

Bangladeshi Women in UN Peacekeeping

A Case Study

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The United Nations peacekeeping operations (UNPK) have been evolving continuously and Bangladesh as a country has been playing an important role in it. The country wants to remain a dominant contributor to UNPK even in future as the participation brings several advantages in military, diplomatic, economic and social arena. Meanwhile, it has also been realised that to make the UNPK more effective, women have to play an important role as there are certain functions which women can perform better. Moreover, their participation ensures that peacekeepers get access to the whole population in the conflict zone. Presence of women in a contingent makes it more acceptable to the locals. This article argues that the participation of women in the UNPK has added value to it and inclusion of Bangladeshi women in the contingent sent by their country has proved useful in implementing the ever-growing mandate of the UN operations.

Keywords: *Bangladesh, UN Peacekeeping Operations, Peace-building, Role of Women in Peacekeeping*

Bangladesh is one of the largest contributors to the United Nations peacekeeping operations (UNPKOs). This large participation in the UNPKOs has helped Bangladesh—a country previously known for poverty and natural calamities—change its image. Involvement in the peacekeeping operations has also given the country an important platform for international diplomacy. Further, it has helped Bangladesh boost its

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foreign exchange reserves. In recent times, increasing participation of Bangladeshi women peacekeepers has added a new dimension to the role played by Bangladesh in the UNPKOs. This article argues that, in general, the inclusion of women in UNPKOs has added value to the operations. Also, inclusion of Bangladeshi women in their peacekeeping contingents has been instrumental in effectively implementing the ever-growing mandate of the United Nations (UN) operations.

With the gradual evolution of the United Nations (UN), there has been a growing demand to make it more gender representative. The UN adopted Resolution 1325 in the year 2000, which was the first Security Council resolution to recognise:

the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.¹

This resolution states that because women often are the main victims of armed conflicts, they should also play an important role in resolving them. It emphasises on integrating a gender perspective in all peace efforts of the UN. Bangladesh played an important role in the adoption of this resolution as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) that year.

As a follow-up to this resolution, an initiative was launched in August 2009 to recruit more female police officers.² The UN wanted to increase the proportion of female police officers to 20 per cent by the year 2014. Though the UN partly succeeded in this exercise and the number of women police officers grew, the efforts to recruit women into the military forces were not as successful. In 1993, women were just 1 per cent of the deployed uniformed personnel, but in 2020, out of approximately 95,000 peacekeepers, women constituted 4.8 per cent of military contingents, 10.9 per cent of formed police units (FPUs), and 34 per cent of justice and corrections government-provided personnel in UN peacekeeping missions.³ Thus, the objective of gender diversification was achieved to an extent in the civilian sector of peacekeeping. However, a lot still needs to be done to improve the number of uniformed peacekeeping operation personnel.

Another attempt to improve women's participation in UN missions was made in October 2015 when the UNSC passed Resolution

2242, which called for doubling the number of women participants.⁴ Subsequently, Resolution 2538, once again, called to bolster the role of women in the peacekeeping operations. It wanted greater presence of both uniformed and civilian women officers at all levels of peacekeeping. It also expressed concern about allegations of sexual harassment in peacekeeping operations and affirmed 'its support for the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy'.⁵

In 2017, numerous women's groups intensified their campaign for greater and more meaningful representation of women in the UN. Campaigns were launched to appoint a woman Secretary-General.⁶ However, that did not happen and António Guterres was elected as the new Secretary-General of the UN. These women groups kept up the pressure and argued that other measures to make UN more gender equal should not wait. It was suggested that to enhance gender equality within the UN, representation of women should increase in other UN organisations. As a result, representation of women increased at higher levels within organisations like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

These women's organisations also demanded that representation of women should increase in the United Nations peacekeeping operations (UNPKOs). It was pointed out that as the purpose of these operations is to make the local population 'more, not less, safe and secure',⁷ the UN could achieve this by becoming more gender equal.

