

‘Sustaining gender’ in natural resource management for Sustainable Peace: A critical analysis of UN Peacebuilding Fund projects for conflict prevention and women’s empowerment

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Abstract

Since the beginning of the UN Sustaining Peace agenda (2015), the UN has developed a new set of initiatives that link gender equality to good natural resource management and to sustainable peace. These initiatives, such as the UN Joint Programme on Women, Natural Resources and Peace are framed around two core assumptions: 1) that natural resource management (NRM) provides a good opportunity to increase women’s participation in fragile and conflict affected settings, and 2) that women’s participation in NRM is necessary to prevent conflict in fragile and conflict affected contexts (UNEP, 2018). This paper takes a genealogical approach to understand how the emergence of the ‘nexus’ on ‘gender, natural resource management, and peace’ was made possible, and in turn, what kind of peace it makes feasible and desirable. After critically engaging with the broader assumptions of the Joint Program in the deployment of three projects in Sudan, Mali and Côte d’Ivoire, we focus our analytical attention on the UN Peacebuilding Fund projects in Sudan where the logics of the Joint Program are deployed. Methodologically, we draw from a post-structural feminist policy analysis approach to examine how the policy itself and associated practices create and reproduce meaning and what, therefore, can be implemented. We use inductive coding in Atlas.ti to analyse a dataset of UN-PBF projects documents. Our aim is to consider how ‘gender’ is treated as essential element of ‘conflict prevention’ in the context of natural resource management. This will allow us to better understand the role of ‘natural resource management’ in the wider conflict prevention objective of the Sustaining Peace agenda, and what this might make (im)possible for the kinds of peace on offer.