



Armed Forces of Bangladesh

MOWIP REPORT 2022

RESULTS OF THE MEASURING OPPORTUNITIES FOR
WOMEN IN PEACE OPERATIONS (MOWIP) ASSESSMENT



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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors from Cornell University and DCAF, based on the best available information they have. The report does not necessarily reflect the views of Global Affairs Canada, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, dRi, or the AFB. The data contained in this report are time-specific and reflect identified opportunities and barriers to women's meaningful participation in peacekeeping between 2020 and 2022. It is therefore necessary to update the data and/or findings as new information becomes available, to identify current opportunities and barriers to women's meaningful participation.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AFB	Armed Forces of Bangladesh
AFD	Armed Forces Division of Bangladesh
BIPSOT	Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operation Training
CIMIC	Civil–Military Cooperation
DCAF	Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance
dRi	Development Research Initiative
EIF	Elsie Initiative Fund
FET	Female Engagement Team
FFF	Fact-Finding Form
GBV	Gender-based Violence
MOWIP	Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations assessment methodology
NAP	National Action Plan
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer/Soldier
SEA	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
ToT	Train the Trainers
TPCC	Troop- and Police-Contributing Country
UN	United Nations
UNDPO	United Nations Department for Peace Operations
UN PO	United Nations peace operation
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WPS	Women, Peace, and Security

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

The Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP) assessment for the Armed Forces of Bangladesh (AFB) examines the AFB's ability to deploy women to, and ensure their meaningful participation in, United Nations peace operations through ten issue areas. It uses three data collection tools: a fact-finding form, key informant interviews, and a survey. The assessment team undertook the data collection for this project from July 2020 to February 2022. Due to the ongoing pandemic, the data collection process was spread over an almost two-year period and was carried out maintaining all required health protocols mandated by the Government of Bangladesh. Additionally, due to unforeseen circumstances, the survey was only conducted with non-commissioned personnel; so, the barriers represented in this report relate primarily to non-commissioned servicewomen. It is also important to note that the data contained within this report are time-specific and reflect identified opportunities and barriers to women's meaningful participation in peacekeeping between 2020 and 2022.

Top good practices that can be scaled up and replicated elsewhere

Recruitment target quota. The AFB have committed to a recruitment target quota of 17% women in officer ranks and 6.5% women within soldier/non-commissioned officer (NCO) ranks, in support of the UN Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018–2028¹ and also to address the limited pool of eligible servicewomen within the AFB.

Gender focal point system. Following the adoption of the National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security in November 2019, all ministries and departments in Bangladesh appointed gender focal points to support the implementation of the NAP. In 2020 a gender adviser was appointed to the Armed Forces Division of Bangladesh and gender focal points were appointed to the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

Training accommodation for servicewomen. A new three-storey accommodation building for women personnel, supported by a US\$1 million Elsie Initiative Fund grant, is currently under construction at the Bangladesh Armed Forces Institute of Peace Support Operation Training.

Gender mainstreaming policy. The National Defence Policy on Gender Mainstreaming has been drafted and is awaiting adoption.

Top barriers to women's meaningful participation in UN deployments

Issue Area 1 – Eligible pool. At present women represent about 2% of total personnel in the AFB. Of these women 5% are in high and medium (officer) ranks.² There are proportionately fewer women in the soldier/NCO ranks because women were first inducted as soldiers/NCOs in 2015, while women officers were first inducted in 2000. Nonetheless, in 2019 about 11% of personnel deployed in peace operations were women, making their representation in these operations proportionately greater than their representation within the AFB.

Issue Area 4 – Household constraints. Based on survey and key informant interview data, there is a socio-cultural expectation that women are primarily, if not exclusively, responsible for the care of children, parents, and the home. This could present a structural challenge, inasmuch as women may not have the support to leave small children or elder parents in order to deploy; and a socio-cultural challenge if the care of small children, elderly parents, and the home is a widely accepted and potentially enforced norm.

Issue Area 9 – Gender roles. There is a prevailing belief in the notion that gender roles and divisions are natural for women and men, and a belief that women personnel need greater consideration for protection (referred to as the gender protection norm). This can limit women's deployment as a result of women's self-selection (to decline deployment), the need for family permission, and institutional decision-making based on perceived deployment risk and additional consideration if the woman has small children.

1 See UNDP, *Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018–2028*, available at peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/uniformed-gender-parity-2018-2028.pdf.

2 High: General, Lieutenant General, Major General, Brigadier General, Colonel, Lieutenant Colonel, Major, Captain, Lieutenant, Second Lieutenant, Admiral, Vice Admiral, Rear Admiral, Commodore, Captain, Commander, Lieutenant Commander, Lieutenant, Air Chief Marshal, Air Marshal, Air Vice-Marshal, Air Commodore, Group Captain, Wing Commander, Squadron Leader, Flight Lieutenant. Medium: Master Warrant Officer, Senior Warrant Officer, Warrant Officer, Sergeant, Corporal, Sub-Lieutenant, Acting Sub-Lieutenant, Midshipman, Master Chief Petty Officer, Senior Chief Petty Officer, Chief Petty Officer, Flying Officer, Pilot Officer, Leading Aircraftman. Low: Lance-Corporal, Sainik, Petty Officer, Leading Seaman, Aircraftman 1, and Aircraftman 2.

Summary of priority interventions aimed at overcoming identified barriers

RECOMMENDATION 1: Increase the representation of women across roles (operational and combat), units (infantry, armoured), and ranks (Lieutenant Colonel and above) within all three branches of the Armed Forces of Bangladesh.

Explanation summary: To ensure that sufficient women are eligible for deployment and meet the stated quota target (17% officer rank and 6.5% soldier/NCO rank), more women will need to be recruited and equipped with a broader range of skills and experience (including leadership), enabling them to serve in roles and within units where they are underrepresented or not represented.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Design and implementation of structural support for women with families and family care responsibilities

Explanation summary: Women personnel are identified as primarily, if not exclusively, responsible for the care of families, children, and the household. As such, women may face social expectations to prioritize these responsibilities over deployment. This social responsibility and expectation could be mitigated by greater structural support in the form of day care, flexible family leave, and expanded paternity leave.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Advance understanding and awareness of gender, gender equality, and gender bias

Explanation summary: All socio-cultural and institutional contexts come with attitudes and stereotypes based on gender roles and expectations. These include beliefs about the accepted and expected behaviours, roles, attributes, and responsibilities of women and men. Consolidated data from MOWIP pilot countries reveal that these beliefs can and do translate into peacekeeper attitudes and behaviours in contravention of UN peace operations (UN POs) mandates.³ It is therefore critical to advance understanding and awareness of gender roles, the existence of (implicit and explicit) gender bias, and the goal of gender equality as an integral component of increasing women's meaningful participation in peace operations and advancing long-term and sustainable peace. This includes training and education, outreach and awareness, and bystander intervention programming.

3 Surveyed personnel from four countries and five security institutions who held rigid gender roles were significantly less likely to view misconduct as serious, including sexual exploitation and abuse, bribery, drink-driving, and using violence against civilians, and less likely to say they would report these forms of misconduct – as required by UN PO mandates. In addition, personnel who reported a belief in a version of masculinity that privileges social respect, physical strength, and sexual potency were overwhelmingly more likely to engage in violence-escalating behaviour, and less likely to de-escalate as required by UN PO mandates. See DCAF, *Global MOWIP Report: Fit-for-the-Future Peace Operations: Advancing Gender Equality to Achieve Long-term and Sustainable Peace* (Geneva: DCAF, 2022), pp. 31–32.

01

Introduction

Introduction

Women's participation

Conflict affects men and women differently. However, this realization has remained confined to the academic context until recently. Similarly, the advancement of women's rights and their engagement in political, economic, and social arenas have largely been undertaken at the country level. As such, the advancement of gender equality is specific to the country and its socio-cultural and political context, and thus exists on a continuum where some countries and contexts have made greater progress than others. In the 1970s the international sphere, under the auspices of the United Nations (UN), started to address the need to advance women's rights and their participation in all levels of society. The UN is a member organization representing and reflecting the varied interests of its member states collectively. This includes its primary goal of supporting, enabling, and fostering international peace and security, a task outlined by its Charter. In line with this mandate, the UN became the foremost intergovernmental international organization responsible for advancing women's rights and participation in the context of peace and security. Most notably, in 2000 the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 to address women, peace, and security ushered in an era of women's participation in security provision, peace negotiations and mediation, and peacebuilding, as well as a specific need to address gender-based violence in the context of conflict, peacekeeping operations, and humanitarian relief efforts. UN member states recognized that the role of women should not be limited to being caregivers; rather, their presence in peace negotiations, peacebuilding, and social, economic, and political development is critical to long-term and sustainable peace. Indeed, peace is not merely the absence of violence and conflict, but also the presence of equal security, safety, and access to livelihood. This requires the collaborative participation and engagement of all members of society – including women, who often represent a slight majority of the population. When women experience barriers to meaningful participation in decision-making across all levels of society and governance, policies will fail to be holistic and as such will be ineffective in dealing with the complex reality of advancing equal safety, security, and access to livelihood – or long-term and sustainable peace. Hence advancing women's rights and gender mainstreaming have gradually been recognized as a necessity at both international and national levels.

Even while women's social, political, and economic participation is increasingly understood as central to a country's overall progress, their actual participation in peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and social, political, and economic development has remained limited. Women's access and entry to wider parts of a society, where men's entrance is often viewed with suspicion or even barred, is not fully appreciated. In societies where strict gender roles and segregation exist, it is often women who are positioned to gain access and build trust, enabling them to advance understanding of the dynamics of conflicts, requirements of sustainable peace, and the socio-cultural cleavages and fragility that may exist. Women's participation in peacekeeping and peacebuilding must therefore include meaningful participation in the context of decision-making as well as operational work – including peacekeeping operations. To build trust with local communities, a prerequisite to meeting their specific security and safety needs, both women and men are needed within peacekeeping forces.

UNSCR 1325 identifies the need for women as uniformed peacekeepers across roles, units, and ranks. Uniformed women peacekeepers, like their male counterparts, must perform all the official duties of peacekeeping, thereby contributing at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. Equally important is a demonstration of women role models – at both the global level and in the host-country context. This importantly serves to challenge the existence of gender roles. Indeed, in many societies women may be responsible for (and limited to) the challenging task of reproductive and care work and meeting the basic day-to-day needs of their family and community (food, water, care, etc.) within a context of violence and conflict. The presence of uniformed women peacekeepers, working alongside uniformed men peacekeepers, importantly illustrates a social contract wherein men and women are working together to establish and maintain peace.

Bangladesh is committed to this effort, as demonstrated by the deployment of two women combat pilots – Flight Lieutenant Nayma Haque and Flight Lieutenant Tamanna-E-Lutfi – who participated in the UN mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in 2017. Lt Haque and Lt Lutfi represented Bangladesh and challenged prevailing gender roles – showcasing women in combat roles. In addition, their participation confronted the notion that women in non-Western countries lack choices and agency to participate in gender-non-conforming roles.

Bangladesh – One of seven MOWIP pilot countries

Bangladesh has been participating in UN POs since 1988, when it sent 15 military observers to the UN Iran–Iraq Military Observation Group (UNIMOG) mission. Since then, Bangladesh has emerged as one of the leading troop- and police-contributing countries (TPCCs) to UN POs. Members of both the Armed Forces and the Bangladesh Police have made long-standing contributions to peace operations.

In addition, Bangladesh Police received the Best Police Unit Award in 2019 by the UN for its contribution to UN POs. In 2010 Bangladesh sent the second UN PO all-female formed police unit to Haiti – a contribution that has been internationally recognized.

To date, Bangladesh has participated in 54 of the 71 UN POs, and 163,887 Bangladeshi peacekeepers have been deployed to 56 UN POs in 40 different countries. The AFB have lost 139 service personnel, and 247 have sustained injuries on deployment. Beginning in January 2019, Bangladesh started deploying non-commissioned women soldiers to participate in ‘female engagement teams’. So far, 751 servicewomen have been deployed and worked under the auspices of the UN blue helmets. This includes 601 servicewomen from the Army, 28 servicewomen from the Navy, and 122 servicewomen from the Air Force. At the time of writing there are 413 servicewomen deployed to six UN POs: 97 servicewomen are deployed to UNMISS (South Sudan), 105 servicewomen are deployed to MONUSCO (Democratic Republic of the Congo), 50 servicewomen are deployed to MINUSMA (Mali), 106 servicewomen are deployed to MINUSCA (Central African Republic), nine servicewomen are deployed to MINURSO (West Sahara), 19 servicewomen are deployed to UNIFSA (Sudan), and one servicewoman is deployed to UNDP (UN Department for Peace Operations, New York). This includes 387 servicewomen from the Army, 12 servicewomen from the Navy, and 14 servicewomen from the Air Force.

Notably, Bangladesh was honoured to have Sierra Leone¹ adopt Bengali as one of its national languages in recognition of the work of Bangladeshi peacekeepers. While this is primarily a symbolic gesture, it nonetheless illustrates the critical importance of cross-cultural international trust and rapport as a component of peace and security.

Bangladesh hosts the United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) Shantidoot Exercise every quadrennial (four years). The purpose of this military exercise is to bring members of the Armed Forces from different countries together to prepare them for a ‘Mission Essential Tasks List’ undertaken during a PO. The Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operation Training (BIPSOT), a leading institution that trains peacekeepers from all over the world, is responsible for organizing this.

Bangladesh and the AFB are committed to international and domestic peace and security and see the meaningful participation of women as an integral component of that effort. Hence the AFB is pleased to participate as one of only seven pilot countries implementing the MOWIP methodology for the first time since its development.

Bangladesh's commitment to UN peace operations and gender mainstreaming

The Government of Bangladesh and the AFB are committed to providing ongoing support to UN POs. Indeed, the AFB believes that a component of national security involves taking a leading role in the context of international security. This strategic perspective has enabled Bangladesh to create a distinct and positive image in the area of peace and security – both domestically and internationally. Bangladesh sees itself as being positioned to contribute to international peace and security while also benefiting from its role as a TPCC. This includes greater collaboration and concordance between civil and military authorities at the decision-making level within Bangladesh. Contributing to UN POs also infuses the AFB with local and cultural knowledge, and thus expands their non-kinetic or contact skills.

Bangladesh is committed to achieving the goals of the UN Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018–2028, and is working as a MOWIP pilot country to identify both opportunities and barriers to increasing women's participation.² Moreover, 'UN SCR 1325 (2000), which aimed to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives into the UN's peace and security efforts, was adopted under the initiative of Bangladesh, when it was a non-permanent member of the Security Council.'³

Bangladesh has demonstrated its commitment to UNSCR 1325 by developing and adopting a National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace, and Security. The AFB in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs served a critical role in leading the process of drafting and promoting the adoption of the Bangladesh NAP, which came into force in December 2019. The AFB have drafted a National Defence Policy on Gender Mainstreaming that is also planned for adoption. In addition, the AFB designed and implemented a gender focal point system in 2020. Each formation of the AFB has a gender focal point, who is responsible for implementing the NAP and addressing the needs of women in each of the respective forces.

The AFB intends to use this MOWIP report to apply to the Elsie Initiative Fund (EIF) administered by UN Women. The funds requested will principally finance needed infrastructure to accommodate the recruitment and training of more women in the AFB and used in pre-deployment training programmes.

2 Twenty-five % of military observers and staff officers are women, as are 15% of military contingents. See UNDPO, *Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018–2028*, available at peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/uniformed-gender-parity-2018-2028.pdf.

3 Meghna Guhathakurta, *The women, peace and security agenda in contemporary Bangladesh*, WhiteBoard online magazine, 16 March 2021, whiteboardmagazine.com/2094/the-women-peace-and-security-agenda-in-contemporary-bangladesh/.

02

Methodology

Methodology

Overview of the MOWIP assessment methodology

The MOWIP methodology⁴ is a unique tool to assess and improve women's meaningful participation in peace operations. It provides a systematic and comprehensive framework for identifying both a security institution's existing good practices and possible improvements in each of ten issue areas identified as central to women's meaningful participation. Factors relevant to assessing women's meaningful participation in peace operations are not limited to the specific time of deployment, but include the policies, practices, and experiences of women and men within the security institution. Thus, the good practices and possible enhancements identified by the MOWIP methodology can be used to improve both the meaningful participation of women in uniform in peace operations and the conditions for equal opportunities between men and women in the security institution under study. Peacekeeping cannot be separated from the security institution that manages deployments: advancing the equality and inclusion of women and men in general within the institution also reinforces the trend towards meaningful participation of women in deployments.

The ten issue areas discussed below include all the factors that shape the numbers and nature of women's participation in peace operations, from initial recruitment into the AFB to deployment on mission. These factors can be either positive (opportunities at the institutional level that contribute to women's meaningful participation) or negative (barriers to women's meaningful participation at the institutional level). For each issue area, the MOWIP methodology uncovers whether and to what extent it constitutes a barrier or an opportunity. Its main objectives are to:

- provide a comprehensive set of issue areas within a given security institution that could be improved to increase women's meaningful participation in UN POs;
- identify the opportunities within the security institution that can be leveraged, scaled up, and/or disseminated more broadly;
- apply a set of tools and a comprehensive list of indicators to measure the importance of each issue area for increasing women's meaningful participation in the security institution; and
- determine the differential impact of each issue area in the security institution.

The MOWIP methodology comprises three components, which are implemented by the national assessment team.

- The **fact-finding form** (FFF) contains approximately 200 questions designed to collect qualitative and quantitative data from official sources about AFB deployment to UN POs.
- Twenty **key informant interviews** with leadership from within the AFB and in relevant ministries, to collect information on decision-making in security institutions with regard to deployment in peace operations.
- An hour-long **survey** of deployed and non-deployed Armed Forces personnel, both male and female. The Bangladesh sample comprised a total of 495 personnel, of whom 11% (56) were women. Moreover, 44% of the sample have deployed to a mission. Of the total women in the sample, 7% (4) have deployed. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances and because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the sampling frame could not be followed. This presented several challenges, because the number of deployed women did not meet the criteria for a complete MOWIP assessment. Moreover, the sample comprises **only soldiers/non-commissioned personnel**. As such, the report is only able to determine barriers to women's meaningful participation for non-commissioned women for Issue Areas 1–5 and 7–10. Based on the data we do have, it appears that men have a very positive experience on mission (Issue Area 6) and based on interviews, commissioned women have positive experiences as well, but a systematic study of Issue Area 6 is not possible (see below for explanation).

After processing and analysing the data from the three data collection tools, each issue area is **ranked based on a colour code**. Dark blue indicates the issue areas that constitute the most significant barriers, and light blue indicates areas of low priority or opportunity. The survey data are compared to the data from the FFF to look for inconsistencies between institutional reforms and policies and AFB personnel's actual experiences and perceptions.