While the UN encourages and advocates for the deployment of women to uniformed functions, the responsibility for deployment of women in the police and military lies with the member states. The UN wants 15 per cent women in its military contingents and 25 per cent women as military observers and staff officers by 2028. It also wants 20 per cent women serving in FPUs and 30 per cent women as individual police officers (IPOs) by the same year.⁸

PROBLEMS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE IN UNPKOs

The UN peacekeepers are deployed around the world either in conflict zones or in areas which have suffered natural disasters. They are responsible for conducting democratic elections, restoring law and order and reintegrating ex-combatants into the society. The UN is, thus, seen as the protector of peace and human rights. However, unfortunately, there have been instances of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) in the UNPKOs, which have dented the UN's image. A number

of reports indicate that peacekeepers have not only committed acts of child abuse but also exploited women, girls and boys from internally displaced people of Central African Republic (CAR), Mali, Haiti, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan, among others.⁹ In the UNPKOs, '[w]idespread rape and sex in exchange for money, food or relief goods, including acts of sexual violence against young children,'¹⁰ have occurred. In Haiti too, a report alleges that hundreds of peacekeepers have sexually exploited poor women in exchange for basic necessities.¹¹ This kind of exploitation has also been reported from Cambodia, Bosnia–Herzegovina, East Timor and Liberia in the 1990s. In fact, the allegations have continued to grow with growing number of peacekeeping missions: 'Between 2004 and 2016, the UN received almost 2,000 allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation, including 300 involving minors', by its peacekeepers from Bangladesh, Brazil, Jordan, Nigeria, Pakistan, Uruguay and Sri Lanka.¹²

It has been argued that this exploitation was taking place because of the prevailing gender inequality in peacekeeping operations. In a 2015 study commissioned by the UN Secretary-General, it was suggested that the UN can deal with this problem by increasing the number of women peacekeepers.¹³ As gender diversity has not been a primary goal of most contributors and is largely an unintended by-product of force sizes, the UN urged the troop-contributing countries to send more women peacekeepers to overcome their gross under-representation in the contingents.¹⁴ Both India and Bangladesh responded to this request and sent their all-female squads. Despite this, the representation of women has remained low.

In the absence of an adequate number of female peacekeepers, the UN has resorted to training of male peacekeepers as well as local communities on the topic of SEA. This type of training is seen as an important tool to implement the organisation's zero-tolerance policy on SEA. However, it has been argued that though the training can greatly dissuade possible perpetrators from indulging in exploitation of women and children, it may not necessarily encourage reporting of abuse or make the peacekeepers more responsible towards local population.¹⁵

The situation becomes further complicated due to the difficulties faced in prosecuting the perpetrators. All peacekeepers are bound by the local laws of their own country and have complete immunity from the courts in the countries they are deployed in. This means that no prosecution can be undertaken in the host country. In UN peacekeeping, the issues

related to discipline and legal proceedings are seen as responsibility of the troop-contributing country. Prosecuting the culprits becomes even more difficult as evidence and witnesses remain in the host country.

Lack of transparency and non-cooperation by the troop-contributing countries is a major problem. They fail to update the UN on the outcome of investigations and disciplinary proceedings. To improve the situation, the UN has now declared a deadline of six months to conclude such investigations or move on with prosecutions. Still, commanders are rarely held responsible for their troops' acts and the sentencing of culprits is often disproportionate in comparison to their crimes.¹⁶ For instance, in Haiti, 134 Sri Lankan peacekeepers were accused of exploiting children in a sex ring between 2004 and 2007. Out of these, 114 were repatriated but none of them served jail time.¹⁷

It is also alleged that cases of SEA by the UN peacekeepers is under-reported. Independent investigations invariably find much higher numbers compared to official UN numbers. In this situation, the wrongdoers are often redeployed elsewhere, which further accentuates the problem.

