



THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN ITALIAN DEFENCE

This publication is not exclusively designed to address the issue of women in the Armed Forces and in the Carabinieri Corps. Yet, female personnel should be the starting point to explain what is meant by “gender perspective” and why this is a crucial instrument to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the military instrument.

Indeed, through female presence, the military component of Defence has developed a different approach to its institutional tasks, especially as regards activities performed abroad, thus managing to interact in a more productive manner with the local population and, in particular, with female personnel. This new kind of interaction made it possible to take into account local women’s needs, expectations, and views, as well as integrate them into stabilization and reconstruction projects. Furthermore, advice and recommendations provided by those who used to have no voice with our troops have finally found a more effective channel for communication.

This is what the United Nations had realized thirteen years ago when issuing the first



of all Resolutions on “Women, Peace and Security”, namely Resolution 1325/2000, which marked a turning point at the international level by introducing the concept of **“gender perspective” meant as the ability to deal with and consider any situation from both a female and male**

point of view, so as to identify men and women’s peculiar needs and priorities as well as their potential contribution.

What about the regulatory framework?

At the international level, the main documents are the following: 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013). They also include, amongst others, NATO BI Sc Directive 40 – (2012) “Integrating UNSCR 1325 and Gender Perspectives in the NATO Command Structure”.

At the national level, “The National Action Plan for Implementing Resolution 1325 (2000)” is the reference instrument.

What are we talking about when using the word “gender”?

The word “gender” is often improperly used to define biological categories, which generally concern sex. However, how do sex and gender differ?

Sex is the category pertaining to anatomical and physiological differences that characterize male and female bodies; it is innate, universally acknowledged and permanent.

On the other hand, **gender** refers to male and female social roles, ensuing responsibilities within society and is consequently dynamic. Such roles can indeed change over time and are affected by social economic, cultural, religious factors, amongst other ones. Social roles and one’s awareness of masculinity and femininity are acquired.

Thus, being developed within a specific reference society, gender is prone to constant change.



Gender may be defined in many ways; generally it can be said to regard social differences and social relationships between women and men. Actually, mere

difference between the sexes is transcended in order to include the way in which relationships between individuals are developed within a specific society.

Gender results from a person's various roles, responsibilities, opportunities, needs and constraints, which are different for men, women, boys and girls.

Gender is an issue that can never be coped with separately. It exists across all the activities of an organization, including the armed forces. It belongs to a wider socio-cultural environment that is helpful in determining what it is to be expected, allowed, avoided and enhanced as regards women and men in a specific cultural context.

Why discuss gender if that is a concept that appears to be taken for granted? Why talk about the gender perspective in military contexts?

There are several reasons:

- *it is necessary to debunk the stereotype according to which this is a matter that only concerns women's rights;*
- *gender brings positive change into societies, because enhancing differences leads to greater equality and more comprehensive integration;*
- *acknowledging needs depending on individual perspectives entails engaging all personnel, involving them in change and processes. In substance, this means working for the future of the organization.*



As a matter of fact, change cannot exclusively occur in a theatre of operations and the gender perspective must become a component of everyday life. It should be adopted across the whole organization as it impacts upon the positive quality of life in military facilities.

Why is the gender perspective important?

Because respecting gender peculiarities increases motivation and has a positive impact on the execution of activities. Indeed, it leads to positive outcomes in terms of increased security and strength of the contingents deployed in operations. In other words, by enhancing the contribution of both genders to military operations the efficiency of the instrument and effectiveness of operations can be improved.



While it is important that strategies and instruments are adopted at the political level, it should be noted that, finally, one has to cope with very practical situations when interacting with the populations since they are the actual victims of conflicts.

Some practical examples:

In 2005, during the operations in Iraq, the local government, in concert with the coalition forces, initiated the police forces recruiting plan. Before starting the basic training programme, selection personnel required recruits to shave themselves. The order was ill-received and some recruits refused to do so. Military personnel did not understand the implications of such an order for Iraqi male personnel. In fact, many Muslims are very proud of their beard, which is considered as a religious mark; consequently those who had shaved it were exposed as collaborators of the Westerners. As a consequence, the recruits who had accepted to shave themselves were marginalized and motivation towards recruiting declined.

In Iraq, another example was the interrogation of a local woman from a village in a well-known area controlled by the fundamentalists. Military personnel took the woman into the compound unaccompanied by either her husband or a relative. When she was accompanied back to her village, she was rejected by her family because she was suspected to have been abused by military personnel. The result of that approach, which had completely disregarded gender, was devastating: the woman was lapidated and her husband committed suicide for failing to protect his wife. Overall, this resulted in growing hostility from the local people towards the coalition forces, decreased security in the area, many improvised explosive device attacks and suicide attacks, weaker contact with the local people who were no longer willing to cooperate - and media backlash.



From these examples, it can be inferred that a gender perspective, along with a fair amount of common sense, could have probably have prevented those situations from occurring. In such circumstances, relying on the new professional figure of the gender advisor would have in all likelihood averted those consequences.

What is a Gender Advisor?

A **Gender Advisor** is a professional role created within a military organization. He/she is not the nth adviser and is a fundamental resource for a Commander. Looking through “gender glasses”, across all functional areas, he/she supports the achievement of set objectives through better human resources management - within the military component - promotes consideration for all personnel and acts as a natural interface within military forces in their activities.