The analysis of the survey data takes into consideration rank, age, and past deployment(s). We identify cases where there are statistically significant differences⁵ between male and female respondents in the survey. This indicates that differences in responses between men and women may reflect real differences in their experiences and perceptions, rather than being due to chance or the fact that women would be overrepresented in certain grades or services. The survey data are compared with the FFF data to examine gaps between institutional policies and the actual experiences and perceptions of AFB personnel.

Box 1: Analysis of the survey data

The data were analysed in several ways. First, descriptive statistics were calculated for the full sample – for women, for men, for those previously deployed to a UN PO, and for those never deployed to a UN PO.

Second, t-tests – which determine whether the mean value of respondents varies between male and female personnel and between deployed and non-deployed personnel – were conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference between respondents in these subgroups (distinguished by gender and deployment status). Third, regression models were used to determine whether male and female personnel as well as deployed and non-deployed personnel responded in a statistically significant manner, taking into account other factors that may influence responses, such as age, rank, and service type.

In the case of a statistically significant difference between men and women (when there was a p-value less than 0.05), we give details in this report. If we do not give details of different response proportions between male and female personnel, it indicates that there was no significant difference between male and female respondents, all other factors being constant. The regression models were run as logistic regression when the response was dichotomous (for example, when the response options were yes or no), and ordinal logistic regression when the response options were categorical or ordinal (for example, questions that asked how much the person agreed with a certain statement). For continuous variables, ordinary least squares regression was used.

A first draft of the MOWIP report is written based on the data analysis and the ranking of the ten issue areas, with the caveat about Issue Area 6 mentioned above. The completion of the draft report marks the start of the validation process, during which the assessed security institution is engaged in providing feedback, contextual and institutional information, and additional clarifications and interpretations of the data. The key findings from the report (main opportunities and barriers) are presented to key stakeholders within the security institution during the oral report, which allows the institution to contribute substantially to the report. The inputs from the oral report are then integrated into the draft report, which is finalized and submitted to the security institution for review in preparation for the validation workshop. The validation workshop constitutes an opportunity for the security institution to review the findings of the entire report in great detail, to validate the findings, and to develop evidence-based recommendations. It also uses this opportunity to develop the content for the public version of the report, as all countries have an internal report with no redactions.

The MOWIP methodology therefore produces robust and evidence-based findings, drawing on perspectives from within the institution and the knowledge acquired by the assessment team, as well as from national and international experts who have an academic background in gender and peace operations. It can be used to provide transformative, evidence-based recommendations that effectively target the root causes preventing uniformed personnel, particularly women, from deploying to peace operations. Using a common methodology across many TPCCs also allows for the identification of universal barriers that need to be addressed at the UN level and highlights good practices that can be shared and adapted to other contexts.

5 If the survey were repeated many times, men and women would respond in a unique way and differ from each other when considering other factors that may also influence responses (such as rank, age, deployment status, and service). Statistical significance was determined by a p-value of 0.1 or less in the regression models described in Box 1.

Development Research Initiative: The national research partner

The Development Research Initiative (dRi) is a leading independent consultancy, research, and evaluation centre in Bangladesh. dRi conducts research and analysis on various issues related to development, international aid, NGOs, markets, and the state. It has completed more than 200 research projects and worked with over 90 development partners. This includes specific research on the role of gender (in)equality in development work. For example, dRi collaborated with Oxfam GB to design and implement the 'Inequality Research in Bangladesh: Unpacking Gender Identity Based Economic Inequalities' project, which included 30 focus group discussions, 36 life histories, and 25 key informant interviews. It was designed to identify different types of inequality between men and women. The aim was to reveal the role that religious identity, geographical location, occupation, social and political disparity, and exploitation play in creating, sustaining, and/or reinforcing social, political, economic, and cultural inequality, and how this inequality adversely affects the overall development of Bangladesh.

Implementing MOWIP in the Bangladesh Armed Forces

The implementation of the MOWIP methodology was initiated in April 2019, when the first meeting between DCAF, Cornell, dRi local researchers, and BIPSOT representatives took place. Thereafter, local enumerators were identified, chosen on the basis of their expertise carrying out previous surveys and knowledge on gender. Final enumerator selection was dependent on completing a vetting process carried out by the Armed Forces Division (AFD), the principal national command authority for national defence of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Initial training of the enumerators was conducted by Dr Sabrina Karim of Cornell University, the lead researcher for the project and designer of the MOWIP methodology. The training was held over a two-day period, 9–10 April 2019, and principally covered how to implement the 300+ question survey with respondents in an ethical and unbiased manner. This involved didactic and interactive sessions in addition to mock interview practice in the presence of the DCAF-Cornell team. Final AFD approval for the enumerators was received in April 2020.

The AFB established the Board of Officers, made up of representatives from all three service branches, to oversee and implement the MOWIP assessment within the AFB. The first Board of Officers' meeting with the dRi team took place in November 2020. During this meeting the overall strategy to implement the MOWIP methodology was discussed and identified, including how to manage limitations resulting from the pandemic and how to identify respondents for the survey and key informant interviews. However, the process was interrupted a number of times due to the pandemic. Although the research ideal was to initiate the survey first and implement it in different parts of the country, this was not feasible because of pandemic restrictions. Hence key informant interviews were initiated first (rather than the survey), starting in March 2019 and continuing through to November 2021.

In June 2021 two focus group workshops were held on AFD premises to complete the fact-finding form (FFF). The participants were members of the AFB, local researchers, and the Board of Officers.

The survey questionnaire was localized and translated into Bengali. The 300+ question survey and accompanying interview checklist were approved following the standard permission procedure of the AFD. An additional two-day workshop was held in mid-October 2019 at dRi with the survey enumerators to share the localized and approved survey in Bengali and English and the interview checklist. As written and spoken Bengali can be different, another mock interview practice was arranged in mid-October before enumerators were scheduled to begin collecting surveys.

The survey was implemented between October 2020 and November 2021 under the supervision of the dRi and local researchers at BIPSOT. The AFD first identified members of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) BANBAT army contingent (one of three) at BIPSOT to participate in the survey. Over the same period, three additional teams of enumerators implemented the survey in Dhaka City with personnel of the Bangladesh Air Force, Navy, and Army, with the explicit permission and specific guidelines of the AFD. During the survey implementation process, the dRi research team and the enumerators stayed in close contact, with regular debriefs to identify and resolve any emerging issues. The survey was carried out in the Bengali language, and a sample of it was approved by the AFD.

The survey specifications were intended to draw a representative sample of security personnel – deployed and non-deployed men and women from the Army, Air Force, and Navy. This was planned to include Dhaka, Chattogram, and Jessore Cantonments. However, due to pandemic restrictions that affected travel and in-person engagement, the survey sample was ultimately limited to the availability of personnel at BIPSOT and from the Dhaka, Rajendrapur, and Postogola Cantonments. A significant number of survey respondents were personnel attending pre-deployment training at BIPSOT prior to their first deployment, and personnel from the Rajendrapur Cantonment and other cantonments across Bangladesh who were attending pre-deployment field training exercises. Other respondents were drawn from Dhaka and Postogola Cantonments. Nonetheless, it was not possible to meet the research requirement to survey a sufficient number of women soldiers/NCOs with mission experience.

The survey did not include commissioned officers. This decision was made jointly by the AFD and the dRi research team, based on the long questionnaire method and its suitability for soldiers/NCOs. Moreover, as key informant interviews prioritized commissioned officers at the middle and senior levels of leadership, it was assumed that officers did not need to participate in the survey as well. Indeed, key informant interviews were aimed at identifying the nuanced way the AFB applied UNDP requests and guidance in the deployment of contingents, military observers, and staff officers over the years, and how they affected senior and mid-level serving officers from the Army, Navy, and Air Force. In support of this, the AFD suggested specific officers at different levels of leadership with in-mission experience and experience of making deployment decisions.

Unfortunately, the survey did not ultimately include enough deployed women personnel to meet the requirements of the MOWIP methodology to address women’s experience in peacekeeping. As such, Issue Area 6, peacekeeping experience, only references the experience of male soldiers/NCOs. However, existing data are sufficiently robust to examine barriers and opportunities to women for Issue Areas 1–5 and 7–10. In addition, due to the time period between implementation of the survey, collection of the FFF and key informant interviews, and the validation process, there are a number of current realities that do not show up in the assessment data. For example, there are now more women in leadership positions, and the AFB is transitioning away from female engagement teams to engagement teams with 50% men and 50% women. In addition, given the practical changes that have taken place, such as the introduction of a gender focal point system, it may also be that the survey results, particularly with respect to views, beliefs or attitudes, have been affected.

The final survey covered personnel in the non-commissioned ranks, from soldiers to JCOs.⁶

Table 1: Sample distribution for survey

Force name	No. of surveys conducted	%
Army	384	77.6
Navy	61	12.3
Air Force	50	10.1
Total	495	100.0

Table 2: Region-wise sample distribution for survey

Location of survey	No. of surveys conducted	%
BAF HQ/Bashar (Air Force)	50	10.1
BIPSOT	232	46.9
BNS Hazi Mohsin (Navy)	61	12.3
Dhaka Cantonment (Army)	102	20.6
Postogola Cantonment	50	10.1
Total	495	100.0

⁶ JCO (Junior Commissioned Officer) is a term used by the top military ranks in some South Asian countries to designate non-commissioned positions. It is higher than soldier (habildar) and lower than lieutenant.

The total sample comprised 495 individuals – 439 men and 56 women. Within the sample, 214 men and four women have previously been deployed to at least one UN PO, while 225 men and 52 women do not have mission experience. Because there are only four deployed women in the survey, it is not a reliable source of data. The results below include the results for the four women, but we cannot make any conclusions about the experiences of deployed women based on the survey that was conducted. Moreover, the survey includes only non-commissioned personnel. As such, we can only make inferences about the barriers to meaningful participation for non-commissioned non-deployed women soldiers, non-commissioned deployed men soldiers, and non-commissioned non-deployed men soldiers.

Of the respondents, the Army constitutes 77.6%, the Navy constitutes 12.3%, and Air Force constitutes 10.1% (see Table 1). BIPSOT, Rajendrapur Cantonment, covers 46% of the respondents (Table 2). Of the total, 56 (11.5%) are women respondents from various non-commissioned ranks, mainly from the Army and Navy. The women soldiers from the Army are now receiving training to be deployed to UN missions. The women sailors from the Navy have just become eligible for UN missions – as such, no women sailors have been deployed to peace operations at the time of this report. The Air Force has recently recruited airwomen, but they are not yet suitable for deployment to UN POs. Thus, the Army represented the only mission-experienced women soldiers.

The average age of survey respondents was 34.75 years. For men the average age was 36, with the youngest man being 21 years and the oldest 51. For women the average age was 24, with the youngest woman being 19 and the oldest 28. The average age of deployed personnel was 39 years old, and 31 for non-deployed personnel. For women, 23 were single and 33 were married; of the men, 13 were single and 426 were married. One man and 29 women did not have any children, while 398 men and six women had between one and four children. The age of the oldest child was 25 and the youngest child was an infant. The majority of individuals had the rank of sergeant (15%), corporal (19%), lance corporal (18%), and sainik (22%).

The Bangladesh research team also conducted 20 key informant interviews with senior and mid-ranking decision-makers from the Army, Navy, and Air Force. These included key informants and experienced policymakers from the Armed Forces Division Overseas Operations Directorates, gender advisers in the respective headquarters of the forces, and senior trainers from BIPSOT. The interview findings offer a comprehensive insight on various issues of opportunities for and challenges to women's participation in peace operations. Interviews with key informants mostly addressed the barriers to women's meaningful participation, the trends and patterns of Bangladesh's participation in UN POs, women's deployment in various ranks and positions, military and non-military factors that can be barriers or challenges for women and identified practices that can increase women's participation.

Completing the FFF was a collaborative process between the Bangladesh research team and the AFD Board of Officers. The AFD cooperated to arrange three focus group discussion meetings to complete the FFF. The respondents were primarily all four members of the Board of Officers, representing all three forces. When there was a need to find or confirm answers to specific questions, other respondents from the Armed Forces within the focus groups were approached by phone. The researchers also received critical insights about the FFF from the key informants' interviews. While there were some unanswered questions due to the classified nature of the information, respondents otherwise enthusiastically completed the FFF.











03

Results of the MOWIP Assessment

Results of the MOWIP Assessment

The MOWIP methodology measures opportunities and barriers in ten issue areas. Each area is given a score, to highlight places where the security institution should focus its future efforts to improve the meaningful participation of women in uniform in peace operations. Table 3 is a summary of the findings; the following sections of the report provide more detail on the barriers and opportunities by issue area. The data presented in Table 3 are time-specific and reflect identified opportunities and barriers to women’s meaningful participation in peacekeeping between 2020 and 2022.

Table 3: Summary of the MOWIP assessment results

Pre-deployment stage: including factors that affect force generation			Cross-cutting issue areas	
	1	ELIGIBLE POOL Are there enough women in national institutions?		
	2	DEPLOYMENT CRITERIA Do criteria match the skills needed in peace operations?	9	10
	3	DEPLOYMENT SELECTION Does everyone have a fair chance for deployment?	GENDER ROLES Do preconceived attitudes about women preclude their ability to deploy?	SOCIAL EXCLUSION Are women treated as equal members of the team?
	4	HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES Are women able to leave their family and household responsibilities in order to deploy?		
Deployment stage: including conditions for women during peace operations				
	5	PEACE OPERATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE Are accommodation and equipment designed to meet women's needs?		
	6	PEACE OPERATIONS EXPERIENCES Do positive and negative experiences in peace operations affect women's deployment decisions?		
Post-deployment stage: including factors that affect redeployment				
	7	CAREER VALUE Do deployments advance women's careers?		
All stages				
	8	TOP-DOWN LEADERSHIP Do leaders at all levels support women's deployment?		

- HIGH PRIORITY
- MEDIUM PRIORITY
- LOW PRIORITY
- INSTITUTIONAL ISSUE AREAS
- CROSS-CUTTING ISSUE AREAS

Understanding the results

In the following sections, a brief summary of the results is given for each issue area, followed by a detailed explanation of the results.

Understanding the classification of each issue area (high, medium, or low priority)

In classifying the issue areas,⁷ the methodology takes into account differences in the results of the FFF, the interviews, and the survey. Specifically, it examines:

- whether the FFF and key informant interview responses on policies, practices, and programmes are different from the survey responses, which measure personnel's experiences of these policies, practices, and programmes;
- whether certain policies or practices disproportionately affect women or men (for example, requirements for a minimum height may favour men because they are taller on average than women); and
- whether there is a significant difference in the way women and men answer each survey question.

The data from these three tools are used to measure a set of indicators for each issue area. The indicators are measured using the MOWIP indicator form, on the basis of four scores:

- the **Implementation Gap score**, which indicates the extent to which there is a gap between the policies, practices, and programmes and personnel's experiences of those policies, practices, and programmes;
- the **Barrier score**, which indicates the extent to which the issue area is a barrier for men and women;
- the **Institutional Barrier to Women score**, which indicates the extent to which the issue area affects solely or disproportionately women; and
- the **Women's Gap in Experience score**, which indicates the extent to which this issue area is experienced or perceived as a barrier more commonly or more strongly by women than it is experienced by men.

The four scores measure different dimensions of what constitutes a barrier. The Barrier score measures the degree to which an issue area is a barrier for men's and women's meaningful participation. But to understand whether an issue area affects women, it is important to understand whether particular indicators disproportionately affect women and how well the country is performing specifically on those indicators (Institutional Barrier to Women score). Moreover, the actual experiences of the personnel might not match the stated policies, programmes, and practices. Thus, it is also important to measure whether experiences match what is on paper (Implementation Gap score), and whether women experience the issue in different ways than men do (Women's Gap in Experience score). Each score ranges from 0 to 1, with 0 being the most concerning and 1 indicating no barrier.

Next, all indicators within an issue area are examined together to determine whether the area in question is high, medium, or low priority for follow-up activities. The results thus highlight opportunities and barriers to women's meaningful participation in UN POs, as well as gaps in the implementation of existing policies and differences in perceptions between senior and junior personnel, and between women and men.

Cross-cutting issue areas

Issue Areas 9 (gender roles) and 10 (social exclusion), which reflect the values, norms, perceptions, behaviours, and practices of individuals within security institutions, as well as the institutional cultures and group dynamics that this entail, are cross-cutting; indeed, they impact on all of Issue Areas 1–8. The findings include a section on how these cross-cutting issue areas affected the results. This will help guide recommendations, as transformational change can involve both policy and attitudinal changes.

Additional information

The report contains the most important findings identified by DCAF and Cornell University. Further analysis can be conducted using the dataset, if required, for follow-up activities.



ISSUE AREA 1: Eligible Pool

The eligible pool issue area explores whether there are enough women in the AFB to meet the UN Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy targets for 2028 (25% for military observers and staff officers and 15% for military contingents). This is a high-priority issue area, because women only recently entered the AFB and still constitute just 2% of total personnel. This means it is not currently possible to increase the deployment of servicewomen. Servicewomen will first need to be recruited, selected, trained, and serve a minimum of five years before being eligible for deployment. Increasing the eligible pool is therefore a longer-term strategy in line with the AFB commitment to continue to serve as a TPCC.

Summary of findings

The AFB are committed to advancing the UN Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018–2028. According to the FFF, there is a current quota target of 17% of women in officer ranks and 6.5% of women in the soldier/NCO ranks. Nonetheless, at present the AFB does not have a sufficient pool of eligible women for deployment and women do not deploy at the same percentage as men. Presently women represent about 2% of total personnel in the AFB. About 5% of women personnel are at the high and medium (officer) ranks.⁸ There are fewer women within the non-commissioned soldier ranks because women were first inducted as soldiers/NCOs relatively recently (2015), while women officers were first inducted in 2000. In 2019 about 11% of deployed personnel were servicewomen. This represents a higher proportion of servicewomen deployed in comparison to women within the AFB, signaling a clear effort by the AFB to prioritize the deployment of servicewomen.

A positive finding is that women report wanting to stay in the Armed Forces (even more so than men). The targeted recruitment of women could therefore represent a long-term benefit for the AFB. Moreover, women expressed a high degree of interest in deployment opportunities.

OPPORTUNITIES

- There is a quota target for women (17% officer rank and 6.5% soldier/NCO rank) and according to the FFF, there is a plan to create engagement teams made up of 50% men and 50% women.
- Surveyed women express a strong interest to stay in the AFB and deploy to peace operations; and men express a greater interest to stay in the AFB after they have deployed.
- Women are in leadership roles and continuing to advance in rank. For example, according to AFB representatives there are a total of 16 women commanding officers, nine women Grade 1 staff officers, and four women contingent commanders within the Bangladesh Army.
- The AFB are increasing the number of women in various areas, including paratrooping (27 women officers from the Bangladesh Army), pilots (two women officers are pilots), and in command positions (as mentioned above).