This lack of accountability and transparency undermines confidence in UN's zero-tolerance policy towards SEA.¹⁸ The UN has, on occasions, threatened to repatriate the whole battalion involved in such cases.¹⁹ However, it becomes difficult to implement the tough talk as adequate number of military and police personnel are often not available to fulfil the UN mandate.

INVOLVEMENT OF BANGLADESHI PEACEKEEPERS IN SEA

The UN, after 2015, started disclosing the country of the alleged perpetrators in a strategy of naming and shaming. Indeed, between 2010 and 2018, it identified 865 perpetrators. The largest numbers of perpetrators were from South Africa (28) and the DRC (26). Bangladesh was on the lower side of the spectrum, alongside Pakistan (four) and Nepal (three). The data revealed by the conduct and discipline unit showed four cases where Bangladeshi peacekeepers had been involved in sexual exploitation. Two of the accused peacekeepers were police personnel who were part of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). In these two cases, one was involved in transactional sex, while the other one was accused of sexually assaulting two children in June 2017.²⁰

The other two allegations involved military personnel and have been substantiated. The first one happened between November 2015 and January 2016, where the exploitative sexual relationship led to the victim bearing a child of the peacekeeper in the mission in the DRC (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo [MONUSCO]). In the second case, in November 2015, a minor was raped in CAR by two Bangladeshi peacekeepers who were part of United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). The Bangladesh military dismissed both these offenders from the mission; and later on, they were sentenced to one year in jail each.²¹

Bangladesh follows a zero-tolerance policy in case someone is found guilty. The participation of the country in UN missions is a great source of pride for its armed forces. It provides not only financial gains to its troops but also helps bolster the country's image globally. Bangladesh definitely does not want its involvement in the missions to be overshadowed by the darker side of UN peacekeeping. Therefore, it generally carries out investigations into the alleged cases in a timely, transparent and accountable manner, in order to avoid tainting its reputation in peacekeeping.

VITAL ROLE OF WOMEN IN PEACEKEEPING AND PEACE-BUILDING

Now, in the UN, there is a growing opinion that participation of women in peacekeeping operations improves its effectiveness. Participating in an open debate organised by the UNSC on the role of women in the peacekeeping operations, Secretary-General António Guterres emphasised that this was 'not just a question of numbers, but also of our effectiveness in fulfilling our mandates.'²² In recent times, the mandate of the UNPKOs has been widening, to include more and more humanitarian and state-building concerns. Women are often better suited to perform some of these functions.²³ A female peacekeeper has access to 100 per cent of society and not just 50 per cent, as would be the case for male peacekeepers in several conservative societies. Besides, it also serves some other purposes, like women empowerment.

In conflict zones, men, women and children face different kind of security threats, and hence require different kind of response from the peacekeepers. The role of women in peacekeeping operations is important not only because they can perform to the same extent as men but also because they are more suitable for performing certain essential tasks.

For instance, the presence of female peacekeepers positively impacts confidence of the local population, leading to increased reporting of gender-based violence. In addition, female peacekeepers are better suited to interview women who have suffered sexual or gender-based violence. There are many instances where women could not find any female peacekeepers with whom they could comfortably raise the issue of sexual abuse. They can also relate better with child soldiers and are far more useful in assisting female ex-combatants with demobilisation and reintegration into civilian life.

Further, in conflict zones, women often provide medical assistance to local communities. It is one of the ways in which they positively impact the lives of local people and help build trust. During the COVID-19 outbreak, they supported national authorities in countries where they were deployed and helped to protect the vulnerable communities. In countries like Mali, the CAR and the DRC, peacekeeping radio stations provided critical information during the pandemic.

Intelligence gathering is another important aspect of peacekeeping operations. Peacekeepers have to map and track various military factions so that they can protect the civilians effectively. In most cases, it is the locals who serve as the main source of information. In addition, the peacekeepers have to develop an early warning system, for which building trust with the local population is very important. They also have to interact with women and children, often the main victims of armed conflicts, in order to properly protect them. It may not be possible for male peacekeepers to access a significant section of the population due to cultural restrictions in certain societies. The presence of female peacekeepers can overcome this problem by giving them access to women and children.