When we talk about **gender** we often focus specifically on women. This approach, while not intended to be discriminatory against men, is a sign of consideration for the female component, considering that, within the theatres of operation, 98% of interlocutors are male. Nevertheless, if we hold this kind of attitude, much information is lost. In order to fill the gap it is necessary to focus also on the other half of the population and involve 100% of them. Moreover, applying a gender perspective also means considering women not only as victims but also as main actors, a source of information and a factor of influence within their society.



What are the gender dimensions of a conflict and what kind of consequences do they have?

In relation to the roles that men and women play or are called on to play in a conflict, and to the resulting impact on their respective lives, a conflict is basically a gender activity. Several effects of a war are immediately apparent such as destruction of infrastructures, civil population displacement resulting in masses of refugees, the collapse of political and economic apparatus and the increase of acts of violence. In addition to these aspects, others must be taken into account such as psychological traumas, sexual violence and the lack of rules, factors that sometimes go unnoticed notwithstanding the enormous negative effects that they have on millions of people, both men and women. Moreover, the sense of insecurity, which is often one of the most serious consequences for the population, lasts well beyond the end of a conflict and is very often underestimated by the actors on the field, including military forces.



The entire population suffers the consequences of a war. Yet, women are the main victims of conflicts. Often, when procedures for conflict prevention or resolution are launched, women do not have any say in the matter because they are not invited to sit at the decision-making tables. Women frequently play a secondary role in society, thus they are often also excluded from key roles in post-conflict operations and do not actively contribute to the achievement of stable and lasting peace. Gender factors influence the environment in which military activities are carried out and the importance attached to these factors can be crucial for the success or failure of an operation.

What is the right attitude for adopting a gender perspective?

In our daily activity we have always to ask ourselves the following questions:

- ✓ *Has this activity a different impact on men, women and children? If yes, howso?*
- ✓ *Is this a positive or a negative factor for their security? How can I obtain their confidence?*
- ✓ *How is it possible to increase information gathering within specific areas?*
- ✓ *How can we approach men and women belonging to a specific culture and obtain/exchange information?*

Therefore, in order to apply a gender perspective we do not only have to consider the overall picture but also focus on specific situations, with the possibility of obtaining significant results.

Here are some questions to be addressed:

- ✓ *What is it necessary/useful for and to whom is it necessary?*
- ✓ *What are people doing and who is doing what?*
- ✓ *How many women are involved and what kind of women?*
- ✓ *How many men are involved and what kind of men?*
- ✓ *Who is supposed to speak and who is supposed to listen?*
- ✓ *What kind of security do we want to achieve and for whom?*
- ✓ *What kind of information is needed and to whom is it useful?*



How can we train ourselves to this type of questions?

In this framework, gender training and, in particular, pre-deployment gender training, represents a crucial factor. Its role must not be underestimated, especially in an operational context. Men and women deployed in operation must be conveniently



trained and made aware of the fact that each action, word, statement and attitude can have a different consequence on other people on the basis of their gender identity and may result both in positive or negative mission outcomes.

What is Italian Defence doing?

Italian Defence is creating a gender perspective culture through the following actions:

- ✓ *within the 1st Division of Defence General Staff an ad hoc organization - "Equal Opportunities and Gender Perspective", comprising both male and female personnel - has been set up. It deals with these issues in close cooperation with the Alliance, and has undertaken the administration of information/training courses for all personnel of the Armed Forces/Carabinieri Corps regarding the contents of relevant UN Resolutions and NATO Directives.*
- ✓ *a directive has been issued having force at the joint level concerning "Guidelines on Fair Treatment, Interpersonal Relationships, Protection of Family and Parenthood." This document deals with the following issues, amongst others:*
 - ❖ *the legal framework (National legislation, current international situation, Italy and the National Action Plan provided for in UN Resolution 1325/2000);*
 - ❖ *gender mainstreaming and gender perspective;*
 - ❖ *the gender advisor as a professional figure;*
 - ❖ *gender perspective education and training;*
- *the Gender Advisor/Gender Field Advisor/Gender Focal Point have been established as professional figures to be working in Bodies/Divisions/Schools.*

- the programmes of joint training courses have been integrated and single force ones have been upgraded.



In conclusion, just a few words on current figures regarding gender composition of the Italian military instrument.

Women started joining the Armed Forces and the Carabinieri Corps in 2000 when, following the provisions of Law 380/1999, female

recruiting finally became possible. 13 years later the female component amounted to 11,000 units, therefore at the moment women constitute nearly 4% of approximately 286,000 military personnel of Defence (Army, Navy including Coastguard, Air Force and Carabinieri Corps). The highest rank reached by a woman is Mayor. In the Carabinieri Corps there are also three officers having the rank of Colonel and Lieutenant Colonel, coming from the ranks of Police Force.

Research material:

- <http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/index.shtml>;
- http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_101371.htm;
- <http://www.act.nato.int/gender-advisor>;
- http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/who_is_who_89607.htm;
- http://www.cidu.esteri.it/ComitatoDirittiUmani/Archivio_News/piano_azione.htm;
- http://www.difesa.it/Content/Risoluzione1325_2000/Pagine/default.aspx;
- http://www.difesa.it/SMD_/Eventi/Pagine/ProspettiveGenereRapSpecNATO_FA.aspx.



VNA VIS