BARRIERS

- Women represent a particularly low number of soldiers/NCOs. Even while this can be understood as a consequence of only recently opening soldier/NCO ranks to women, it nonetheless represents a current barrier to women's deployment within contingents.
- There are only small numbers of women within the AFB leadership, and this limits the range of deployment opportunities available to them.
- Women may not be well represented across roles and units (in particular infantry, armoured, and other combat units), thereby limiting the range of deployment opportunities available to them.

GAPS IN PERCEPTION AND EXPERIENCE, AND CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

- Women express an equal or greater desire to deploy than men, yet both men and a limited survey pool of women express the belief that women should deploy less frequently, suggesting the presence of socio-cultural expectations based on a belief in gender roles.
- Men report being more likely to feel 'stuck' and consider leaving the AFB than women, yet women are recruited (and deployed) at a significantly lower level.

Detailed findings

OPPORTUNITIES

The Armed Forces of Bangladesh have a positive intention to recruit more women

The key informant interviews suggest that the AFB have a positive view on targeting and recruiting more women. According to the FFF, the AFB are committed to supporting the UN Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018–2028, and so have committed to a quota target of 17% women in officer ranks and 6.5% women soldiers/NCOs. According to representatives at the validation workshop, the AFB plan to initiate engagement teams of 50% men and 50% women.

Peacekeeping appears to contribute to a preference to stay in the AFB

Of the personnel surveyed, 28% had considered leaving the Armed Forces: about 13% of women surveyed had considered leaving, compared to 30% of men. However, that percentage decreased for personnel who had been deployed to a UN PO, with only 26% considering leaving. This is compared to 30% of non-deployed personnel of both genders who considered leaving.

About 22% of surveyed personnel said they sometimes or often felt stuck in their jobs. Men were more likely to say this than women.

Equal access to facilities

95% of personnel had access to their preferred bathroom (98% of all women and 94% of men). About 85% of personnel had access to same-sex facilities (88% of women and 85% of men). The remaining personnel said they had access to unisex sleeping facilities and all personnel had access to sleeping facilities. Additionally, 98% of personnel were provided with the equipment they needed to carry out their duties (95% of women and 98% of men said this).

Women are advancing in rank in the AFB

The AFB started recruiting women into commissioned ranks in 2000. Presently there are 1,819 women officers and 460 soldiers/NCOs. In 2019 the AFB promoted their first woman to the rank of lieutenant colonel; there are now 46 servicewomen with this rank, 16 servicewomen who hold the rank of unit commander, four servicewomen with the rank of contingent commander, and nine servicewomen with the rank/role of general services officer.

Promotion procedures are applied irrespective of gender, so servicewomen compete based on merit with servicemen. According to key informant interviews, some women officers are undergoing training to support their continued advancement in rank. Nonetheless, a key informant noted: 'We started to intake women officers from the year 2000 and we are the first in the armed division to intake women officers. But till now the number of women officers is too low. When the UN set targets to select 18% women officers it is very tough for us to meet them.'

There have been specific efforts to encourage women to join the AFB

According to the FFF, the AFD has used the media to encourage women's recruitment into the AFB and has conducted motivational lectures in schools and colleges (thus engaging with both women and men).

Most personnel want to deploy

About 83% of survey respondents said they wanted to deploy to a UN PO. Only 9% of women surveyed said they did not want to deploy, in comparison to 15% of men who did not want to deploy.

Redeployment

In Bangladesh, generally soldiers/NCOs are deployed in one mission. Those who are working in the Signals, Military Police, and Medical Corps as well as those who have commando training may be redeployed according to the mission requirements provided by the particular mandate. Soldiers from these categories receive redeployment training with the outgoing contingent. The scope of redeployment is based on skills.

MAIN BARRIERS

The overall number of servicewomen in the Armed Forces of Bangladesh is low

The AFB started recruiting women into commissioned ranks in 2000 and soldier/NCO ranks in 2015. This contextualizes why women constitute only 2% of the total personnel of the AFB, with 1,819 commissioned officers and 460 soldiers/NCOs.

The AFB started recruiting women into soldier/NCO ranks six years prior to undertaking the MOWIP assessment. As a result, the number of women at the soldier/NCO level is understandably low. The fact that women are currently eligible to join the soldier/NCO rank will inevitably result in the number of women increasing within this rank. Nonetheless, the present low number of women in soldier/NCO ranks constitutes a current barrier for women's participation in contingents deploying to UN POs.

It is also important to note that due to the limited career time women have had in the AFB, they are less likely to have the rank and/or experience necessary for a mission environment. According to the FFF, women hold fewer than 2% of leadership positions – out of 600 managerial/leadership positions in the AFB, 16 are held by women.

According to a key informant, 'there is a shortage of women in the pipeline' so it is not possible to deploy more women at present.

Altogether, the findings signal an awareness and commitment by the AFB both to increase the number of women within commissioned and soldier/NCO ranks and to ready those women with the experience and training necessary for deployment on peace operations. Nonetheless, the actual numbers of women within the AFB may represent a challenge for Bangladesh to support the UN Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy.

However, according to representatives at the validation workshop, even though the AFB have a relatively low number of women overall, they are deploying a high number of women to UN POs comparatively. In fact, one representative at the validation workshop reported that the prospects for women to deploy are three times greater than for men. For example, in 2022, while there were only 2% of women within the AFB, 7.8% of those deployed to peace operations were women.

Nonetheless, it has been widely evidenced that when there is a small number of women (or other socio-demographic group) in a particular field or institution, this can create a particular set of challenges. For example, one female key informant identified a lack of experience working with women soldiers within the AFB as a barrier for deployment and potentially a structural advantage for men: 'Nobody knew how to deal with women or how to give them training. I think that was a challenging part for the armed forces. But the challenges were not only in training – it was in every sector. The assessor, who assesses the candidates, had never assessed a female candidate before. They are all male assessors. They hadn't any idea of the psychology or social circumstances of a female. I think cooperation was needed. They needed an idea of how a female officer is selected in other countries.'

Personnel believe women should deploy less frequently than men

Fifty-one % of survey respondents, men and women, reported that women should ideally be deployed on one peace operation, while 67% of respondents said that men should ideally be deployed twice. This view was not reflected during key informant interviews. In contrast, AFB policy is such that the sex/gender of a soldier does not determine their eligibility for deployment; rather, the personnel requirements as determined by the mission's Order of Battle determine the eligibility criteria (rank, role, unit, experience, training, and fitness). However, according to a number of key informant interviews, women may not be considered fit for deployment in practice (not policy) for up to two years following childbirth.



ISSUE AREA 2: Deployment Criteria

The deployment criteria issue area explores ‘the skills and criteria necessary and prioritized for deployment, whether men or women are more likely to have these skills, and whether the criteria are more likely to favour men for deployment than women’. Moreover, this issue area’s focus is ‘the skills that are required match what is needed on the ground’.⁹

The deployment criteria issue area examines whether women can meet the requirements for deployment to the same extent as men. This is a low-priority issue area for the AFB, because a high percentage of personnel believe there is a need for a mix of contact and non-kinetic skills, and many women and men believe they have the right skills for deployment.

Summary of findings

The actual criteria for participating in peace operations are different from personnel’s perception of what is required. While women perceive themselves as having the right skills and abilities, they are lacking some key skills and experience that may reduce their eligibility to deploy.

The criteria for participating in peacekeeping operations as a soldier/NCO include:

1. length of service;
2. career track record, e.g. disciplinary record;
3. physical fitness;
4. willingness to participate in missions.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Women and men believe they have the right skills, including combat/tactical skills and physical fitness.
- Women and men both believe there is a need for contact skills alongside combat skills for successful deployment, and key informants also believe contact skills are important.
- Women and men equally express feeling comfortable speaking with a superior about deployment opportunities.

BARRIERS

- Women personnel, especially soldiers/NCOs, are less likely to have the five years of experience required by the UN for deployment. This is linked to the AFB only starting to recruit women into the soldier/NCO ranks in 2015, compared to recruiting them into commissioned ranks since 2000.

GAPS IN PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCE

- Women believe they have the right skills for peace operations, but more often they are lacking the UN’s required five years of military experience.
- A minority of surveyed personnel report having been familiarized with gender-related training topics, with more men having been exposed, yet gender-related topics like women, peace, and security (WPS), conflict-related sexual violence, and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) are core pre-deployment training modules.

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

- Gender roles do not appear to impact on the confidence of women in terms of their self-assessment of combat/tactical skills or physical fitness as criteria for deployment.
- Gender roles may translate into fewer women with driving skills, driving licences, and passports (Bangladeshis overall are not as likely to hold a driving licence or passport as nationals in other countries, and women make up a higher proportion of individuals without driving licences and passports).

Detailed findings

OPPORTUNITIES

Men and women believe they meet the criteria for deployment

Table 4 shows percentages of personnel who believe they meet the criteria for deployment (with numbers of individuals in parenthesis). Women are more likely to believe they have computer skills than men; while men are more likely than women to think they have small arms/tactical skills and driving skills.

Table 4: Percentage of personnel who believe they have the required skills for deployment

Highest reported criteria for deployment	% of women who believe they have skill or meet the requirement; number in parenthesis (n = 54)	% of men who believe they have skill or meet the requirement; number in parenthesis (n = 439)
Disciplinary record	70 (39)	80 (350)
Small arms/tactical test	73 (41)	92 (402)
Computer test	46 (26)	32 (141)
Driving test	11 (6)	27 (117)

Women believe they have the right skills for peace operations

When asked to consider the skills or abilities needed for peace operations, 92% of personnel were confident they had the physical fitness required for a UN PO – 91% of women (n = 51) and 92% of men (n = 404). Similarly, 90% of surveyed personnel said they had enough experience within the AFB to qualify for a UN PO – 91% of women and 90% of men.

A high percentage of personnel believe they have the most important skills for mission success, including interpersonal and communication skills

About 70% of personnel feel they have the communication/listening/interpersonal skills – or contact skills – necessary to serve in a UN PO. This included 73% of women (n = 41) and 70% of men (n = 307) – both deployed and non-deployed personnel. In addition, 63% of those surveyed believe they have the conflict resolution and negotiation skills required for a UN PO (64% of women and 62% of men).

According to the survey, personnel believed that the most important skill for mission success was combat/tactical skills, and 92% of men and 73% of women were confident they possessed these skills. In addition, personnel reported physical fitness and the ability to work with locals in the host country as important skills for peacekeepers (see Table 5). When surveyed, 92% of men and 91% of women felt they had the physical fitness to meet peacekeeping requirements. In addition, 80% of women and 24% of men felt comfortable working with local women, while 59% of women and 66% of men felt comfortable working with local men.

Armed Forces leaders believe that communications skills are important

When asked what kinds of skills are necessary for successful deployment for a contingent, its staff, and the military officers, leaders listed situational awareness, skills to operate equipment, and understanding the local culture. Some leaders felt that language skills were also necessary, including English and French.

Contact skills, including communication, conflict resolution, listening, and community engagement, are currently not part of UN criteria for deployment within a contingent. However, as noted by both surveyed security personnel and key informants, these are necessary skills for successful peace operations.

Women were more likely to say they have the disciplinary record to deploy

About 79% of personnel surveyed reported having the clean disciplinary record needed to qualify for a peace operation: 70% of women claimed a clean disciplinary record compared to 80% of men.

Personnel feel comfortable talking to superiors

When asked if they would be comfortable talking to a supervisory officer to discuss opportunities in peacekeeping, 50% of personnel (50% of women and 50% of men) said they would be willing or very willing. Personnel also reported that they would be comfortable asking a supervisor for additional gender training (73% of women and 88% of men), discussing inappropriate behaviour by a colleague (70% of women and 65% of men), and approaching a superior to discuss family issues (76% of women and 81% of men).

Personnel believe that both ‘contact or non-kinetic’ skills and ‘combat or kinetic’ skills are needed for successful deployment

Tables 5 and 6 outline what personnel (deployed versus non-deployed) believed to be the top three most important and least important skills.

Table 5: Skills considered by non-deployed personnel as most important and least important for mission success

Three <i>most</i> important skills	% of women	% of men	Three <i>least</i> important skills	% of women	% of men
Combat/tactical skills	65	73	Having no family commitments	0	0
Physical fitness	42	41	Computer skills	1	0
Conflict resolution	37	40	Minimum rank	1	0

Table 6: Skills considered by deployed personnel as most important and least important for mission success

Three <i>most</i> important skills	% of women	% of men	Three <i>least</i> important skills	% of women	% of men
Combat/tactical skills	75	67	Gender awareness	0	0
Physical fitness	25	47	Minimum rank	0	0
Ability to work with locals in host country	50	36	Ability to speak French	0	1

The AFB deploy servicewomen with the five years of experience required by the UN, not more, in an effort to increase the deployment of servicewomen

UN policy requires that contingent members have at least five years' experience to deploy to a UN PO. According to data provided by the AFD, women are more likely to deploy with five- or six-years' experience (the minimum required), while men are more likely to deploy with 12–13 years of experience. This difference is seen as a necessary response to the UN demand to increase the number of women deployed and represents an effort by the AFB to increase women's deployment opportunities. Indeed, when asked about considerations for deploying personnel to UN missions, one decision-maker replied, 'Females are new in the army. So, they are not as experienced as males. When a female will be experienced then there will be no problem. As they aren't so experienced yet, we can't attach them in a major operation. We attach them with other activities like inquiry, injury nursing etc. And the UN set us a target about the ratio of female engagement. We are trying to achieve it.'

In contrast, the difference in years of experience for servicewomen and servicemen who act as contingent commanders is nominal. Women contingent commanders deploy with an average of 21–22 years' experience, and men with an average of 19–22 years' experience. However, as women have only been inducted since 2000, the number of women contingent commanders eligible to deploy is currently limited to the initial batches of women officers inducted.

MAIN BARRIERS

Women may be less likely to have the needed documentation to deploy

Only 36% of personnel report having a valid driver's licence, and for women that number is significantly lower – only 2%, compared to 41% for men. These data come from the survey, and AFB representatives at the validation workshop suggested that there may be some confusion, as it is unlikely that 41% of surveyed men have a driving licence. Nonetheless, it is the case that in Bangladesh citizens are less likely to hold a driving licence than in other countries. This is largely understood as a phenomenon related to the view that driving is a 'profession' undertaken by a specific class/group of people. For example, in 2019 there were only 2.47 vehicles per 1,000 people in Bangladesh – illustrating that having a car is extremely unlikely.

However, according to AFB representatives, officers from the rank of major and upwards are required to have a driving licence. This is relevant in terms of eligibility to be a military observer, as having a driving licence is required.¹⁰

Nonetheless, survey results reveal a significant difference between men and women personnel within the AFB holding a driving licence – even if the number of men is half of what the survey results show. This could represent a barrier to women's deployment in cases when being able to drive and having a driving licence are among the criteria for deployment (roles within contingent deployments as well as military observers). Notably, the difference between the proportion of men and that of women who hold a driving licence may be a reflection of gender roles. This is illustrated in a quote from a key informant interview: 'Asian girls cannot drive, or they are less skilled at driving. As a result, it acts as a barrier to conducting various operations in missions with female soldiers.'

There is some confusion over what criteria are needed for deployment

In the AFB there is no such criterion as a minimum or maximum age or a required rank to deploy to a UN PO. Rather, the UN requires that personnel have served for five years before being eligible to deploy. This was corroborated by survey responses: 82% of surveyed personnel believe there is no minimum age and 83% believe there is no maximum age limit. Similarly, 57% believe there is no rank requirement. Only about 16% of surveyed personnel are aware that a certain number of years is required to be eligible to deploy, while 34% believe there is no minimum year requirement.

¹⁰ 'Driving. Includes requirement for competence in driving a 4x4 vehicle cross-country on non-existent or unimproved roads. Also includes the requirement to have experience supervising vehicle daily maintenance and self-recovery.' UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations/Department of Field Support 2017, *United Nations Military Observers (UNMO) in Peacekeeping Operations, Guidelines*, March 2017, Ref. 2016.25.

Personnel do not believe that gender awareness is a skill

Gender awareness is listed as one of the least important skills for deployment (see Table 6). This is problematic, because gender awareness is a key policy doctrine and operational component of deployment. Furthermore, few personnel have knowledge and/or experience of analysing the influence of gender roles (gender mainstreaming) in a particular context. Just 7% of personnel experienced a gender awareness module and/or interview question during their pre-deployment process. This included 2% of women and 8% of men.

Interpersonal, communication, and conflict resolution skills are not a requirement by the UN despite their importance

Despite a high percentage of personnel who identify interpersonal, communication, and conflict resolution skills as necessary, they are not a UN requirement for deployment. However, 26% of men and 27% of women listed communication skills as one of the top three skills needed for deployment, 33% of men and 36% of women listed conflict resolution skills, and 38% of men and 34% of women listed the ability to work with the host population. Despite not being a requirement for deployment, the majority of personnel believed they possessed these skills: 70% of men and 73% of women believed they were skilled in communication/listening/interpersonal skills, 62% of men and 64% of women believed they had conflict resolution/negotiation skills, and 60% of men and 57% of women believed they could work with personnel from other countries.

According to AFB representatives at the validation workshop, the AFB conducts pre-deployment training to build the interpersonal, communications, and conflict resolution skills of all personnel identified for deployment. In addition, civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) officers, engagement teams, and staff officers receive specialized training in these areas. General awareness training for all service personnel includes interpersonal and communication skills.

Few personnel have the French language skills necessary for deployment

Only 4% of personnel (2% of women and 4% of men) selected knowledge of the French language as a requirement for UN POs. Additionally, just 7% possessed French language skills. More women had these skills than men: about 16% of women and 5% of men.

According to AFB representatives at the validation workshop, the AFB are currently in the process of building up their pool of officers with French language skills to meet the UN demand. This includes a 12-week language training programme at BIPSOT offered twice per year for officers.



ISSUE AREA 3: Deployment Selection

*The deployment selection issue area explores whether women are or are not prevented from deploying by a lack of information, a lack of connections to influential decision-makers, and/or because their superiors decide that it is too dangerous for them to deploy. This is a **low-priority issue area** for the AFB, because the selection process is standardized and largely perceived as fair.*

Summary of findings

The majority of women and men generally believe that the process for testing and selection is fair, and the majority of personnel think that no one is favoured. However, there is a belief among some men that women are favoured for deployment. This may be a result of the AFB prioritizing the deployment of women so as to meet the UN demand to increase the number of women deployed to peace operations.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Senior leaders express a commitment to improving awareness and information, particularly among women, to increase their interest and participation in UN POs.
- Both women and men believe the testing process to qualify for deployment is fair and standardized.