Currently, the major proportion of female peacekeepers are in policing. People often find police personnel easier to contact when they face abuse or exploitation, rather than the military. This is because the civilian population, in general, is more used to interacting with police rather than military in their daily lives; and they feel less intimidated dealing with the police. The widening mandate of peacekeeping operations also makes the presence of police personnel useful as they might be deployed to address a range of civilian safety issues, including human rights violations, conduct of elections or even institution building. For example, in Haiti, UN peacekeepers were deployed as

correction officers in prisons. The participation of women in both police and military peacekeeping missions thus helps in its objectives.

Female peacekeepers are also seen as role model in countries where they are deployed. They often inspire local women to join the military and police forces of their country. Thus, the presence of more women leads to improved operations and performance, resulting in more effective peacekeeping. The United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) was the first mission where women simultaneously led its civilian, military and police components.

BANGLADESH AND UN PEACEKEEPING

The Bangladesh Armed Forces and the Bangladesh Police have been actively involved in a number of UNPKOs since 1988. Currently, Bangladesh is the largest contributor to the UN peacekeeping missions (Table 1).

Table 1 Bangladesh as Contributor to the UN Peacekeeping

<i>Country</i>	<i>Experts on Mission</i>	<i>Formed Police Units</i>	<i>Individual Police</i>	<i>Staff Officer</i>	<i>Troops</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>End Date</i>
Bangladesh	34	460	28	143	5,733	6,398	28 February 2022

Source: 'Contribution of Uniformed Personnel to UN by Country and Personnel Type', available at https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/01_contributions_to_un_peacekeeping_operations_by_country_and_post_47_feb_22.pdf.

Beginning of Female Participation in UNPKOs in Bangladesh

Though Bangladesh started participating in peacekeeping operations from 1988 onwards, it took more than a decade for women to join in them. For the first time, a delegation of five women was sent to East Timor in 2000. Subsequently, in 2005, responding to the challenges in implementing UN mandate in the field of gender issues, women and children affairs, an FPU was sent by the Bangladesh Police to the DRC (MONUSCO). These FPUs are specially equipped, self-sufficient police units. Besides these, there are also IPOs. The number of women military and police officers sent by Bangladesh has now grown manifold and the country intends to contribute at least 20–25 per cent of women peacekeepers, as suggested by the UN.

Female Participation from the Bangladesh Armed Forces

Uniformed female personnel from the Bangladesh Armed Forces have been deployed in field missions to implement the mandate of UN operations. Some of these missions have been in areas with highly volatile security situations. The participation of these women has helped in women empowerment and gender mainstreaming. So far, 512 women from the Bangladesh Armed Forces have participated in peacekeeping operations. Out of these, 139 women are currently deployed in various missions (see Table 2). The UN has set a target of deploying 18 per cent female staff officers and military observers in the UNPKOs.²⁴ Bangladesh is already close to that target and wants to exceed it in future.

Bangladesh was the first country to deploy a woman military contingent commander in the UN history in Cote d’Ivoire in 2016.²⁵ As a tribute to UN peacekeepers, in the year 2020, Bangladesh issued a set of commemorative stamps with the UN Post, including a stamp featuring the first-ever women fighter pilots from Bangladesh deployed to UN peace operations. These stamps were issued to commemorate the birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Table 2 Participation of Bangladeshi Women in UN Peacekeeping

Service	Participated		Total	Currently Deployed	
	SO/UNMO	Contingent		SO/UNMO	Contingent
Army	38	341	379	16	106
Navy	17	6	23	5	–
Air Force	6	104	110	4	8
Total	61	451	512	25	114

Source: Available at <https://afd.gov.bd/un-peacekeeping/female-participation>.

