

EQUAL GOES TO CONGO

Five words that represent a very special story about the successful mainstreaming of EQUAL good practices: A training programme for gender advisors developed by the Swedish Development Partnership (DP) "[Gender Force](#)" is currently being replicated by European Armies in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.



For the first time, an EU military operation involves a gender advisor whose task it is to sensitise, train, monitor and support both officers and soldiers with different responsibilities in the [Operation EUFOR RD Congo](#). This robust EU mandate aims to support the United Nations' Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo ([MONUC](#)) during the process of national elections that should enable the first democratic vote in 40 years, for both the post of President of the Republic and the posts of Members of Parliament.

EUFOR RD Congo's gender advisor is Charlotte Isaksson, a gender expert in the Swedish Army who had been in charge of the EQUAL project but is now seconded to the [German-led Operational Command](#) of the EU mission. She is building on the achievements of the Gender Force DP whose aim is to integrate a gender dimension into Swedish international peacekeeping missions and relief operations that are operating in regions of natural disasters and human conflict. In fact, the training for gender advisors is one of eight sub-projects jointly implemented by the Gender Force DP that involves the Swedish Armed Forces, the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, the Swedish Women's Voluntary Defence Organisation, the Association of Military Officers in Sweden, the Swedish Police and the Swedish Rescue Services' Agency.

The training includes a number of components covering many different tasks from preliminary fact finding through understanding gender roles in the culture of the country of deployment to the early identification of discrimination, harassment, rape and trafficking in women. Charlotte Isaksson believes that gender should play a role in the preparatory phase of any deployment as *"Besides putting together existing facts and figures that are relevant for a forthcoming mission, there is a need to complement such data by face-to-face interviews in the field", and she explains that, "most of the time women have not been asked for their views and perceptions. Yet, if you are to integrate a gender dimension into any activity, you have to assess the different impact that those activities might have on women and men and in order to do that, it is paramount to collect as much first hand information as possible."* To substantiate her views she adds, *"There are cultures where such conversations with women can only be led by another woman. So you have to rely on female members of staff and if none is available, you have to look for external support from, say, a women's NGO or advocacy group"*. Besides training the members of the EUFOR RD Congo, Charlotte has started to train "multiplicators", who are women and men who can act as gender advisors and also pass their knowledge and skills on to others. In this way she hopes to speed up the process of creating a resource bank of people with gender expertise.

Another crucial aspect of her training and awareness raising efforts is the code of conduct to be applied by all military personnel participating in international missions. Charlotte is quite open in admitting, *"It is no secret that sexual exploitation and abuse were not only committed by the Congolese army and paramilitary groups, as members of the MONUC peace keeping forces were found guilty of similar crimes."* She has developed a code of conduct for the EU's operation in the RD Congo that is modelled on the code that is being used by MONUC's [gender office](#). *"Zero tolerance to rape and abuse is an absolute must to combat these violations of women's human rights. Also, the history of UN peace keeping missions shows that some of them failed, having lost all credibility, because some of their members did behave as atrociously against women as the warring groups they had come to assist with conflict resolution."*

The Operational Command had made it an obligation on all EU Member States participating in the mission to include gender issues in the preparatory briefings, prior to the deployment of their troops. But in many cases this did not happen and thus Charlotte, on top of training the German contingent which is the largest, has been travelling back and forward to do the same for the French troops, who are second both in terms of the chain of command and the number of soldiers deployed. She will provide training to the staff of the other Member States in Kinshasa, the central base for the operation, and Libreville (Gabon) the base for technical support and the reserve forces. It is a tremendous challenge that this Swedish Captain, is undertaking. She

admits to encountering lots of barriers, as often her trainees do not take gender questions very seriously. *"But, I have the absolute backing of the [Operational Commander](#)"* she says, *"and this is what's essential when you set out to make gender mainstreaming a reality."*

Out of this front line action, the EQUAL Gender Force DP is working in the context of Sweden's commitment to respect Resolution 1325 "Women, Peace and Security" which was adopted by the United Nations in 2000. This resolution calls on all UN member states to ensure equal participation of women, at all decision-making levels, in conflict resolution and peace processes. It also urges members to pay special regard to the impact armed conflict often has on women. The DP has sub-projects focusing on gender-fair recruitment; the application of gender mainstreaming to UN missions and other international operations led by the EU, NATO or OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe); the empowerment of local women in the mission areas by providing them with opportunities for participating in an equal and active manner in reconstruction projects; and the training of gender advisors that has already been mentioned. These projects are complemented by a Gender Coach Programme and the implementation of a matching process between these Gender Coaches and trainees. In addition, the DP is running a research project on collaboration between military and civilian players in the field of gender mainstreaming and it is focusing other efforts on providing leaders, instructors and training managers with information on human trafficking.