BARRIERS

- Some surveyed men believe that women are favoured for deployment. This may be a result of prioritizing the deployment of women to meet the UN requirement to increase women's participation in peace operations.

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

- There may be risk associated with the belief held by 50% of surveyed men that, favouring women for some opportunities unfairly disadvantages men.

Detailed findings

OPPORTUNITIES

Senior leaders believe there is a need to increase awareness of peacekeeping for women

A key informant (and senior leader) commented: 'mission awareness should be increased, then many women will get interested in participating in UN missions.' This sentiment was echoed consistently among key informants. For example, another key informant said the main problem is 'the lack of knowledge associated with peace operations. Till now we haven't been able to circulate appropriate knowledge so that negative perceptions about the work environment in peace operations can be minimized and perceptions can be more positive for women to participate in an enthusiastic fashion. Most people don't know what goes on in UN missions. Many of them think that they have to stay with a male counterpart, and they consider this as unsafe.' One continued: 'I think [informative] campaigns are very important. If you go, the [peacekeeping] environment won't harm you, but you can enjoy it. Even though the UN takes female officers for various posts, in our country [serving] women don't know it. So campaigning is a must, I think.'

According to the AFB, there is a standardized process for selection for deployment

Deployment selection in the AFB, whether for individuals or contingents, is based on institutional policies. The Overseas Operation Directorate of the respective force draws up the list of personnel for contingents in coordination with the concerned divisions and in line with AFB and UN criteria.

The AFB keeps three battalions on reserve in case the UN requests urgent deployment. In regular deployments, the AFB channel a request for troops to the Overseas Operations Directorates of the respective forces, which in turn reach out to the concerned divisions to develop the Order of Battle based on the mission requirements. Thereafter, the Overseas Operations Directorate follows the AFB's institutional policy approach in combination with UN guidelines to select, train, and prepare individuals and military contingents for deployment.

About 53% of surveyed personnel believe that the process for deployment is standardized. Approximately 37% of men believe they were chosen to deploy based on being in a contingent. However, according to AFB representatives at the validation workshop, deployment to a peace operation is not voluntary, nor achieved through a competitive application process. Rather, the AFB select contingents for deployment, as well as staff officers and military observers. The policy is that if a candidate is selected but declines to deploy, that candidate will not be considered for the same mission for a period of one year.

Personnel perform well on tests

According to the FFF, Bangladesh is visited by Mobile Training Support Teams, Selection Assistance Teams, or Mobile Training Teams more than once a year. Most people pass the pre-deployment assessment test – only 9% of people who took the exam failed it.

Personnel find the testing and the pre-deployment training fair

Testing for deployment is also perceived as fair. According to the survey, there were few complaints about testing for deployment in terms of it being too difficult, questions being irrelevant, cheating, shared results, time to take the examination, disrespect during the test, distractions, or lack of clarity; overall, 82% of people had no issues with the test. Women find the training process to be fair. One interviewed woman also stressed that the training process was fair and equally prepared members of both genders: ‘Women members must be sent to any level of mission. A female and a male member of the force go through the same training process. Therefore, it seems that all the men and women members of the Armed Forces of Bangladesh are qualified to participate in peace operations at any level.’

Personnel do not have to use their own resources to receive training

The AFB carries all the logistics costs for the troops, starting from the pre-deployment training phase and continuing throughout the length of the mission. This is reflected in the survey findings: 99% of personnel did not have to spend any personal money during the pre-deployment process, including four out of four women and 99% of men.

Personnel do not believe there is corruption in deployment selection practices

About 98% of personnel said they had never paid a bribe to deploy to a peace operation, and about 88% of personnel believe the process for deployment is fair.

MAIN BARRIERS

Some men believe women are favoured

While many respondents (32% of women and 43% of men) believe that no one is favoured, some men believe that women are favoured for positions within the AFB and deployment on UN POs. When asked if they thought that women were sometimes favoured for opportunities, such as jobs and promotions, 4% of women and 22% of men answered ‘yes’. In addition, 0% of women and 50% of men believed that favouring women for some opportunities unfairly disadvantages men. In contrast, only 15% of surveyed personnel believe women are favoured for UN peacekeeping deployment, while a greater portion, 18%, believe men are favoured. This suggests that personnel may be able to distinguish between the UN demand for more women in peace operations and positions, jobs, or promotions within the AFB.

However, according to AFB representatives at the validation workshop, women are more likely to deploy with only five to six years of service, while men are more likely to be selected for deployment with 12–13 years of service.



ISSUE AREA 4: Household Responsibilities

*The household responsibilities issue area explores the effect of having young children, elderly parents, or other family obligations on women's ability to deploy to peace operations, as compared to men. It also assesses whether there are social expectations of women who (might) deploy. This is a **high-priority issue area** for the AFB because, based on survey data and key informant interviews, women personnel are identified as primarily, if not exclusively, responsible for the care of families, children, and the household, and women continue to face social expectations to prioritize these responsibilities over deployment (or other career development opportunities). This issue area does not analyse the impact of prolonged deployment on families, but this has been identified as an important follow-up enquiry by AFB representatives.*

Summary of findings

Men and women have the same preference for the age of deployment (25 years old) and duration of deployment (one year). However, they have different preferences related to the age of their children during deployment and the frequency of deployment. Most notably, women prefer to deploy when their children are five years old and believe that a one-year, one-off deployment is ideal. In contrast, men prefer to deploy when their children are one year old or less and are willing to deploy for one year and for multiple deployments. Both men and women believe that men are suited for multiple deployments while women are suited for a single deployment.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Women and men do not believe that deployment hinders their ability to be good parents.
- Leaders recognize that family responsibilities can be a barrier to women's deployment, whether in self-selection not to deploy (among women personnel with families) or based on the social and family expectations of a husband or parents.
- Women are provided with flexibility or support for breastfeeding infants, and flexibility when they have a family. This includes 30 minutes' flexibility around work starting time for women with families (Navy policy); a one-hour break during office hours for lactating mothers (Air Force practice); and access to daycare for lactating mothers (Army practice).

BARRIERS

- Social and family expectations of women may represent a structural and social barrier for them to deploy.
- Men and women more consistently believe that women should get permission from their family before deploying in comparison to men.
- Parents may not give permission for their unmarried daughters to deploy.

GAPS IN PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCE

- Women and men personnel report that family considerations were not a factor in their decision to deploy, but they also report a belief that women must get permission to deploy and that women face socio-familial expectations that can be a barrier to deployment.

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

Gender roles appear to have a significant influence on whether and when it is believed that women can deploy. This is related to the extent to which gender roles limit unmarried women's autonomy due to reputational risk that could damage their eventual ability to marry (if they are with male soldiers in another country, for example). Gender roles also situate women with the primary, if not exclusive, responsibility for caring for children, and this may limit their deployment opportunities and/or put them at risk of social and family disapproval if they deploy when they have children.

Detailed findings

OPPORTUNITIES

Personnel do not believe that deployment hinders their ability to be good parents

About 96% of those surveyed (56 women and 439 men, representing 93% of women and 95% of men) disagreed with the statement that men who deploy to peace operations could not be good fathers. Only 3% agreed with the statement. When asked if women who deployed could still be good mothers, 96% of those surveyed disagreed that women with children who deployed could not be good parents. This included 76% of all parents of both genders. About 6% of people agreed with the statement – 2% of men and 2% of women.

The sample contained 404 confirmed parents (82%), made up of six mothers (out of 56 women) and 398 fathers (out of 439 men); 40 men and 21 women (including all four of the deployed women) declined to answer the question, leaving one man and 29 women who reported having no children. Looking exclusively at personnel who responded to the survey question, 17% of women and 99% of men are parents. All six women with children believed that men who deploy to peace operations could still be good fathers, while 96% of men with children believed that men could be both peacekeepers and good fathers. The one man without children strongly agreed that men who deploy to UN POs could not be good fathers. It is worth noting that the vast majority of the surveyed women did not have children, whereas most of the men did have children; indeed, only one man had no children. This point is illustrated by a servicewoman who elaborated on the tension between career and family goals many women face during their service: ‘Another thing is when we enter the professional life we reach the marital age. Twenty to 28 is the suitable time for getting married and having a baby. On the other hand, this is the time to build up a career. In the other services there are chances to get promoted later but, in our institution, if I don’t sit for an exam or I don’t attend a training course then I can’t go for the next rank. So sometimes the timing of career and personal life doesn’t match. Someone who has two babies, after giving birth she can’t fly for six years. That means she won’t be promoted as captain in those six years. So sometimes women fall behind by this natural reason. But there is no problem in the institution. Institutions don’t impose any rule of getting married or not to get married. It is her choice. I think it is a problem that only because of being a woman I can’t grow professionally.’

However, the AFB have also demonstrated support to women with families who deploy. One woman interviewee shared her experience of the incredible support she received from her supervisors when she had a family emergency. In this case, her role as a mother was respected and supported while she was deployed. She stated, ‘There was a disaster in my family. Just after ... going back [to the] UN mission from my leave my eldest daughter, who was a minor, was diagnosed as having cancer. It was devastating for me. Moreover, we can’t easily fly from Congo as there was no airport there. No international airport there. So, we needed to go to Uganda before we could fly to our country. It takes almost ten days to come to Bangladesh from Congo. It was a very violent type of cancer and it had to be removed very urgently. As it took ten to 15 days to come back to my country, she had to go for surgery in the meantime... I also submitted an application to drop the mission, mentioning that it isn’t possible for me to continue the mission as I am mentally and physically unable to continue. But the Air Force gave me great support. They told me, “No leave boundary. You can take leave as much as you need. Please give time to your baby. We will formally represent you under the UN/mission. Since it is a contract between two countries, if you feel good, please do come and join and after staying ten to 15 days come back to your country again.” I got a huge support from the Air Force and was staying with my baby for three months.’

Leadership recognize that household responsibilities can be a barrier to women’s participation in peace operations

Most key informants interviewed expressed the belief that women are constrained by their family responsibilities. This means that leadership are aware of specific challenges women face and can support policy and practice changes that can help mitigate these constraints. For example, a key informant noted that ‘from the perspective of a woman with a child, she has to keep the child with her mother-in-law [if she deploys]. But women don’t prefer that.’ Another key informant reported that, ‘In our country, women often experience family issues, childcare issues, and separation from family as holding them back. Those who have children or who are unmarried are unwilling to go.’

Leaders said they have chosen women to deploy, but that women do not want to be deployed due to their family responsibilities. For example, ‘Sometimes it has occurred that I select a woman officer, but she wants to start a family now. Then she can’t participate. Even after giving birth, a woman officer needs another year for rearing her child. This shows that I can’t recruit a woman officer for two years. Altogether, three years is lost before inducting a woman officer.’

Extended families may be able to provide childcare during deployment

About 68% of personnel surveyed (56 women and 439 men) noted that they could rely on extended family to provide childcare. It is increasingly common within Bangladeshi society for grandparents or extended family members to be involved in raising the children of their sons/daughters or relatives. This is a socio-cultural phenomenon that emerged when women first started to enter the job market and has increasingly become a norm in Bangladeshi society.

Women do not feel that they will miss out on career opportunities if deployed

Ninety-seven % of personnel (100% of women and 97% of men surveyed) said they did not feel they had missed or would miss out on any career opportunities by being deployed as a peacekeeper.

The ideal length of deployment is the same as actual deployment length

The ideal length of a peace operation according to the women who were surveyed was 12 months, which is very similar to the actual mean length of time spent on mission by female peacekeepers, which was 13 months.

Women believe the salary is sufficient to run a household

Fifty-two % of personnel (56 women and 439 men) said the salary associated with UN POs is sufficient to run a household. Women were much more likely to believe this than men: about 84% of women and 49% of men stated that the salary from deployment was sufficient to manage their household.

There are childcare facilities in the country, but there could be more options

When asked what types of childcare facilities were available in Bangladesh, the majority of personnel answered that they had no information regarding this (32% of women and 43% of men). The individuals that did have knowledge in this area provided a list of private daycare facilities and nannies (30% of women and 28% of men), childcare facilities at the Armed Forces (34% of women and 21% of men), and childcare subsidies provided by the Armed Forces (18% of women and 19% of men) as the most common options available. However, childcare is less of a problem in Bangladesh because the extended family may be available to help.

The Armed Forces have implemented some practices to support lactating mothers

Only 19% of personnel said the Armed Forces provided adequate breastfeeding/pumping arrangements, with the majority of personnel saying they did not know if the arrangements were adequate. At present there is 30 minutes' flexibility over start of work time for women with families (Navy policy); a one-hour break during office hours for lactating mothers (Air Force practice); and access to daycare for lactating mothers (Army practice).

The advent of additional policies and practices within the branches of the AFB is clearly helpful for women. For example, one interviewee said how difficult it was during her deployment for pregnant and nursing women, and her hope for the new policy. She stated, 'For maternity leave... a lactating mother faces various problems or difficulties, and the baby also gets deprived. We frequently used to submit these complaints... now a new law has been introduced even though those of us from the first and second batches didn't get this opportunity... we had to suffer, we went to the field during pregnancy, even cried also, almost every woman/mother does it... but now the new regulation provides arrangements for up to two years after giving birth with the permission of a commanding officer. She can go to her baby for one or two hours of her office time for breastfeeding or caring.' This quote suggests there is room for ongoing policy and practice adjustments that can help mitigate the barrier that family responsibilities can create for women who are called to deploy.

There is some flexibility in how work is conducted

Personnel reported a few different options for how work is conducted, including work hours that accommodate personal/family needs (63% of women and 68% of men) and the ability to leave the office if there is a family emergency (57% of women and 48% of men).

There is a vacation policy for personnel

About 97% of personnel reported that members of the Armed Forces are allowed to take vacations and holidays (95% of women and 98% of men).

Women do not believe family considerations are an impediment to deploying

Notably, 100% of surveyed personnel of both sexes (56 women and 439 men) stated that family considerations did not factor into their decision to apply to a UN PO. Moreover, 75% of the women sampled said they were not afraid of any family disapproval if they were deployed; in comparison, 80% of men were not concerned by family disapproval if they deployed. Fourteen % of men and 9% of women said they were afraid of family disapproval for deploying.

MAIN BARRIERS

Social and family expectations related to women's family responsibilities may represent a barrier for women to deploy

About 82% of deployed male respondents named the mother as the member of the family primarily responsible for childcare in their home. The responsibility of the mother was one of the most frequently named barriers among key informant interviews. One male key informant even noted, 'In the case of Bangladesh, if there is a child, it is always the mother's responsibility to take care of it, so a woman officer cannot go on a mission as easily as a male officer. In our society, women have to take care of the children all of the time.'

However, as indicated by the following quote from a female key informant, the AFB can do things to mitigate this barrier: 'If there is a good childcare system, and a reliable support system, then women can escape from the big worries of participating in UN POs. It would be better for the force to take any initiative to improve the childcare support system and provide reliable support, etc., so that women can manage the challenge of work and family more easily.'

Women may be expected to get permission from a male family member to deploy

About 97% of personnel believe that a woman should ask permission from her husband/father before being deployed to a UN peace operation: 68% of women (56 women) and 49% of men (439 men) agreed and 32% of women and 47% of men strongly agreed. In comparison, when asked if a man should seek permission from his family before deploying, 61% of women and 58% of men agreed and 34% of women and 32% of men strongly agreed. According to AFB representatives at the validation workshop, it is a social norm in Bangladesh for women to get permission from their family to deploy.

Key informant interviews confirmed this social norm. For example, a key informant stated, 'Parents don't want to send unmarried women on a peace operation. They think if their daughter goes to a mission she can be sexually abused, and no one will marry her. Again, for the married woman, the husband doesn't allow her to go abroad.' Similarly, some key informants expressed the belief that if a woman soldier is married to a man in the military, he will be more likely to support her deployment. One key leader noted: 'sometimes husbands working in civilian jobs will not allow their wife to participate in a mission. If the husband is from the Armed Forces, then he does not create any hindrance as he knows in the mission how his wife or a woman soldier stays, what are the amenities or what working environment exists in the field. But if the husband is a civilian, then it is difficult for him to know about the working environment. Then the husband may not allow her to participate in a peace operation.'

Women may experience social and family expectations to prioritize their family responsibilities or get married

Only 10% of respondents agreed that men may experience social and family disapproval for deploying to a peace operation (5% of women and 10% of men). In contrast, 42% of respondents agreed that women experience social and family disapproval (48% of women and 42% of men) for deploying. Fourteen % said that women may experience a greater level of social disapproval for being deployed.

This can also include a sense of moral impropriety directed towards unmarried women who deploy. For example, one key informant commented: ‘in the case of a daughter and being unmarried, parents prevent women from going abroad alone. The fear is that no one will marry the daughter if she has been to a foreign land while single. Often, it is observed that before going to any mission, parents marry off their daughters quickly.’ Another key informant remarked: ‘Even when I considered recruiting two women soldiers who were unmarried, their parents didn’t allow them to go. I called their parents and asked them why they did not allow their daughters the opportunity. They said, “My daughters would go abroad with male soldiers, which will be known to others. How can she get married if this information spreads?”’

However, interviews with key informants indicate that there is a way to mitigate potential social and family expectations by providing counselling to families of women who will be deployed. One informant commented: ‘it was discussed that the parents of women soldiers who fear social stigma would be invited for counselling. Can it be a way to convince them that women’s participation in the Armed Forces is safe or good for their careers?’

There is no paternal leave policy

While women are eligible for a six-month maternity leave up to twice per service term, there is no paternal leave policy for fathers in Bangladesh in either the public or the private sector.¹¹ However, according to AFB representatives, men can take leave when they feel it is necessary based on their personal requirements. Nonetheless, just 11% of personnel stated that they were aware of a paid maternity leave policy within the AFB, and almost all of those personnel were women (93% of women and 1% of men). The other forms of leave provided by the AFB include medical and disability leave, but there is no policy to support elderly care or family leave. Awareness of medical leave is relatively high, at 79% (93% of women and 77% of men).

Deployment preferences do not always match reality

One question asked, ‘when would be an ideal time to be deployed?’ Women reported that the ideal scenario for deployment is when they are around 25 years old, and their children are five years old. Women report being willing to deploy once for up to one year. Their ideal rank would be Sainik (soldier/private).

Women tend to be deployed when they are between the ages of 22 and 24, whereas most men are deployed when they are 30–35 years old. This is in contrast to when men would prefer to deploy, which was identified through the survey as about 25 years old and when their kids are less than one year old. Men reported that they should ideally be deployed twice, with each deployment for a one-year period. The ideal rank for men would be Sainik (soldier/private).