Note: SO: staff officer; UNMO: United Nations military observers.

Female Engagement Team

In many of the peacekeeping operations, it is not easy to engage local women who are part of the civilian population. To overcome this problem, the Bangladesh Army has, since January 2019, initiated the inclusion of a female engagement team in every battalion to make peacekeeping and peace-building more effective in the conflict areas.²⁶ It plans to continue this practice in all subsequent major contingents in UN peace operations. This team is making a difference with the battalion deployed as part of United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). Female engagement team in a mission makes it

much easier to engage women to know their needs. In fact, this team has helped improve the relationship of the Bangladeshi contingent with the civilian population in Mali and brought the UNPKO closer to people.

In a Muslim country like Mali, local women cannot speak with male strangers due to strict cultural norms. The interaction of the female engagement team with local women helps in getting important information from them. Further, interaction with women and children helps in knowing their problems, like abduction, rape or sexual harassment. Then, these issues can be solved either locally or through the UN system. It is also believed that female engagement teams can access female networks in communities, thereby enhancing the overall understanding of the situation.

Female Police in UN Missions

In the last few decades, it has been recognised by the international community that strengthening of the internal security and criminal justice structure is very important to restore the rule of law in a conflict zone, especially when the conflict is taking place inside a country. This has also led to an expansion in the role of the UN Police, from monitoring and advising function to reforming, restructuring and institutional building of local police services. Bangladesh Police has shown its expertise in the area of responsive policing, accountable policing and community policing. It has also offered electoral assistance.

In conflict zones, it is important to take measures which prevent countries from relapsing into the conflict. This can be done by strengthening the capacity of a country in the area of conflict management. Thus, it becomes important to restore the rule of law, secure people's lives and property, train local police forces and ensure respect for human rights. Only then can sustainable peace be achieved. The Bangladesh Police has been doing this in collaboration with other partners.

Bangladesh, being the top contributor of female police officers to the UNPKOs as FPU, is playing a crucial role in this transition from war to peace in several conflict zones. More than 140 Bangladeshi female police officers are deployed in various UN missions. They are working in Darfur, Mali, the DRC and South Sudan. Some of them are also working at the UN Headquarters. In addition, as mentioned earlier, one all-women FPU of the Bangladesh Police is presently deployed in the Congo (MONUSCO).²⁷

Bangladesh is among a handful of countries that have provided an all-women unit for UN peacekeeping. A Bangladeshi FPU was sent to Haiti in 2010 to serve with the former UN peacekeeping mission in the country (MINUSTAH). In Haiti, the women contingent was expected to provide humanitarian help and community policing.²⁸ It was also expected to provide primary education, primary healthcare, protection from violence against women, prevention of HIV, awareness regarding AIDS and so on.

The women peacekeepers of Bangladesh also participated in MINUSCA. Besides the mandated tasks, they arranged free medical camp for locals, provided safe drinking water to the people in remote areas as well as free education for social awareness. They also distributed sports and entertainment items to the locals to generate interest in leading a healthy life.²⁹

Focus on Community Policing

Women peacekeepers often focus on community policing rather than aggressive methods of enforcing law and order. In community policing, an officer operates in the same area for a relatively longer period and develops relationship with the local people. In this approach, policing is done in partnership with the local people. As a result, often the law enforcement agencies get intelligence before the crime happens, and hence these are prevented in time. This leads to better trust between law enforcement and local people. Women peacekeepers generally are not very keen to use force even under provocation.

