will be crucial in order to ensure that it is agile and does not get bogged down in UN bureaucracy.

Initial questions include:

- Will civil society be part of this structure (advisory committee, for example)?
- How will it be managed? By whom?
- What will be the incentives for T/PCCs to participate?
- What is Canada’s leverage in terms of developing and implementing a ‘systemic approach’?
- What is the leadership strategy for the initiative?

Another important consideration is whether or not the issue of introducing a premium to T/PCCs who deploy more women has been addressed/settled. While there have been many [proponents](#) of this approach, there is no consensus among our Network members. For example, one of the contributors to this note (Margaret Jenkins) believes that this would be a counterproductive measure. In her view, *“it could lead to women being included primarily for financial reasons, rather than catalyzing more substantial reforms to ensure the right women (and men) are recruited and retained for full and equal participation in all aspects of peace and security operations. In my research, I have found that the most successful cases of women’s inclusion in peacekeeping operations are when women are highly trained (so they are very confident and comfortable with fulfilling all aspects of the mission), others on mission perceive them as highly trained (they are respected and viewed as extremely valuable assets), and/or they have a network in the country and local experience/knowledge that makes them highly valuable for fulfilling the objectives of the mission. There are other issues as well (such as leadership and support at high levels of command for gender equality and women’s participation but none of these are clearly aided by more money for more female troops). The global fund should support capacity building, and innovative programs to support gender equality, and women’s deployment (but not contribute to paying more money for female vs. male peacekeepers).”*

Another contributor to this note (Beth Woroniuk) has [noted](#) the importance of responsibly increasing the number of women peacekeepers and the importance of strategies to ensure that women are not deployed before they are fully trained and equipped. As well [institutional culture](#), structural issues, leadership strategies, capacities and norms should be addressed (see, for example, [Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping](#) by Sabrina Karim and Kyle Beardsley).

7. Canada should consider locally-based, unarmed civilian peacekeeping (UPC) and ceasefire monitoring options that can work alongside the UN or independently.

Network members have consistently noted the importance of supporting and investing in alternatives to military action and of addressing root causes of conflict. Women’s participation in non-military solutions is also worth exploring and supporting.

Margaret Jenkins adds: *“There are other options to consider (other than deployment of UN peacekeepers) to involve women on the front lines of peace and security operations. I am not suggesting UCPs as a way to replace UN and other traditional peacekeeping models but they should be considered in addition, especially in certain cases. Canada should, as part of its innovative research and technical assistance program look at the possibilities for locally-based civilian peacekeepers (such as those who have worked with NonViolent Peaceforce), and partnering with NGOs that have already been engaged in ceasefire monitoring at a local level. I have studied one of these groups in detail operating in the [southern Philippines](#) (an unarmed all-female contingent) that was doing impressive work. I know this can sound ‘fluffy’ compared to UN deployment of armed troops, but my research suggests that these groups*

may be in a better position or may be a better tool to use in certain cases to get the job done (and they could be used in partnership with UN units).”

8. The Elsie Initiative should not use or be based on gender stereotypes.

As a final point we strongly recommend avoiding gender stereotypes in planning and justifying this initiative. In launching the Elsie Initiative, Prime Minister Trudeau noted that, “women bring a unique and valuable perspective to conflict resolution. They look beyond the interests of warring parties. They bring the wider community to the table and they focus on root causes.” Minister Freeland [commented](#) in the press that increasing the number of women in Peace Operations would lead to less sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) on the part of peacekeeping troops. This stress has been criticized by at least one analyst as [short-sighted](#) and misinformed.

We [warn against using gender stereotypes](#) to advocate for women’s full and equal participation, or when designing, monitoring and implementing the Elsie initiative. When this approach is used, gender stereotypes are reproduced, and unrealistic expectations are often placed on women (which works against gender mainstreaming and against the objective of making both women and men responsible for the gender, peace and security agenda). We would argue more for debunking gender stereotypes, and recruiting and supporting men and women who can operate both within, and beyond traditional gender parameters, for example, hiring men who have a strong interest in gender equality issues or work in areas not seen as traditional male domains and women who pursue careers in STEM - as did Elsie McGill.

About the authors:

Margaret Jenkins is a Visiting Professor at the School of Public Policy at Central European University (CEU) in Budapest, Hungary, and a Research Associate at the Institute for Women, Peace, and Security at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. She is based in Ottawa.

Danielle Stodilka, PhD, is a registered trainer with the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR). Her work in R&D has been supported by military and civilian contracts. She consults on security, technical and legal reforms that relate to disaster risk reduction.

Kristine St-Pierre is a gender & women, peace and security adviser and trainer with a specific focus on policing and peace operations. She has worked with numerous organisations in the development and delivery of gender/WPS training and has conducted extensive research on gender and peace operations.

Beth Woroniuk is the coordinator the WPSN-C. She has worked on women, peace and security issues for over 15 years at the policy, programming and advocacy levels. She has designed and delivered training and worked with numerous institutions (including UN, development cooperation and NGOs) to build their capacities on gender mainstreaming/ women’s rights in conflict-affected contexts.