¹¹ ‘Paternity leave is generally a short period of leave for the father immediately following childbirth. Its aim is to enable fathers to assist the mother to recover from childbirth, which is also crucial in establishing breastfeeding, take care of the newborn as well as other children, attend to the registration of the birth and other family-related responsibilities. Paternity leave is either provided as a separate leave measure for fathers or included in the “special leave” provisions to which all employees are entitled. Paternity leave entitlements can be found in the national legislation of at least 79 countries out of 167 for which data are available: 29 in Africa, seven in Asia, five in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 24 in the Developed Economies, 13 in Latin America and the Caribbean and two countries, Saudi Arabia and Syrian Arab Republic, in the Middle East.’ International Labour Office, *Maternity and Paternity at Work: Law and Practice across the World* (Geneva: ILO, 2014), p. 52.

ISSUE AREA 5: Peace Operations Infrastructure

*The peace operations infrastructure issue area assesses whether a lack of adequate equipment and infrastructure prevents women from deploying to peace operations. This is a **low priority issue area** for the Armed Forces because there are generally adequate services, infrastructure, and uniforms for women.*

Summary of findings

The AFB report that they conduct a gendered needs assessment to ensure that all personnel have access to the necessary equipment, infrastructure, and training. Key informant interviews note that by conducting this assessment they are hopeful that more women will feel confident about joining the Armed Forces. However, in the context of peace operations deployment, both mental health services and reproductive health services may not be adequately available and/or accessible to deployed peacekeepers.

OPPORTUNITIES

- According to the FFF, the AFB conduct a gendered needs assessment to identify the specific needs of women personnel. AFB representatives at the validation workshop reported that the practice of conducting gendered needs assessments was implemented by leadership at all levels with the inception of women officers in 2000. Leadership acknowledges that women have different needs in relation to equipment, supplies, and infrastructure.
- A new three-story accommodation building for women personnel supported by a US\$1 million EIF grant is currently under construction at BIPSOT.
- There are regular reviews and updates of in-mission equipment (computers, armoured vehicles).
- All four deployed women reported that the barracks, bathrooms, equipment, and uniforms were adequate.

BARRIERS

- Women may be less likely to receive in-service peacekeeping training.

GAPS IN PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCE

- Despite the claimed use of a gendered needs assessment, two of the four deployed women report receiving no feminine hygiene products in their deployment kit.

Detailed findings

OPPORTUNITIES

Personnel receive the gear they need while on deployment

According to the FFF, women receive deployment gear/equipment/uniforms specifically made for them. The FFF also indicates that there are sleeping quarters for 100% of deployed personnel in missions. About 63% of deployed men and all four women reported that the barracks, bathrooms, equipment, and uniforms were adequate in mission. Only about 15% of respondents (all male) said the door to their sleeping quarters could not be locked.

The AFB conducts a gendered needs assessment

According to the FFF and AFB representatives at the validation workshop, a gender needs assessment is conducted by leadership to identify the specific needs of women in relation to deployment on peace operations.¹² Moreover, according to the FFF, women receive deployment equipment (gear, uniforms, etc.) specifically made for women. Mission leaders understand that women have specific needs. One stated, 'You know, even a bullet-proof jacket needs to be tailored particularly for women. When it comes to logistics, everything should be thought differently, and the criterion should be 'women friendly'. The design of the training centre dedicated for women has also incorporated women-friendly amenities. Once it is completed and functional, women's participation shall increase, I think.'

Plan to build servicewomen's accommodation at BIPSOT

Project funding has been approved by the US EIF to build a three-story accommodation facility for women personnel at BIPSOT. Key informant interviews suggest that this will enable many more women to participate in pre-deployment and refresher training for deployment on peace operations.

Consistent with this, multiple members of the Armed Forces listed improvements to infrastructure as one of the changes they would like to see to reduce barriers for women. For example, one male interviewee said, 'We currently have quarters for the families of the officers who went to a UN mission. If such arrangements are made for the families of women soldiers, they will be free from many family-centred worries. Currently 119 women soldiers are deployed to a UN mission. If we increase it by 8%, then this number will be 300 plus. It is very good to arrange accommodation for their families.' However, it is important to note that, according to UN guidelines, family housing is limited to very low-risk peace operations like in the case of Cyprus.

Personnel have access to general health services while on mission

According to the FFF, female physicians are available for women. Two out of the four women deployed reported that they received care from a woman physician. According to the FFF, peacekeepers have general access to healthcare during missions. This was corroborated by survey results which revealed that 100% of personnel said they had healthcare while deployed.

Personnel have access to mental healthcare

According to the FFF, peacekeepers have access to mental healthcare during missions: 70% of male survey respondents and all four female personnel who deployed said they had access to this care. Of those who had deployed, 39 men and none of the four women listed mental healthcare during the mission as being inadequate in their opinion.

Bangladesh has institutional capacity and infrastructure for deployment in host countries

According to the FFF, Bangladesh has a consulate in the peace operations countries to which it deploys. This makes it easier for any passport- or visa-related problems to be resolved.

Bangladesh regularly updates its peacekeeping facilities and equipment

Leaders stated that the government provides resources to the Armed Forces to maintain their equipment for deployment. One stated, 'Mainly, I want to speak about the contingent. I observed that the Bangladesh Army and the government are very considerate about it. Senior officers and chiefs visit all the missions and specifically risky missions. When I went, I saw that the number of armoured cars, which represents critical equipment, increased from 14 to 32. Computers with outdated technologies were phased out gradually. Armoured cars were equipped with updated and remote technology.'

Bangladesh uses its national carrier for peacekeeping transport

Bangladesh Biman flies AFB's UN PO troops to their locations. Leaders stated: 'We negotiate with Bangladesh Biman regarding the number of troops to be deployed and about the destination and timeline. For this, Biman charges a lump-sum amount. Again, we pursue the matter of using our national carrier with UN headquarters so that Bangladesh Biman receives the negotiated amount. One may wonder why we use our national carrier. In this context, we should applaud the Prime Minister's effort to make the national carrier more profitable by earning foreign currency through this means. Therefore, most [but not 100%] of our contingents are sent using our national carrier.' In Bangladesh, as the statement suggests, there is a general awareness regarding promoting Bangladesh's image globally through UN POs, where national resources are properly utilized.

Personnel receive training from other countries

According to the FFF, personnel get sent to peacekeeping training centres in other countries. Only three people in the sample of deployed personnel and two non-deployed personnel received training outside Bangladesh, and they were all men. However, one woman and 27 men in the survey said that during the course of their careers they have participated in international military training in locations such as China, India, and Malaysia. According to AFB representatives at the validation workshop, selection for this training is based on performance criteria and merit – gender is not a selection factor.

Pre-deployment training is adequate

Most people believed that pre-deployment training was adequate: 92% of personnel who received training believe that the training provided them with the information they needed. However, only 5% of survey respondents reported receiving peacekeeping training at BIPSOT. This is likely a result of the 'train the trainers' (ToT) process that BIPSOT uses to provide pre-deployment training (see below).

The country uses 'train the trainers' for pre-deployment training

The troops selected for missions receive pre-deployment training. It should be noted here that not all of them receive the training at BIPSOT, as the AFB use a 'train the trainers' method. This involves a 13-week training curriculum: the first week is conducted at the contingent level at BIPSOT, then selected personnel attend a six-week ToT course at BIPSOT; thereafter, ToT participants return to their contingents and deliver the six-week training course; and finally, the entire contingent (infantry contingents) comes to BIPSOT for a four-week series of field training exercises and, later, there are two more weeks of refresher training.

One key informant explained, 'We can't send full contingents to the BIPSOT. We send some for the training of the trainers.' Indeed, in our sample, only 5% had been trained (finished training) at BIPSOT, while 22% of personnel reported receiving in-service training through the ToT method. This is likely a distinction between personnel who participated in the six-week ToT course and those who received training within their contingent from one of these trainers.

BIPSOT

The Peacekeeping Operation Training Centre was established in Bangladesh on 24 June 1999 at Rajendrapur Cantonment to train potential peacekeepers. In 2002 the centre was renamed as the Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operation Training (BIPSOT), thus BIPSOT was one of the pioneer peacekeeping training centres in the world. On average, BIPSOT conducts 30 annual courses involving a minimum of 100 training weeks. As of 2022, BIPSOT has trained more than 34,385 peacekeepers, including 2,362 overseas participants from 49 countries.

In addition, BIPSOT has been the chair of the International Association of Peace Training Centers (IAPTC) for the last two rotations and is set to be elected and nominated as chair for a third consecutive rotation. The annual IAPTC conference was held at BIPSOT in October 2022.

Online training is increasingly used

Peacekeeping training has historically been in-person training either at BIPSOT or through the ToT in-service methodology. However, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, BIPSOT, like many other training and education institutions around the world, adapted training to the online environment. According to AFB representatives at the validation workshop, a variety of courses now have components that are offered online, in particular with international guest lecturers. This includes courses on WPS, and for UN staff officers or military observers. In addition, the delivery of core pre-deployment training material is now conducted online. This course is compulsory for all personnel being deployed to UN POs, regardless of rank or role.

The AFB provides separate toilets and wash facilities for officers and soldiers in peace operations

According to AFB representatives at the validation workshop, women within the AFB have a preference for separate toilet/wash facilities (in mission and domestically). Since 2005 the AFB have provided women officers with separate toilet/wash facilities, and since 2019 the AFB have provided women soldiers/NCOs with separate facilities in peace operations.

One key informant interviewee noted: 'girls have a lot of distance from their toilets [in peace operations]. The girls cannot go to the toilet alone because the toilet is far away, and they have to take another girl at night. In addition, due to the fact that the toilets are far away, and the females' and males' toilets are side by side, the privacy of the girls is being violated and sexual harassment also happens many times... A female soldier from a foreign country complained to me [about such harassment] because I was the commanding officer of that contingent at the time. I conveyed the allegations to the higher authorities and took action accordingly. It would be safer for female soldiers if their toilet or bathroom facilities were connected or attached to their living quarters.'

MAIN BARRIERS

While in-service training is common, surveyed women reported they were less likely to receive in-service training about peacekeeping

In-service training is designed to serve the goals and objectives of the Armed Forces to combat national security challenges. Peacekeeping has gradually become an important goal of the AFB. Each branch of the Armed Forces has mainstreamed an in-service training curriculum on peacekeeping. This includes familiarizing personnel with UN peacekeeping, UN policy and doctrine (including WPS), and UN mandates. According to AFB representatives at the validation workshop, this means service personnel are more likely to be familiar with UN regulations and, as such, better positioned for deployment as well as working with or for the UN following their retirement from the AFB. However, according to the survey, only 27% of respondents (29% of all men and 15% of all women) received peacekeeping training as part of in-service training.

Uniforms may not always fit

According to the FFF, women receive deployment gear/equipment/uniforms specifically made for them. Yet survey results reveal that the UN-specific uniforms provided by the AFB fit personnel only 76% of the time (two of the four women and 77% of men). This compares with 95% of personnel who reported that the uniform provided during their time in the AFB always fits. The AFB dress code follows a secular tradition and is applicable to all service members irrespective of their religion, caste, or ethnicity; 89% of personnel surveyed confirmed this.

Women may not consistently be supplied with hygiene products

According to the FFF, feminine hygiene products are part of the standard deployment kit. However, two of the four women survey respondents with deployment experience noted that feminine hygiene products were not part of their kit.

Personnel mentioned not having adequate facilities while on mission

There were 70 men (but none of the four women who deployed) who felt that some of the facilities they encountered while on mission were inadequate. This included office space, bathrooms, dining, and recreation space, with the most common complaint involving sleeping quarters (15% of personnel, all of whom were men).

Some personnel did not have access to reproductive healthcare on mission

According to the FFF, peacekeepers have access to free reproductive healthcare while on missions. However, the survey findings suggest that 42% of male respondents had free reproductive healthcare, while 17% reported they did not have access to any. All four women who deployed said that they had access to free reproductive healthcare.



ISSUE AREA 6: Peace Operations Experiences

The peace operations experiences issue area assesses the impact of (positive and negative) experiences during deployment, including experiences of meaningful participation, women's decisions to redeploy or not, and encouragement or discouragement of others before deploying. This is a low-priority issue area for the AFB, because most men did not face many challenges while on mission and the sample size of deployed women is too small to draw conclusions.

Summary of findings

Because the survey did not include a sufficient sample size to make any claims about deployed women, this section only addresses barriers to men's deployment experiences. Where possible, we include information about the four women in the survey, but this should not be used as evidence for any recommendations. Instead, more research should be conducted about the actual experiences of women on mission to validate the findings mentioned here.

Survey results reveal that deployed men have not generally had negative experiences while on mission. Similarly, men returning from mission report having no problem with their physical or mental health, though some experienced being subject to rumours and others have encountered some family problems. The majority of those surveyed believe that both women and men are necessary for successful peace operations.

OPPORTUNITIES

- All the deployed men except one (and all four deployed women) reported not experiencing any discrimination during deployment. Similarly, 95% of men (and all four deployed women) reported believing that everyone was treated with respect during missions.
- A majority of men reported receiving assistance transitioning back from the UN (48%), a formal programme in the Armed Forces (36%), the government (23%), and their supervisors (1%).
- Personnel believe that women and men peacekeepers, together, are necessary for mission success.

BARRIERS

- Deployed men reported experiencing a variety of problems during their mission, including homesickness (34%), feeling unsafe due to violence in the host country (23%), and health problems (23%).

GAPS IN PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCE

- Thirty-four % of deployed men (and two of the four deployed women) reported feeling unsafe during combat operations, yet the overwhelming majority of men report feeling prepared for deployment; two women report not feeling prepared for deployment.

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

- Gender roles may shape how senior leaders view the value of deploying women in peace operations, and result in limiting their role to working with local women and children.

As reported by senior leaders, social exclusion may be an issue for women. To the extent that women do not want to live alone or with a majority of male soldiers, this may negatively influence their decision to deploy.

Detailed findings

OPPORTUNITIES

Deployed men did not experience discrimination while on mission

Only one man reported experiencing criticism while on mission, stating that it was directed at him for being too emotional. All four women and the remainder of the men stated that they had not experienced any criticism; 95% of men (and all four deployed women) also stated that they had not witnessed any form of favouritism while on mission. The few individuals who did witness favouritism attributed it to friendship, geographical origin, nationality, or religion. Similarly, 95% of men (and all four deployed women) reported that everyone in a peace operation is treated with respect, although a few individuals witnessed cases of young/junior staff and people from developing countries receiving less respect during the peacekeeping operation.

A majority of men (and the four women deployed) had help transitioning back after deployment

About 81% of deployed men (and all four women) said they had help transitioning back from mission. Deployed men reported being assisted by the UN (48%), a formal programme in the Armed Forces (36%), the government (23%), and their supervisors (1%).

Personnel believed that men and women peacekeepers are necessary for the success of the mission

About 87% of surveyed personnel (56 women and 439 men) believe that women peacekeepers are necessary for the success of a mission, and 93% believe that men peacekeepers are necessary for this success. One interviewee reported that the positive perceptions of women peacekeepers by locals help to make missions more effective: 'In South Sudan, for example, when women soldiers go for patrol duty with men soldiers, the peace operation becomes easier. Women soldiers' activities are also well received by local media.'

Leaders believed that personnel make a difference while on mission because of women's participation

Senior leaders have pointed to how women's engagement with local women helps the UN and the AFB to have a positive experience in the mission. One stated, "The intimacy among the Malian women and our women soldiers helped. We could receive more information. Maybe, for this reason, [the] Gao women's association came to us with gifts, cakes, and certificates. The Gao female association communicated with us and informed us that they wanted to meet. Then we invited them, and they came. They appreciated us, our work, and gave us gifts too. I think much of the credit should go to our two women officers who were with us in the mission.'

The socio-cultural context in many parts of the world enables women to have access to places, people, and information that may otherwise be inaccessible. Women serving in the AFB who deploy use this opportunity to increase community engagement, collect critical intelligence, and identify a more comprehensive set of needs related to safety, security, and livelihood. Capitalizing on the access that women may have in specific socio-cultural contexts can provide important strategic, operational, and tactical advantages. However, it is worth considering how limiting women peacekeepers to gender-based roles, like working with women and children, could undermine the overall advantage of women peacekeepers.

The survey results show that men (and the four women deployed) have generally not had negative experiences while deployed

- One hundred % of the personnel surveyed said they never received unwanted text messages.
- Ninety-nine % of the personnel surveyed said they never received criticism for not fulfilling family duties.
- Ninety-six % of the personnel surveyed said they had never heard or been called a bad name.
- One hundred % of the personnel surveyed said they never heard of, or experienced unwanted pictures published on the internet by colleagues.
- Ninety-eight % of the personnel surveyed said they never heard jokes being made about women.
- Ninety-four % of the personnel surveyed said they never heard jokes being made about physical appearance.
- One hundred % of the personnel surveyed said they never heard jokes being made about sexual orientation.

The majority of men did not have problems when they returned.

Ninety % of deployed male personnel stated they had no problems when they returned. Of those who had problems, most were physical and mental health problems. Some faced rumours upon return, and others faced some difficulties with family.

Most deployed men engaged with locals regularly

Sixty-seven % of men (and three out of the four women) reported interacting with the local population at least once during their deployment (Table 7). Of the men who interacted with locals, 56% (and all four women) reported this interaction happening on a daily or weekly basis.

Table 7: Ways in which deployed personnel interacted with locals during their most recent deployment

In what ways did you interact with locals during your last deployment?		
Task	No. of women (total = 4)	No. of men (total = 214)
Trained and/or monitored the local security forces	0	9
Engaged in community-based work	2	16
Provided services to the community	3	50
Monitored local activities for situation reports	1	8
Participated in patrols	3	60
Engaged in civilian protection activities (e.g. refugee camps, etc.)	3	16
Participated in local events (e.g. went to a local church/mosque)	1	8
Volunteered my own time to help the community	0	7

Few people have heard complaints about missions, and these complaints did not affect their own decision to deploy

About 11% of surveyed personnel (56 women and 439 men) heard male peacekeepers speak negatively about deployment. Among the 55 individuals who heard such complaints, seven personnel were affected – it influenced their interest in deployment. Only two personnel reported hearing deployed women complain about their mission experience, and one of those two people’s interest in deployment was affected by this.

Men believe that their role in the mission matched their skills

About 99% of deployed men (and all four women) believed that the role they played in the mission matched their skills. However, one male interviewee indicated that sometimes women’s roles in the mission were different than men’s because of concerns over their safety: ‘Women soldiers also face many difficulties in getting on or off the ropes by helicopter during patrols. We need to see if the weapons and other equipment used in UN missions are user-friendly or suitable for women soldiers. Considering such various aspects, they were sent to the soft patrolling of the mission.’