Women Peacekeepers Helping in Skill-building Programme

Bangladesh women peacekeepers have helped women in South Sudan in skill development so that they can become financially independent. In the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), peacekeepers from Bangladesh ran a month-long tailoring programme. Women who were affected by the conflict and were struggling to make ends meet were chosen as participants. This vocational training was particularly important for the women of South Sudanese communities, in order to build a more gender-balanced workforce and ensure future prosperity.³⁰ In recognition of their expeditionary and social work activities, the women peacekeepers of Bangladesh participating in the UNMISS received a letter of commendation from the UNMISS Force Commander.³¹

THE NATIONAL ACTION PLAN TO IMPLEMENT WOMEN,
PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA

Bangladesh launched its first-ever National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2019–22) on 24 November 2019. It is the 83rd member state of the UN to adopt a national action plan (NAP) following various UN resolutions regarding women, peace and security (WPS). Through this, the country wants to show its commitment to the UN Charter. The NAP on WPS is based on Bangladesh's experience and achievements over the past decades.

Bangladesh achieved its liberation in 1971 after going through a war and genocide. In this war, millions of women were violated and rape was used as a weapon of war. During its membership—as a non-permanent member—of the UNSC (2000–01), Bangladesh led the advocacy for bringing the issue of gender in peace and security architecture, thus playing a crucial role in the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1325. This was the first resolution which acknowledged the importance of equal participation of women in maintaining peace and security at national and international level. Almost two decades and additional nine resolutions later, the WPS agenda has further expanded its footprint in global policymaking.

The WPS agenda is now seen as a powerful tool to make decision-making more democratic. It makes an attempt to move away from gender inequality to gender justice. It takes societies away from conflict and violence to sustainable peace. It thus reduces volatility and builds prosperous and stable societies. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that including women in peace and security processes improves the effectiveness of those processes. Inclusion of women in these processes also helps in economic revitalisation of conflict zones and increases the likelihood of successful peace negotiations.

Bangladesh has also faced natural calamities at regular intervals. This, in turn, has led the country to emerge as a global leader in responding to emergencies. It now has one of the most advanced disaster preparedness plans in the world.

The NAP has been formulated after a series of consultations with government and civil society organisations.³² A number of women's organisations at the grassroots and national level have also been consulted. It builds on the country's prior gender legislation and action plans, including those on preventing violence against women and children, human trafficking, development and disaster policy.

It is designed to achieve following objectives:

- *Prevention:* Strengthen social cohesion and raise awareness to prevent all forms of conflict, violent extremism, and gender discrimination that disproportionately impacts women.
- *Participation:* Increase women's meaningful participation in decision making on peace and security, including peace building, peacekeeping missions, and preventing violent extremism.
- *Protection, relief and recovery:* Protect women's safety and well-being as well as their rights, and engage women in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief policies and programmes with an aim to address their specific needs and utilize their unique expertise.³³

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is supposed to coordinate the implementation of NAP with a coordination group, which will have representatives from relevant ministries, departments or divisions. Financing for the NAP has to come from the core budget of relevant ministries and development partners. Thus, there is no allocated budget for its implementation. It will be interesting to see whether the NAP of Bangladesh is able to address structural barriers and power relations that negatively impact women during conflict and that prevent their full and equal participation in peace and security.

CLOSING THE GENDER GAP

The UN peacekeeping still remains largely a male preserve. This deeply engrained male-dominated culture and generally small number of women present in the peacekeeping contingent is a primary challenge to the recruitment and retention of women. These women often feel ostracised or discriminated against.

To achieve the target of gender mainstreaming, all-female units would have to be integrated into mixed-gender units. For the time being, even having all-female squads is an important step to increase the number of women. The increasing number of women peacekeepers will gradually create a critical mass within units, which would find it much easier to break the conventional gender barriers. Women also need to be integrated into senior decision-making positions.

Providing adequate training to female military and police officers will also help in closing the gender gap. This training will create a national and global cadre of deployable female UN peacekeepers who would be

equipped with tactical, strategic and practical knowledge and skills on their peacekeeping mandate.

Although the UN Department of Peace Keeping Operations can increase the recruitment and retention of women, member states control whether women are integrated into their peacekeeping unit contributions. India, Bangladesh and Pakistan are some of the major contributors of uniformed personnel to UN peacekeeping operations. If they decide to integrate women into their peacekeeping units, they can make considerable difference. Creation of the female engagement team by Bangladesh in every battalion is also an important step in this direction.