Many personnel do not engage in extra work outside their duties

About 46% of men (and three of the four deployed women) did not engage in duties outside their scope of work, such as cleaning, cooking, community service, driving, and teaching. Of the four women who deployed, one engaged in extra work outside the scope of her duties.

Men believed they were prepared for the mission

About 99% of deployed men (and three of the four women) believed they were prepared for the mission.

MAIN BARRIERS

More than half of men engaged in operational activities, and some felt unsafe

During their deployment, 52% of men (and two of the four women) reported engaging in operational activities at least once. About 35% of deployed men (none of the women) reported feeling unsafe during their deployment (Table 8).

Table 8: Problems faced by personnel in deployment

Mission Problem	No. of women (total = 4); (% in parenthesis)	No. of men (total = 214); (% in parenthesis)
Driving accident	1 (25)	9 (4)
Health problems	0 (0)	23 (11)
Problems adjusting to local culture	0 (0)	19 (9)
Homesickness	1 (25)	72 (34)
Problems with lodging/hygiene	0 (0)	9 (4)
Problems with food	0 (0)	10 (5)
Feeling unsafe due to violence in the country	0 (0)	50 (23)
Victim of a crime	0 (0)	0 (0)
None	3 (75)	99 (46)

Senior leaders believe that women hold negative perceptions about the mission

When asked about barriers, several senior leaders suggested that women soldiers hold negative perceptions about missions and thus do not want to go. One leader said, 'When I gave feedback and said I used to live alone, women soldiers thought the environment was too adverse for them.' Another senior leader said that because there were so few women, it made the environment challenging. This was considered a negative experience, and they had shared it with other women. 'When the number of male soldiers is too many, it is really difficult for women to stay together in the same camp. So, it is natural to raise negative notions. As there are knowledge gaps, negative perceptions grow.'

Men did not engage in mentorship or networking in mission

In general, men did not engage in social activities, including mentorship and networking opportunities, while in the mission: 97% of men (and all four deployed women) reported not participating in any networking or mentoring opportunities while deployed.

Most men did not frequently interact with other peacekeepers

Only three deployed men reported daily social experiences with other peacekeepers, with most reporting that they were social once a month (22%), once every few months (43%), or never (22%). All the four deployed women reported participating in a social event with other peacekeepers once every few months.

Men were not able to travel while in mission

Ninety-eight % of men (and all four women) reported that they were not able to leave the mission base/compound whenever they wanted, and 95% of men and 100% of women did not have access to a vehicle during deployment. Travelling while on mission requires the permission of the commanding officer or other relevant authorities. This includes internal mission travel as well as leaving the mission for travel.

Men have not served in the role of gender focal point in missions

Ninety-nine % of all deployed men (and all four women) reported that they did not serve as a gender focal point while on mission.

Men returned to the same job they had before deployment

About 96% of deployed men (and all four women) returned to the same job they had before they were deployed. This may represent a lost opportunity, particularly in cases in which new skills are gained through a deployment (see the next section for further information).



ISSUE AREA 7: Career Value

The career value issue area measures whether peace operations help the careers of military personnel. This, in turn, may contribute to whether or not men and women are likely to deploy and redeploy. Women who have deployed may choose not to redeploy if it is not advantageous to their career development. This is an issue area of low priority for the AFB because personnel largely believe that deploying to a peace operation benefits them.

Summary of findings

Among AFB personnel, peacekeeping is considered beneficial in terms of extra salary, expanding one's social and professional network, and acquiring new skills. Peacekeeping is recognized annually on National Peacekeeping Day.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Peacekeepers report acquiring new skills.

BARRIERS

- Peacekeeping is not formally recognized by the AFB in terms of career change (changing role or unit), or career advancement (increase in rank).

GAPS IN PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCE

- While Bangladesh holds a National Peacekeeping Day to recognize the Armed Forces' contributions to peacekeeping, some peacekeepers reported not being recognized for having deployed.

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

- Gender roles may make it difficult for women to advance – to deploy on a peace operation, sit for exams, or participate in training – due to family and social constraints.

Detailed findings

OPPORTUNITIES

Peacekeeping helps people to learn new skills

About 75% of personnel said that peacekeeping helped them learn new skills. When the entire sample was asked a hypothetical question, 80% of women and 74% of men reported that learning new skills was one of the most important benefits they think they would receive or did receive from participating in a UN PO. Of personnel with deployment experience, 70% listed skill increase as a benefit, compared to 79% of those without peacekeeping experience who answered the question hypothetically.

Peacekeeping deployment provided personnel with extra salary

About 98% of survey respondents said that one of deployment's benefits is the extra salary. When the entire sample was asked a hypothetical question, 93% of women and 99% of men reported that a pay increase was one of the most important benefits they think they would receive or did receive from participating in a UN PO. For personnel who had deployment experience, 99.5% listed a salary increase as a benefit, compared to 97% of those without peacekeeping experience who answered the question hypothetically.

Peace operations provided networking opportunities

About 25% of personnel surveyed said they thought peacekeeping gave them new friends and social networks. When asked to the entire sample as a hypothetical question, 36% of women and 23% of men reported that making new friends/expanding their social network was one of the most important benefits they would or did receive from participating in a UN PO. For personnel who had deployment experience, 22% listed an expanded social circle as a benefit, compared to 27% of those without peacekeeping experience who answered the question hypothetically.

There is a national peacekeeping day

National Peacekeeping Day is on 29 May every year, in alignment with the International Day of UN Peacekeepers. There are several national events organized by the AFD, with the head of government presiding over programmes commemorating the contribution of peacekeepers. Different forces also commemorate the day, highlighting their particular achievements and paying tribute to fallen soldiers. National television and print media provide specific coverage of the events and programmes, including the publication of special supplementary articles. Senior leaders believe that a national commemoration day importantly brings attention to Bangladesh's role in international peacekeeping. For example, one key leader noted, 'Peacekeeping Day is coming. On the occasion of Peacekeeping Day, there will be a talk show on each TV channel. The purpose of the talk show is to make people across the country aware about the need for Bangladesh's contribution in UN missions so that it creates enthusiasm for a greater participation across the board. The more we televise the issue through the media, the more we can reach to people so that barriers [to deployment] can be overcome sooner.'

Senior leaders believe that peacekeeping professionalizes the Armed Forces

Senior leaders have suggested that peacekeeping helps to professionalize the Armed Forces: 'After they come back from Mali or other countries, they become more professional. And it is a great achievement for Bangladesh as well as the AFB.'

Bangladesh is drafting a national peacekeeping strategy

Bangladesh is in the process of drafting a national peacekeeping strategy, which will incorporate various aspects of peacekeeping and peacebuilding issues. Peacekeeping is also part of the Forces' Goal 2030, noted by senior leadership during key informant interviews.

Peacekeeping can contribute to advancement, even while it is not a formal criterion for advancement

According to AFB representatives at the validation workshop, deployment to a UN PO does not play a formal role in career advancement and is not a specific criterion. Service personnel are selected for deployment based on the UN demand and deployment criteria. However, deployment on a peace operation can and does assist officers and soldiers interested in a UN career or advancement within the AFB. For example, if an officer has been deployed in a leadership position to a peace operation, or assigned to a post at UNDP headquarters, this will in practice be taken into consideration.

Bangladesh recognizes peacekeeping and peacekeepers

The achievements of the AFB are recognized by the political leaders of the country, including on National Peacekeeping Day on 29 May, when the contributions of fallen heroes are highlighted.

In addition, after completion of a mission the AFB give every deployed service member a specific peace operation insignia they can attach to their uniform. It marks their association with and contribution to a UN PO. Also of note is a sculpture honouring peacekeeping located at BIPSOT. Finally, a number of publications (travelogue and non-fiction) outline the experiences and tasks carried out during peace operations by AFB participants.

MAIN BARRIERS

Peacekeeping may not generally be perceived to contribute to formal career advancement

Thirty-four % of survey respondents believe that peacekeeping deployment advances their careers (52% of women and 32% of men). Looking specifically at those with peacekeeping experience, only 38% said that this experience advanced their careers, while 38% of survey respondents believe that peacekeeping deployment does not advance their career. About 13% of respondents said that deployment to a UN PO improves their CV/resume.

However, survey respondents are mostly representative of non-commissioned members of the Armed Forces. Their promotions and job tenures are of a limited nature. The potential for future employment opportunities after retirement is also limited. Interview findings suggest that deployment opportunities may provide soldiers/NCOs with much-needed financial security that would otherwise not be available to them.

According to the FFF and survey results, peace operation experience is not formally considered in decisions for promotions. Only 5% of respondents (9% of women and 5% of men) said that deployment to a UN PO would help them in promotions.



ISSUE AREA 8: Top-down Leadership

*The top-down leadership issue area explores the impact of political will (or the lack thereof) among those in influential positions on women's deployment and meaningful participation in peace operations. This is a **medium-priority issue area** for the AFB, because there is a lack of known and available gender-specific training and limited female role models or mentoring for servicewomen.*

Summary of findings

Bangladesh and the AFB have committed to increasing the number of women deployed to peace operations. The majority of personnel note that they are willing to approach leadership about personal matters – indicating a level of confidence between ranks. However, there are a limited number of women in leadership positions and a limited number of women who have deployed or are eligible to be deployed. For the time being, this may indicate that women are less likely to have women allies, mentors, and role models. This may signal a need to provide planned and structured capacity-building and mentoring targeted at women to ensure they have the support necessary to advance. Nonetheless, this context is changing as more women are being inducted and thus changing the face of the AFB. For example, a widely distributed photo of the first two Bangladeshi women combat pilots – Nayma Haque and Tamanna-e-Lutfi, who were deployed to MONUSCO in 2017 – has generated interest among younger women.

OPPORTUNITIES

- According to key informant interviews, there is leadership support for gender mainstreaming overall and specifically for increasing the number of women in every sector, including the AFB and peacekeeping.
- Personnel note that they are willing to approach leadership about personal matters – indicating a level of confidence between ranks.

BARRIERS

- According to survey results, personnel have not attended gender-specific training, even while this is required for pre-deployment training and also more generally within the AFB.

GAPS IN PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCE

- According to the FFF, a variety of gender training is both available and required for new recruits and in the context of pre-deployment training, yet the majority of personnel, both deployed and non-deployed, are unaware of these training opportunities and requirements.

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

- While gender mainstreaming is recognized as important by key decision-makers, survey data suggests that this commitment has not yet been fully implemented in the context of peacekeeping training.

Detailed findings

OPPORTUNITIES

There is leadership support for gender mainstreaming

Some leaders have an understanding of what gender mainstreaming can involve. For example, one leader said: 'For the progress of developing countries along with Bangladesh, we need to ensure equal participation of men and women in every sector. If the UN POs are male dominated, women of the host country would not feel secure enough to interact with the members of the UN PO. A male soldier can't know the problems, needs, advantages, and disadvantages of women in a conflict zone. From this perspective, recruiting women soldiers who can cross this barrier and make connections with women in a host country can help the UN's role to have a lasting impact.'

Personnel are willing to approach leadership about personal matters

Eighty % of personnel in the sample feel willing to approach leaders about personal matters.

There are national frameworks related to gender

According to the FFF, there is a national commitment to increasing the number of women peacekeepers and an official policy on SEA: 'Bangladesh Armed Forces strictly maintain 'zero tolerance' of any SEA cases either in country or mission area. We have a clear policy of dismiss[al] from service for any rank, if any SEA cases [are] proved.'

Women have mentors in the Armed Forces

Sixty-eight % of all survey respondents (both men and women) said they have mentors within the Armed Forces.

Initiation of a gender focal point system

Following the adoption of the NAP on Women, Peace and Security on 24 November 2019, all ministries and departments in Bangladesh appointed gender focal points to support the implementation of the NAP. In 2020 a gender adviser was appointed to the AFD and gender focal points were appointed to the Army, Navy, and Air Force. The gender focal points, in coordination with the gender adviser, are responsible for advancing the NAP and addressing the needs of servicewomen. This includes, for example, holding monthly meetings with all servicewomen of the respective formations to identify and discuss the needs of women soldiers and raise awareness about gender. The outcome of each meeting is reported to the head of the formation in case there is a need for follow-up action, including convening service members to advance awareness. This practice started with the initial induction of women in commissioned and non-commissioned ranks and has since become an established practice within the AFB. However, since gender focal points were first appointed in 2020 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, they were not able to hold monthly meetings. This may account for the lack of awareness among surveyed personnel, as noted below.

According to survey data, 96% of personnel are not aware of the gender focal point position or function. Survey results also revealed that 99% of personnel are not aware of a gender mainstreaming policy, which is understandable – while the National Defence Policy on Gender Mainstreaming has been drafted, it has not yet been adopted. Finally, according to the FFF, the AFB has gender coaches, yet 97% of surveyed personnel are not aware that these coaches are available.

Women are more likely to know other female peacekeepers

Women trailblazers who have deployed can act as role models and/or mentors (formally or informally) for non-deployed women among the personnel. Eight % of men and 54% of women know a trailblazer, while 16% of deployed personnel and 12% of undeployed personnel know a female trailblazer.

The AFB have initiated gender-specific training

Beginning in 2018, when the first female engagement team (FET) was deployed, specialized training on gender-related topics has been provided, including gender mainstreaming and the WPS agenda.

The AFB report that BIPSOT provides training and courses on the following topics:

- women, peace, and security (WPS);
- Female Military Officers course;
- Gender Adviser course; and
- FET training as part of pre-deployment training.

All UN officer courses, like the UN Staff Officers' course, UN Logistic Officers' course, and UN Military Observers' course, have a 'Core Pre-deployment Training Materials' module that includes basic knowledge on human rights, SEA, conflict-related sexual violence, and WPS.

According to the FFF, gender training is required for all new recruits at the basic academy. Yet 86% of survey respondents (88% of men and 76% of women; 86% of deployed personnel and 87% of undeployed) are not aware of gender training for new recruits.

According to the FFF, gender training is offered at pre-deployment training. However, 58% of survey respondents (59% of all men and 48% of all women; 51% of deployed personnel and 63% of undeployed) are not aware that gender training is offered at pre-deployment training. While SEA training is offered during pre-deployment training, 42% of deployed personnel are not aware of this.

However, as actions to provide gender-specific training were only recently initiated, the results may not have been apparent within the data collected. This likely reflects a gap between changes in awareness and experience and institutional policy/practice. It may also reflect the different training opportunities and awareness available to officers in contrast to soldiers/NCOs (the survey was conducted with soldiers/NCOs).

FFF data also indicate that senior leaders, as well as mid-career officials, have not taken at least one gender training course.

Finally, 51% of all survey respondents (50% of men and 59% of women; 46% of deployed personnel and 56% of personnel who have not deployed) had no knowledge about UNSCR 1325.

Table 9 highlights the percentage of personnel attending different types of gender training (please note these data are from 2020–2022).

Table 9: Types of gender training attended by AFB personnel at basic academy, by rank

Did you receive any of the following training in the academy?	No. of low rank (n = 216); (% in parenthesis)	No. of medium rank (n = 247); (% in parenthesis)	No. of high rank (n = 2); (% in parenthesis)
Training on prevention of SEA	36 (17)	29 (12)	0 (0)
General gender training	42 (19)	33 (13)	0 (0)
Gender training for leadership	17 (8)	16 (6)	0 (0)
Specialized gender training, such as domestic violence training	26 (12)	33 (13)	0 (0)
Institutional harassment training	29 (13)	26 (11)	0 (0)
None of the above	131 (61)	170 (69)	2 (100)

Table 10: Types of gender training attended by AFB personnel at basic academy, by gender

Did you receive any of the following training in the academy?	% of women	% of men
Training on prevention of SEA	23	13
General gender training	27	15
Gender training for leadership	13	6
Specialized gender training, such as domestic violence training	16	12
Institutional harassment training	29	10
None of the above	50	66

Table 11: Types of gender training attended by AFB personnel during pre-deployment training, by gender

Did you receive any of the following training during pre-deployment?	% of women	% of men
Training on prevention of SEA	57	63
General gender training	52	41
Gender training for leadership	29	22
Specialized gender training, such as domestic violence training	43	27
Institutional harassment training	45	27
None of the above	5	14

Table 12: Types of gender training attended by AFB personnel as in-service training, by gender

Did you receive any of the following training as in-service training?	% of women	% of men
Training on prevention of SEA	14	22
General gender training	21	17
Gender training for leadership	11	11
Specialized gender training, such as domestic violence training	13	19
Institutional harassment training	16	17
None of the above	66	65

It is worth noting that a larger proportion of women report attending training on all gender-related topics. This may reflect the fact that topics like sexual harassment, domestic violence, and SEA are seen as more relevant to women than to men. However, it is primarily men who commit SEA and domestic violence and engage in harassment. Moreover, these training topics are relevant to and often required for deployment on UN POs.

MAIN BARRIERS

There is limited experience of female leadership

Most personnel have not had female leaders. About 70% of personnel surveyed (72% of men and 51% of women) have not served under a female immediate supervisor.



ISSUE AREA 9: Gender Roles

*The cross-cutting gender roles issue area explores whether the prevalence of gender stereotypes and attitudes impacts the number of women deploying and their ability to participate meaningfully in peace operations. We assess this by looking at the degree to which women and men hold traditional roles, and their views on the roles, responsibilities, and characteristics of men and women in society. We also assess the degree to which a gender protection norm exists in the institution. This means we assess whether men and women continue to feel that women must be protected from danger even though they are members of a security institution. This is a **high-priority issue area** for the AFB, as survey and key informant data reveal a prevailing belief in gender roles and stereotypes and the gender protection norm.*

Summary of findings

Within the AFB there is a prevailing belief among leadership and personnel in the accepted and expected behaviours, roles, attributes, and responsibilities of women and men – gender roles and stereotypes. There is also support for the gender protection norm, or the idea that women, including servicewomen, require consideration related to their specific protection in the context of deployment. Yet there are leaders who recognize the presence of these stereotypes and the need to make changes, and to reconsider assumptions about what women and men can do. Leadership recognizes that this approach will take time, and that changing social norms about the role of women, particularly in the military and peacekeeping forces, is a long-term process of change.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Leadership recognition that gender stereotypes exist and can influence decision-making.

BARRIERS

- A large portion of personnel hold some gender-role-based beliefs/views about women and men that could have an impact on role assignment and the implementation of some operational areas of work in peace operations.
- Key informants acknowledge the presence of a gender protection norm within the context of deployment decision-making.

Detailed findings

OPPORTUNITIES

Senior leaders are aware of the importance of changing their beliefs about gender roles

Key informants with peacekeeping experience have come to understand that gender-based stereotypes and roles can lead to gender-based bias. The following interview excerpt illustrates this experience:

‘Let me give you an example – an American female Major worked with us in the Mali mission. Since it was an active operation, there was always an army unit there. So, I would send troops in rotation. A unit had to stay the entire night there. I suggested since the operating room was small, it would be difficult for a woman to live together with men and therefore, I did not include the female Major in night-time operations. But two weeks later, an American female officer came to my office and raised the issue – Colonel, you are doing something wrong. You are violating the UN gender parity guidelines. Then, I became rather tentative as I could not point out immediately in which areas, I was violating the guidelines. I requested her to explain the matter further. The Major pointed out that everyone else [referring to the male members of the team] was given night duties except her. She added that she did not accept this as a positive reflection in the job. Upon learning her perspectives on the matter, I was quite astonished and explained to her that in Bangladesh, we rather avoid employing women in hazardous jobs and provide them with safety and security. I also asked her if she would be comfortable to live in such close quarters to men and spend the night there. She replied that managing the situation was her prerogative. She, however, did not appreciate differentiating her tasks on the basis of her gender. This incident made me think how Americans have progressed more in this particular area than we have in Bangladesh.’

In another interview a key informant identified the important role of leadership in providing equal opportunities for men and women. He pointed out: 'In a mission, every soldier is counted, and every person is important. A servicewoman in a mission should not be considered in a different light. When employed, she should be seen as an asset who can deliver just like a serviceman. The leadership must recognize this for the sake of the success of the missions.'

There are no sex discrimination cases in the AFB

According to the FFF, no sex discrimination cases in the AFB have been reported.

The majority of women and men believe women are capable of tactical operations, although men are less likely to believe this

Seventy-two % of all survey respondents (70% of all men; 91% of all women; 70% of deployed men and all four deployed women; and 74% of all personnel who have not been deployed) think that women are capable of tactical operations.

Female engagement teams

A FET was first deployed in 2019 in the UN peace operation to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). However, the AFB have plans to move away from FETs and substitute them with engagement teams made up of 50% men and 50% women. According to AFB representatives, this practice has not yet been initiated but is in the design phase.

Women and men are serving in operational roles on deployment

As noted, the AFB have previously deployed FETs and are preparing to deploy engagement teams comprising 50% men and 50% women. However, limited survey data from deployed women in combination with key informant interviews (reflected above and throughout the report) also suggest that women may be seen as most capable of working with women and children rather than in operational roles. Survey data reveal that of the four women who have been deployed to UN POs, two said they never engaged in operational activities, one said she engaged in these activities once a month, and one said she engaged in operational activities every day. Survey data from deployed men found that 20% had engaged in operational activities every day. Operational roles are outlined in the context of each UN PO mandate and vary according to the nature of the mission. However, they usually include patrolling, search and rescue, and protection of civilians.

MAIN BARRIERS

Some senior leaders may hold gender role stereotypes about women

Interviews with key informants addressed the role of women and how this may affect their role in the Armed Forces and peace operations. Some key informants acknowledged that they may prioritize servicewomen's role as mothers over their professional role and development. Since men are generally regarded as the primary breadwinner of a family, gender roles in this situation may not affect whether they are selected for deployment. Associating and prioritizing women with the responsibility for taking care of their family and children is considered a cultural norm in Bangladesh. However, there is evidence that this norm is changing and both men and women are increasingly attentive to the responsibilities of care work associated with family, as well as the demands associated with the profession of a soldier. For example, some male key informants expressed their concerns about leaving their children and families for deployment.

Also notable is a remark from a servicewoman that while women are capable, they may nonetheless experience gender-based stereotypes and biases related to assignment and training. She said: 'Regarding the talent or training, we don't think it is a barrier but sometimes a concept... is raised by some that maybe women cannot do a certain task. Like the task for a duty officer was to go to the various check post[s] and remain standing the whole night there. In the very beginning the Air Force didn't post us as a duty officer as they thought that we can't do this... But women are capable enough, skilled enough but we have some problems in our mind-set.'

Yet at the time of writing there are 62 women officers and 301 women soldiers serving in various roles in peace operations (deployed as part of infantry battalions). This illustrates that prevailing beliefs about appropriate roles for men and women are changing.

Some senior leaders believe in the gendered protection norm

Some key informants expressed the belief that women should not be sent to dangerous locations. For example, one informant said that ‘a women soldier shouldn’t be sent in a mission which is far [away], for her security’. Another stated:

‘In terms of security, my opinion and recommendation would be for us to be choosy before sending a servicewoman to a challenging mission. We can’t engage our women soldiers everywhere. Where there is a possibility of armed conflict [occurring], such a situation must be avoided. The characteristics of the UN mission have dramatically changed. In the past, we sat and interacted with two [conflicting] parties, where they showed respect; but now they don’t want to hear our opinions or suggestions. Now they consider us [peacekeepers] as soft targets. When they want to make any demands, they attack on a small unit of peacekeeping mission, which would be sensitized and appear on the headline of newspapers. Therefore, we have to be more careful about engaging women soldiers.’

Another male leader said, ‘For women, to move to a new place is not as easy as it is for me. What is possible for a male officer is not very easy for a female officer.’

Nonetheless, according to AFB representatives at the validation workshop, there are currently 50 women (nine officers and 41 soldiers) serving in the UN Mission to Mali (MINUSMA), which is considered one of the most high-risk UN missions at present.

Some personnel hold gender stereotypes about roles in peace operations

The survey asked a series of questions related to the roles men and women should perform in peace operations. While not all the survey respondents have deployed, these data can nonetheless provide insights into some of the beliefs and views that may be contrary to UN doctrine (like the WPS agenda, the UN Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy, and the UN Action for Peacekeeping + Strategy¹³) to integrate women (and men) fully within every rank, role, and unit.

- Women are best suited to work with women in a mission: 64% of all deployed personnel and 51% of non-deployed personnel believe that female peacekeepers are better suited for engaging with women and children in a conflict zone. While it can be operationally necessary for women to work with local women as a result of socio-cultural constraints that prohibit men from having direct contact with women, this belief more generally (rather than being a response to a specific context) can limit the roles that women play in UN POs, thereby representing a barrier to full and meaningful participation. Moreover, it could arguably be important for both women and men to work with children to role-model equality in peacekeeping.
- The three beliefs listed below are problematic. If women are not deemed suitable for a key operational component of peace operations, they are not able to participate fully, and as a result each of these beliefs can represent a barrier.
 - Men are best suited to respond to a riot situation in a mission: 81% of all deployed personnel (which only includes four women) and 71% of non-deployed personnel (which includes a higher proportion of women) believe that only men should respond to a riot situation.
 - Men are best suited to respond to a bomb situation in a mission: 79% of deployed personnel and 71% of non-deployed personnel believe that only men should respond to a bomb situation.
 - Men are best suited to train local police/military in a mission: 78% of deployed personnel and 64% of non-deployed personnel believe that only men should train the local gendarmerie/police/military.

General gender-role-based beliefs/views about women and men

Survey data reveal that a large portion of personnel, while not a majority, may hold general views (not specific to peace operations) on appropriate gender roles for women and men. These views could result in a less than ideal response in the context of some areas of operational work within peace operations.

- Women make false reports about sexual assault: 44% of surveyed personnel agreed or strongly agreed that women often falsely claim they have been sexually assaulted. This belief could potentially affect how personnel in peace operations respond to sexual and gender-based violence – they may not treat reports of this with the seriousness required by UN PO doctrine and policy.
- Women provoke sexual assault based on how they are dressed: 66% of men and 28% of women reported the belief that when women are raped it is because they dressed promiscuously. This belief can also affect how personnel in peace operations respond to sexual and gender-based violence – they may believe that the victim is responsible for an attack and not treat the allegation with the

seriousness required or fail to make a report altogether.

- Men are responsible for protecting the purity of women in their family: 99% of surveyed men and women agreed or strongly agreed that it is a man's duty to protect his family's dignity by watching over the purity of the women in the family. Notably, this belief can be linked to the reluctance (or even refusal) of husbands and parents to support (or give their consent for) a wife or daughter to deploy to a peace operation. This is a phenomenon reflected by some key informant interviews when they spoke about family and social expectations that can be a barrier to women's deployment.
- Men are the decision-makers: 79% of surveyed personnel believe a good wife should listen to and respect her husband's decisions even if she disagrees with him.

It is important to note that these views are complex and nuanced. Moreover, they are not beliefs that are unique to Bangladesh – rather, such views are reflected to varying degrees in every corner of the world. Nevertheless, while everyone is entitled to their own opinions and beliefs, it is necessary to ensure that respect for standards of conduct and procedure in the response to sexual and gender-based violence prevails over beliefs about promiscuous women or women making false reports.

Women's professional engagements in the Armed Forces

According to the AFB, women cannot serve in infantry or the armoured corps. However, when an infantry battalion is deployed, women officers and soldiers/NCOs can be deployed within the battalion as staff officers and FET members. Women personnel perform various roles, including patrolling, VIP escorting, CIMIC engagement, and responding to women victims of gender-based violence.



ISSUE AREA 10: Social Exclusion

The social exclusion issue area explores whether in-group/out-group mentalities cause women to be marginalized, ostracized, denigrated, harassed, or attacked, thus preventing them from deploying or participating meaningfully in peace operations. It also explores the ways in which male group cohesion forms. We assess this by looking at the levels of harassment and violence in the institutions and sanctions against them, as well as healthy and unhealthy ways of creating cohesion. This is a **medium-priority issue area** for the AFB, because while there are examples of positive bonding, these are by and large gender-specific. Moreover, a significant portion of personnel do not believe co-ed training is appropriate – which presents a challenge for pre-deployment training and deployment on peace operations.

Summary of findings

Most personnel surveyed report the presence of positive bonding social activities, although most may not be co-ed (including both men and women). Similarly, very few negative bonding activities are reported. The majority of personnel reported being aware of the official harassment policy and the complaints mechanism. Furthermore, the majority of personnel say they have not had negative experiences that could constitute harassment. However, co-ed personnel are generally not socializing, and a significant number of personnel do not believe co-ed training is appropriate.

OPPORTUNITIES

- There is a solid policy foundation with a complaints mechanism that is known by service members.
- Positive social bonding between same-sex personnel and to some extent co-ed groups is widely identified and valued, whereas negative social bonding was reported by surveyed personnel extremely infrequently.

BARRIERS

- Significant numbers of surveyed personnel believe that co-ed training is not appropriate. This is a barrier, as peace operations are always co-ed, hence pre-deployment training must also be co-ed.
- There are limited formal or informal co-ed social activities/bonding activities.

Detailed findings

OPPORTUNITIES

There is a sexual harassment policy and personnel are aware of it

According to the FFF, the AFB have an official harassment policy and 96% of survey respondents (men and women equally) are aware of such a policy.

There is an internal complaints system and personnel are aware of it

According to the FFF, there is an internal complaints system and 96% of survey respondents (men and women equally) are aware of this system. About 95% of personnel are aware of guidelines about harassment.

Personnel have had few negative experiences in the Armed Forces

- Ninety-nine % of the personnel surveyed said they never received unwanted text messages.
- Ninety-nine % of the personnel surveyed said they never received criticism for not fulfilling family duties while they were in the Armed Forces.
- Ninety-nine % of the personnel surveyed said they have never heard of or been called a derogatory name in the Armed Forces.
- Ninety-nine % of the personnel surveyed said they never heard of or experienced unwanted pictures published on the internet by colleagues in the Armed Forces.
- Ninety-nine % of all of the personnel surveyed said that talking about sex among colleagues is not a norm.

- Only 1% of all the personnel surveyed said that going to brothels outside of work is a norm among members of the Armed Forces.
- Only 1% of all the personnel surveyed said that men are worried about being accused of sexual harassment.

Table 13 demonstrates that very few surveyed personnel said they had experienced harassment and/or discrimination.

Table 13: Negative experiences in the AFB reported by personnel

Experienced during time in AFB	% of women	% of men
Unwanted texts or messages from a colleague	7	1
Pictures of you posted on the internet without your consent	4	1
A colleague referring to someone by something other than their name or title	4	6
A colleague criticizing another for not fulfilling their family obligations	2	1
Other behaviour that made you feel uncomfortable	0	1
None of these	88	92

Table 14: Experiences of favouritism in the AFB

Have you ever witnessed a colleague being favoured for one of these reasons?	% of women	% of men
Friendship	2	5
Geographical origin	4	7
Shared interest outside of work	0	1
Ethnicity/race	0	2
Religion	2	1
Nationality	0	0
Man/woman	2	2
Family relations	0	3
Romantic relationship	2	1
I have never experienced any of these	96	86

There are examples of positive bonding experiences within the Armed Forces

About 90% of all personnel surveyed, including both men and women, identified at least one type of positive bonding activity (sports, co-ed formal activities, extra physical activities, training exercises, orientation programmes) within the Armed Forces. Only 9% of women and 9% of men said they are not aware of positive bonding activities within the institution. But because there is limited interaction between men and women within the AFB, these positive bonding experiences may be with members of the same sex.

There are few examples of negative bonding activities

Only 13% of personnel, including two women and 16% of all men, said new recruits into the Armed Forces face negative bonding experiences, such as punishment, jokes, pranks, informal rituals, etc.

Some senior personnel understand that the Armed Forces are male dominated, and some of them understand the zero-tolerance policy for sexual exploitation and abuse

One leader noted that ‘the Armed Forces were male dominated. It has been also changed a bit.’ Additionally, one senior leader said:

‘We have zero tolerance on anything related to women. We are following it; as a result, it has had a good effect and we have less of these incidents here than in other countries. Even in the mission area we follow the zero-tolerance policy. The accused has to surrender even on the minimum charges.’ However, another senior leader noted that he ‘found some aren’t following the zero-tolerance policy (sexual harassment policy). I found that they had a local girlfriend. Then I said, it must be stopped. And in the next morning brief I said, what you are doing isn’t right. It is strictly forbidden, and it must be stopped.’

Some senior leaders encourage more intermixing of the sexes

One leader said, ‘Before, women thought about how we would be together with men in the Army or peacekeeping mission. But now these fears are not much. Women soldiers are now going to work together with men, exercising together. When women soldiers work together with men in different assignments in different parts of the country, the people of the country see women soldiers working with men and many come and ask the women soldiers how you are working here. So, these issues are improving.’

Some servicemen ally with servicewomen

There is evidence that some male colleagues are allies to women. However, overall 83% of surveyed personnel report a lack of male allies; 84% of all men and 67% of all women said there were no male allies within the institution. Yet of the 33% of women who reported being aware of male allies, 34% have witnessed men mentoring women colleagues and 14% have seen men stick up for women who were confronted by discrimination.

Table 15: Forms of male alliance in the Armed Forces (among 16% of men and 33% of women who reported being aware of a male ally in the AFB)

Actions performed by men	% of women who have witnessed action	% of men who have witnessed action
Mentored a female colleague	34	15
Stood up for women who were discriminated against	14	6
Helped promote women in rank	9	5
Promoted policies that help women	5	4
Talked with male colleagues to correct problematic behaviour towards women	13	5
None of the above	25	32

Social clubs, activities, and practices

In the commissioned ranks of the Armed Forces, socializing with colleagues and between family members is extremely common. This is due to their work–life balance and social status and is also encouraged as a way to foster organizational culture and bonding. Since women were inducted from 2000, they are more accustomed to socializing with the opposite sex. Contrary to this, in the non-commissioned ranks women were inducted relatively recently (2015), hence women and men in the soldier/NCO ranks are less likely to socialize. However, given their shared social status and family background, there is a natural move to make their work environment more open and gender friendly.

Various social programmes are arranged to advance interaction and engagement between men and women within the AFB. These include the Shena Poribar Kollan Shomity, where soldiers’ wives are given social development opportunities like dancing, singing, and reading the Koran. There are additional opportunities for social activities for families, including children’s clubs, and national holidays and festivals.

The Armed Forces have accessible and known complaints boxes

According to AFB representatives at the validation workshop, there are complaints boxes widely available to service members, and women specifically can speak with a gender focal point who can raise a concern or issue with a commander, and thus skip mid-level command staff if necessary. According to the FFF, the internal complaints system follows institutional policy and includes senior and judicial members of the forces. However, there is presently no official whistle-blower policy, nor any internal ombudsman or integrity/ oversight committee that could further strengthen a complaints system.

Colleagues do not generally talk about sexual activities with one another

Only four people in the survey heard colleagues bragging about sex, although 24 personnel refused to answer this question. Three people in the survey said that members of the Armed Forces visit brothels together.

Personnel are aware of colleagues being dismissed for inappropriate behaviour

About 69% of personnel are aware of someone being dismissed for inappropriate behaviour. According to representatives at the validation workshop, there is a zero-tolerance policy in the AFB – hence when someone engages in misconduct and is dismissed, this information is promulgated widely.

MAIN BARRIERS

Joint training is not considered appropriate among a large portion of personnel

Even while all training within the AFB is co-ed, 58% of women are in favour of separate training. Overall, a slight majority of survey respondents expressed the belief that joint training is appropriate – with more deployed personnel believing this.

These survey data suggest that despite the practice of joint training, there is still a sizeable number of personnel who do not believe this approach is ideal. It is even more notable that surveyed women are less likely to believe that joint training is appropriate. This suggests a need to build the confidence of women to train and work with men – which they will have to do in a mission context. It may thus signal the need to identify the source of the belief that joint training is not appropriate – is this related to safety concerns, to concerns about reputation and the ability to marry, or to other concerns altogether? Once this is identified, the AFB would be in a better position to address this challenge.

Men and women may not socialize or work with one another

About 92% of all personnel said they socialize with other members of the institution outside of work. However, this socialization is less likely to happen between members of the opposite sex. Only 36% of survey respondents said they work with colleagues of the opposite sex at least once a week. It is noteworthy that the survey sample was primarily with soldiers/NCOs who are early in their careers, and hence may be unmarried and thus unlikely to socialize with the opposite sex. Moreover, this could also be a result of units where there are no women or where soldiers are living in cantonments and not with their families. This has changed since 2019/2020 – there are now women represented in a greater number of roles and units. However, only 4% of survey respondents (3% of all women and 4% of all men) said they socialize with colleagues of the opposite sex at least once a week. None of the deployed women and 4% of deployed men said they socialize with colleagues of the opposite sex at least once a week. Of the personnel that have never been deployed, 4% of women and 4% of men said they socialize with colleagues of the opposite sex at least once a week. According to the FFF and the survey results (87% of all personnel), there are no co-ed sports teams in the Armed Forces. Finally, about 18% of personnel avoid interacting with the opposite sex because they are afraid they will be charged with sexual harassment. About 18% of men stated this was the case for them.

04

Conclusions

Conclusions

According to the triangulated data from the AFB MOWIP assessment, the three main barriers to women’s meaningful participation in peace operations are:

1. Eligible pool (*Issue Area 1*);
2. Household responsibilities (*Issue Area 4*); and
3. Gender roles (*Issue Area 9*).

There are some minor differences in perception between surveyed personnel and key informant (key leaders) interviews.