CONCLUSION

The UN peacekeeping has evolved over the years. The increasing and changing mandate of the UNPKOs has necessitated that the composition of peacekeepers should also change to better serve people in the area of their deployment. As a result, women have increasingly become part of the peacekeeping family, making these operations more effective. It has been realised that having women as part of the peacekeeping force serves a number of purposes. It not only brings gender equity to the force, the greater diversity also means improved decision making, planning and results, leading to greater operational effectiveness and performance.

The women peacekeepers have better access to the population where they serve. This access, especially to women and children, allows them to gather valuable information which would be otherwise difficult to get. Presence of women among the peacekeepers allows them to engage with all members of the community they are expected to protect. In a post-conflict setting, women peacekeepers also serve as role models. They inspire local women to advocate for their rights, gender equality, etc., and pursue non-traditional careers in police or military. They also provide a greater sense of security to women and children. Their presence gives local women better access to law enforcement agencies. They also help the UN address and respond to SEA.

Gender-sensitive policing has become an operational necessity in the UNPKOs to address the differentiated security needs of women, men, girls and boys. The different concerns and vulnerabilities of different sections of society have to be taken into account while designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating all police activities. A police service that is representative of local population helps restore confidence

of people, especially women and children, as the police institution is reformed, restructured and rebuilt. The police officers engaged in UNPKOs also work closely with the local police for their capacity building and mainstreaming gender-sensitive policy.

As the mandate of the UNPKOs keeps expanding and changing, the participation of women police officers becomes necessary to perform the whole range of activities. These women police officers play critical role in the promotion of rule of law, intelligence, planning, leadership, investigations, public order management, capacity building of host state police, community-oriented policing, gender awareness raising and engaging communities.

The UN peacekeeping is an important part of Bangladesh's foreign policy and the country has now created a good reputation for itself.³⁴ The country wants to maintain a leading position in UNPKOs. To achieve this objective, it is trying to change the composition of its peacekeepers, keeping in view the changing requirement of UNPKOs. It is believed that peacekeeping units with a balanced gender component can better understand drivers of conflict or peace-building mechanisms. They are, therefore, in a better position to implement the mandate of UN missions. As Bangladesh is a Muslim-majority country, women in its peacekeeping contingents can be doubly useful: first, as women and then, as Muslims. It gives the UN peacekeepers access to that section of population where it would be otherwise difficult to reach.

The women peacekeepers of Bangladesh have played an important role in reducing gender-based violence. Their presence provides a sense of security, particularly to women and children. It also reduces possibility of exploitation of local people by the peacekeepers themselves. The armed forces of Bangladesh take pride in participating in the UN peacekeeping operations. It also provides them financial incentive and valuable international exposure. They would not like to get into controversies which taint the image of Bangladesh as a leading peacekeeping nation.

The Bangladesh female peacekeepers have mentored female police officers. They have played important role in economic revival in the areas of their deployment. This has not only empowered women in their host countries but has also promoted social cohesion.

Participation in the peacekeeping missions also empowers Bangladeshi women peacekeepers. The UNPKOs offer a major economic incentive to these women and their families. In the case of Bangladesh, which is a developing country, these women, as part of the contingent, earn three

times more in comparison to their salary in the home country. Besides, peacekeeping also provides an opportunity to escape oppression due to patriarchal systems prevalent in the society.

The Bangladesh government launched an NAP for implementation of the WPS agenda in 2019. However, accelerated efforts are needed to implement this agenda at the national level. Besides, its internalisation is also needed in the UN system, including in the country offices.

Bangladesh currently contributes the largest number of peacekeepers, including women, to the UN peace operations. The proportion of women in the peacekeeping contingent will increase if they are provided adequate training. Besides, creating a women-friendly space and environment in the UN missions would further encourage greater participation of women and take forward implementation of the WPS agenda.

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