VIEWS OF PERSONNEL

Survey respondents were asked to state in an open-ended manner what they thought was the main barrier for women in peace operations. According to the responses, 31% of personnel believe that men face challenges to participation in peacekeeping operations, whereas 51% believe that women face major challenges. This signals an awareness that women are more likely to face challenges in comparison to men.

Of those who said there were challenges for women, the most frequently cited barriers were:

1. household responsibilities (77% of respondents);
2. gender roles (37% of respondents); and
3. deployment criteria (34% of respondents).

This is almost entirely consistent with the high barrier scores, except ‘eligible pool’ is a high barrier, rather than ‘deployment criteria’, which is actually a low barrier. However, it could be that ‘deployment criteria’ reflects a belief that women do not have the necessary skills for deployment – this is consistent with some survey findings, which revealed that men are less likely to believe that women are operationally capable in peace operations. Interestingly, women were much less likely than men to identify ‘deployment criteria’ as a barrier. This signals that women’s experience in the AFB differs to some extent from men’s perception of those experiences, which highlights the need to identify new or additional channels for women’s experiences and perceptions to inform policies and practices.

Table 16: Main challenges to women’s meaningful participation in peacekeeping, according to survey respondents

Top three challenges to increasing women’s participation in peacekeeping	% of women	% of men
Women have too many obligations at home or with their families. (<i>Issue Area 4: Household constraints</i>)	82	77
Cultural attitudes make people doubt women’s ability to deploy. (<i>Issue Area 9: Gender roles</i>)	41	36
Many women don’t have the right skills required to be deployed. (<i>Issue Area 3: Selection criteria</i>)	16	36

Table 17: Main challenges to men’s meaningful participation in peacekeeping, according to survey respondents

Top three challenges to increasing men’s participation in peacekeeping	% of women	% of men
Men have too many obligations at home or with their families. <i>(Issue Area 4: Household constraints)</i>	45	28
Many men don’t have the right skills required to be deployed. <i>(Issue Area 2: Selection criteria)</i>	18	20
Accommodations and equipment don’t meet men’s needs. <i>(Issue Area 5: Peace operations infrastructure)</i>	16	12

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS (LEADERSHIP)

When asked about the three main barriers to women’s full and meaningful participation in peace operations, the responses of key informants almost exactly matched the barriers identified by the MOWIP assessment.

The most commonly reported barrier was **household responsibilities**. Many key informants cited competing roles as a mother and a soldier, or other caretaking responsibilities within the home, as reasons why women may not feel as able to deploy as their male counterparts. Almost every female decision-maker listed this barrier from her personal experience.

The second most commonly cited barrier was the **eligible pool**. Several key informants noted that they are often not able to fill UN-mandated quotas because there are not enough women with the correct skills and experience to draw from. However, almost all the individuals interviewed seemed optimistic about this barrier becoming less relevant in the near future, as more women have recently been recruited and started to build their expertise.

Finally, tied for third place were **gender roles** and **peace operations infrastructure**. Key informants noted that religious and socio-cultural beliefs can make it hard for women and men to function together while on a peacekeeping mission. In addition, key informants stated that problems with bathrooms and sleeping accommodations can also be an issue for women.

Altogether, key informant responses and open-ended survey responses serve to validate the overall findings and scoring of the issue areas. It is clear that personnel and leadership are aware that eligible pool, household responsibilities, and gender roles can represent barriers to women’s meaningful participation. This in turn means that the AFB is well positioned to turn these barriers into opportunities by using the data to inform targeted policy, practice, and training interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO LEVERAGE OPPORTUNITIES AND OVERCOME BARRIERS

Bangladesh has been a leading troop contributor to UN POs and has made strides to increase women’s participation in these operations. Presently the AFB have committed to supporting the UN Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy targets for 2028. This will likely require targeted recruitment and capacity-building efforts. Indeed, deployment is not just about the overall numerical representation; women in particular will need to be identified and trained for a range of roles and units to ensure sufficient eligibility for deployment.

Household responsibilities (family obligations) appear as both an empirical finding and an identified barrier among key informants and surveyed personnel. This is further reflected in the finding that of the 56 women surveyed, only six have children – suggesting that women who deploy may initially be choosing career over family. This signals a need to provide support to women with families, in terms of both policy and infrastructure, if the AFB are going to realize the goal of increasing the participation of women in peace operations.

The presence of gender roles was also an empirical finding as well as an identified barrier among key informants and surveyed personnel. While the presence of gender-stereotypical roles and beliefs about women and views on masculinity may be impeding women’s opportunities within the AFB and in the context of deployment, key informants are aware of this barrier and have expressed a commitment to addressing it. This is a very good signal, and critical to shaping and maintaining the institutional culture necessary for the full, fair, and equal integration of women.

RECOMMENDATION 1: INCREASE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN ACROSS ROLES (OPERATIONAL, TACTICAL, AND COMBAT), UNITS (INFANTRY, ARMOURED), AND RANKS (LIEUTENANT COLONEL AND ABOVE) WITHIN ALL THREE BRANCHES OF THE ARMED FORCES OF BANGLADESH.

Explanation summary: To ensure that sufficient women are eligible for deployment and meet the stated quota target (17% officer rank and 6.5% soldier/NCO rank), more women will need to be recruited and equipped with a broader range of skills and experience (including leadership), enabling them to serve in roles and within units where they are underrepresented or not represented. This includes building the leadership capacity of women to take on command roles and advance in rank within the AFB.

Policy recommendations

- **Targeted recruitment of women.** Consider a policy for targeted recruitment of women into non-commissioned and officer ranks to achieve the quota target and advance the UN Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018–2028 to increase the number of women deployed. This could include tailored outreach efforts directed at young women in basic education (high school) and higher education (university), as well as social media, radio, and TV campaigns directed at women and linked to peace operation deployment opportunities (in other words, the opportunity to serve Bangladesh at the international level).
- **Re-evaluation and reassignment of women.** Consider a policy to re-evaluate and reassign women who have deployed, and as a result may have developed new skills or been trained in a new role. This would enable the AFB to speed up the process of integrating women into roles and units where they are underrepresented or not represented. It also represents an opportunity for the AFB to capitalize on the benefits of deployment and the cross-training and experience women gain on peace missions.
- **Policy review and revision.** Consider implementing a policy review based on existing scientific data that show the presence of implicit or unconscious bias within all societies.¹⁴ The aim would be to identify any policies or practices that could unintentionally reproduce or reinforce the underrepresentation of women in certain roles or within specific units. Based on existing social science, this could include the following.
 - **Representative decision-making bodies.** Ensure that decision-making bodies are gender balanced, with both men and women meaningfully engaged in assessing, evaluating, and decision-making.
 - **Objective criteria.** Review regulations where decision-making may not reflect objective criteria based on current needs and realities. This includes the use of exceptions. The goal is to avoid policies and practices that are exclusionary and/or may reproduce underrepresentation.
 - **Social role-modelling.** Model and reward welcome, wanted, and productive behaviours and practices while simultaneously discouraging and even penalizing unwelcome, unwanted, and counterproductive behaviours and practices.

Professional development and training recommendations

- **Targeted capacity building and cross-training of women.** Consider targeted training and capacity building for women to increase their readiness and skills to serve in roles and units where they are underrepresented or not represented. This could specifically include targeted tactical training for women (in addition to the targeted fitness training for women following childbirth that is already present, according to the AFB).
- **Target leadership training for women officers.** Consider targeted training programmes for women officers to build their leadership skills. This could include effective communication and decision-making, problem-solving and critical analysis, and planning and operations, in addition to key peace operations topics such as gender, gender equality, and gender bias.

14 'People have deep-seated biases of which they are completely unaware. And these hidden attitudes – known as implicit bias – influence the way we act toward each other, often with *unintended discriminatory consequences*... implicit bias can shape social behavior and decision-making. Even people with the best intentions are influenced by these hidden attitudes, behaving in ways that can create disparities in hiring, practices, student evaluations, law enforcement, criminal justice proceedings – pretty much anywhere people are making decisions that affect others. Such disparities can result from bias against certain groups, or favoritism toward other ones. Today, implicit bias is widely understood to be a cause of unintended discrimination that leads to racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and other inequalities.' Betsy Mason, interview with Anthony Greenwald, 'Making people aware of their implicit biases doesn't usually change minds. But here's what does work', *Knowable Magazine*, 4 June 2020.

RECOMMENDATION 2: DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT STRUCTURAL SUPPORT FOR WOMEN WITH FAMILIES AND FAMILY CARE RESPONSIBILITIES.

Explanation summary: Women personnel are identified as primarily, if not exclusively, responsible for the care of families, children, and the household. As such, women may face social expectations to prioritize these responsibilities over deployment. This social responsibility and expectation could be mitigated with greater structural support.

Policy recommendations

- **Design and implement (more) structural support for women with families.** Consider opening Early Childhood Centres throughout the country and providing full-time quotas for the children of deployed personnel. Consider expanding paternal leave for men with families and/or creating a more general family leave policy that enables both men and women to take leave to care for children and family members.
- **Create a pre- and post-deployment outreach and support system.** Consider initiating an outreach and support system that provides pre- and post-deployment services to deployed personnel. This could include recommendations from AFB leadership to help educate families of women personnel who are concerned about giving permission to their daughter to deploy, as well services during deployment like family support and counseling, and post-deployment integration services.

Institutional practice recommendations

- **Establish a travel subsidy for personnel with care responsibilities.** Consider establishing a subsidy to provide return tickets for deployed women personnel with care responsibilities to return home at least once during a 12-month deployment.

Organizational culture recommendations

- **Initiate outreach and awareness directed at personnel with care responsibilities.** Consider initiating a campaign to showcase testimonials of women and men with care responsibilities who deploy (prioritizing women, since women are primarily responsible for the care of children, families, and the home). This could help establish a new norm within society and in the AFB. This could include social media, outreach, and support efforts (noted above), and in-person outreach and awareness efforts during festivals, events, and cantonment and local community activities.

RECOMMENDATION 3: ADVANCE UNDERSTANDING AND AWARENESS OF GENDER, GENDER EQUALITY, AND GENDER BIAS.

Explanation summary: All socio-cultural and institutional contexts come with attitudes and stereotypes based on gender roles and expectations. These include beliefs about accepted and expected behaviours, roles, attributes, and responsibilities of women and men. Consolidated data from MOWIP pilot countries reveal that these beliefs can and do translate into peacekeeper attitudes and behaviours that are in contravention of peace operation mandates.¹⁵ It is therefore critical to advance understanding and awareness of gender roles, the existence of (implicit and explicit) gender bias, and the goal of gender equality as an integral component of increasing women's meaningful participation in peace operations and advancing long-term and sustainable peace. This includes training and education, outreach and awareness, and bystander intervention programming.

Policy recommendations

- **Scale up the gender focal point system.** Consider scaling up and expanding the gender focal point system to include the design and implementation of training and education programmes at the branch and unit levels, with quarterly briefings for women and men on relevant policy, planning, and operational practice. This could importantly have a module or specific training/educational materials on implicit bias – a scientifically established phenomenon that shows how people, regardless of their profession, hold implicit biases with respect to race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, social status, and other distinctions that predict decision-making, including with respect to employment (recruitment, promotion), health/medicine, and education/training, among other areas.¹⁶

¹⁵ See footnote 3 above.

¹⁶ See John T. Jost, Laurie A. Rudman, Irene V. Blair, Dana R. Carney, Nilanjana Dasgupta, Jack Glaser, and Curtis D. Hardin, 'The existence of implicit bias is beyond reasonable doubt: A refutation of ideological and methodological objections and executive summary of ten studies that no manager should ignore', *Research in Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 29, 2009, pp. 39–69.

Professional development and training recommendations

- **Design and institutionalize training and education to advance understanding and awareness.** Consider designing and institutionalizing training and education programmes for personnel across rank, role, and unit to address:
 - **Gender** – the socially assigned roles, responsibilities, and expectations based on biological sex (which vary between and within countries and change over time);
 - **Gender equality** – the goal of equal opportunities, access, and responsibilities for men and women within the legal and policy framework (de jure) and day-to-day life (de facto);
 - **Gender bias** – the implicit and explicit attitudes and stereotypes that influence behaviours, practices, and decision-making; and
 - **Gender mainstreaming** – the process of taking gender (roles) into account when designing and implementing policy, training, and/or programmes/operations.

Organizational culture and practice recommendations

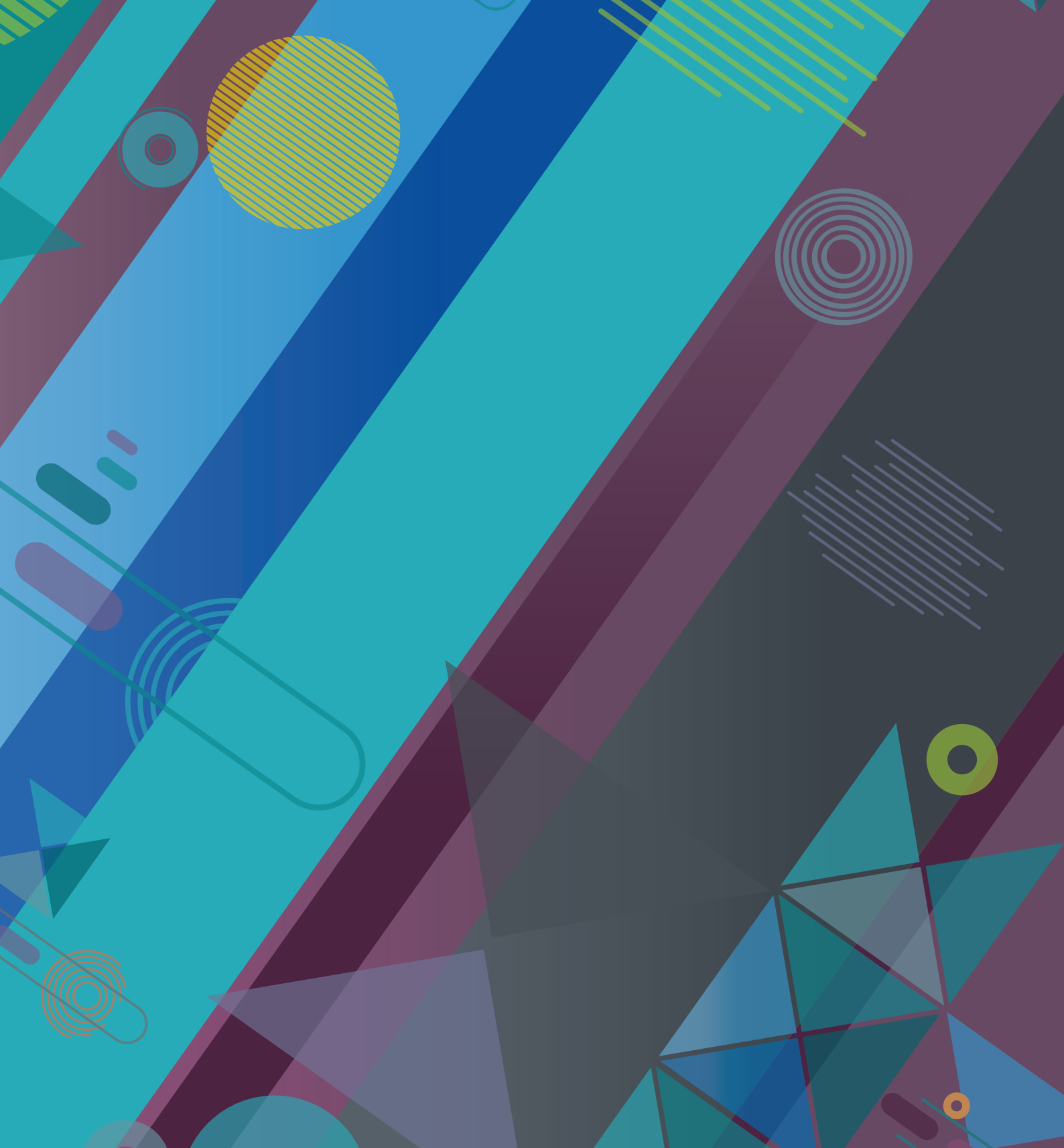
- **Design and implement bystander intervention programming.** Consider institutionalizing bystander intervention programming for officers and NCOs in leadership positions to build organizational capacity to address and prevent behaviours and comments that are counterproductive to gender equality and gender integration within the AFB and peace operations. Consider using the ‘four Ds’ intervention programme (direct (response), distract/disrupt, delegate, and delay).¹⁷ This programme can importantly reinforce and support existing policies that address harassment, bullying, and discrimination.
- **Bystander intervention in peace operations.** Consider a bystander intervention programme designed for and delivered in-mission to equip formed troops, military observers, and staff officers with the skills and knowledge to prevent and deter attitudes, behaviours, and practices that are in contravention to UN PO mandates.

Topics for further investigation

Several topical or thematic data gaps were identified during the MOWIP implementation and data consolidation, in combination with input from AFB representatives.

- What are deployed women’s experiences in-mission?
- How do the experiences and perceptions of high-ranking women differ from those of women soldiers/NCOs?
- Why do servicewomen, and to a lesser extent servicemen, believe that joint or co-ed training is not appropriate?
- What does a gender assessment entail, what needs has this process identified, and how have these needs been addressed by the AFB?
- What impact have the gender focal point system and gender mainstreaming policy had for women and for men?
- What is the impact of prolonged deployment on AFB families?

17 See Bystander Intervention Training from UC San Diego, which promotes acting ethically. This includes teaching bystanders to ask themselves a series of ethical test questions. 1) Is what I am seeing undermining honesty, trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, or fairness (values test)? 2) Is what I am seeing a violation of standards, rules, codes, or laws (standards test)? 3) If others saw what I am seeing, would it (or my inaction) be approved or condemned (exposure test)? The ‘testing’ process is followed by teaching bystanders how to act ethically using an action approach framework: 1) Interrupt – is there a way that I can interrupt the unethical behaviour in progress or interrupt the situation, so an unethical action doesn’t occur? 2) Direct – can I direct the actors to an alternative ethical action instead of unethical ones? 3) Engage – would it be useful to engage others in the situation to help me resolve the situation ethically? 4) Authorities – do I need to act by reporting this to the relevant authorities? See International Center for Academic Integrity, Bystander Intervention Training (BIC) at UC San Diego, 29 October 2018, academicintegrity.org/blog/80-bystander-intervention-training-bit; US Army, Be an active bystander in preventing sexual assault, 8 April 2019, www.army.mil/article/219828/be_an_active_bystander_in_preventing_sexual_assault.



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