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National Action Plans and Beyond: Local Women Peacebuilders Strategies

Online Discussion – 8 November 2022

Summary Note

Introduction

In his latest annual Report on Women, Peace and Security, the UN Secretary-General acknowledges that **the WPS Agenda is further away than ever from achieving its goals:** *"Despite normative agreement since the year 2000 and evidence that gender equality offers a path to sustainable peace and conflict prevention, we are moving in the opposite direction"*¹.

National Action Plans (NAPs) are strategic tools, a precious opportunity for States to implement the WPS Agenda with specific priorities, focuses, and timelines. However, the WPS Agenda and the related NAPs have failed to produce the expected change in peace and security so far. To enhance the effective implementation of the WPS Agenda, it is crucial to shift the focus of NAPs away from high-level leadership and government-led activities and towards grassroots peace initiatives. It is time to increase support for local women peacebuilders' actions and strategies.

Opportunities for change exist at the local level with the development of local action plans. Consultations and activities at these levels could help NAPs to be tailored to meet the specific needs and capacities of local women peacebuilders and communities, thus reinforcing their transformative potential. Regional organisations dedicated policies (e.g., EU, ASEAN, Arab League) and initiatives (regional mediators' networks and advocacy networks) might provide complementary policy frameworks for NAPs to fulfil the transformative power of the WPS Agenda. The evolving international framework on peace and security ("Youth, Peace and Security" Agenda and "Sustaining Peace" Agenda) have the potential to help NAPs to enhance the role of local women peacebuilders as agents of change.

In November 2022, Centro Studi Difesa Civile (Roma, Italy), in partnership with Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), organised an online learning exchange focused on NAPs provisions and implementation in different geographical areas. It was part of a series of [learning events](#) that GPPAC has created in collaboration with its members and the network of its [Gender Focal Points](#).

The learning event brought together gender experts from different organisations and several regions of the world. They discussed how NAPs can be tools for real change in peace and security and identified possible synergies with policies and initiatives at the global, regional, and local levels.

¹ Women and Peace and Security, Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/240). [I. Introduction, point 2.](#)



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Key Learnings

The following key learnings emerged during the session:

1. Meaningful participation of CSOs enhances the transformative potential of NAPs.

- **During the adoption of NAPs**, the involvement of CSO (e.g., Indonesia, the Philippines) improves the structure of the plans on all the pillars of the WPS Agenda rather than focusing on just one aspect (e.g., *Gender mainstreaming* in the NAPs of Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia; *Protection* in Italy). Furthermore, the participation of local CSOs helps to keep the implementation of the WPS Agenda on track (e.g., in Germany, Switzerland, and Italy).
- **During the implementation of NAPs**, the involvement of CSOs makes the planned activities more effective and responsive to the specific needs of local people (Jordan, the Philippines, Italy). National, regional and global CSOs advocacy networks (Karama; "Women and Gender Realities in the OSCE Region" Working Group; GPPAC Gender Focal Points Network) are a valuable resource for linking the grassroots and the institutional levels.

2. Regional and local policies and initiatives reinforce the ground-up approach.

- **Regional policies** are an opportunity to improve conflict prevention, management and response, particularly when conflict dynamics exceed the national boundaries. Existing regional policy frameworks on WPS (i.e., [EU Strategic Approach on WPS](#)) have a great potential. Still, they should be better operationalised (e.g., in prevention/response to the conflict in Ukraine). The process of adoption of new regional action plans on WPS (e.g., [ASEAN](#)) looks promising for positive developments since it is supported by academia and civil society contributions.
- **Regional initiatives** such as the regional women mediator networks are often too high in rank, missing the connection with local women working for peace as mediators and peacebuilders at the grassroots level. The inclusion of grassroots women mediators in existing networks (i.e., the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network/MWMN) and in new and emerging ones (Southeast Asian Network of Women Peace Negotiators and Mediators/SEANWPNM) is a positive signal of change towards supporting sustainable peace at the local level.
- **Localization**: initiatives aimed at tailoring the implementation of NAPs at the local level contribute to reducing the gap between the actors working at different levels and promote synergies (e.g., in Lebanon, where institutional stakeholders have been brought into dialogue with local NGOs, experts, networks). Furthermore, localisation makes all stakeholders aware of the WPS Agenda specificity and makes them realise how their work can be framed within this international agenda.



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3. Global framework is crucial in focusing NAPs role for local infrastructures for peace.

- The **"Sustaining Peace" Agenda** focuses on peace infrastructures actively involved in peace work at the local level. It can help NAPs to broaden the vision from a strict focus on women to a more comprehensive gender and conflict analysis approach. By also referring to the role of youth in peacebuilding, it increases intersectionality and zooms into the role of young women peacebuilders.
- **"Youth Peace and Security" Agenda** supports the role of youth in peace processes, adding new transformative potential. Youth activism and the establishment of peace-oriented youth networks in different regions are developing in synergy with WPS advocates (e.g., in Italy). The development of specific YPS policies at national level could help support the active role of young women in peace processes and contrast the actual trend of WPS Agenda focusing mainly on protection of women and girls in crisis and war.

Besides referring to specific issues, many participants expressed the urgent need for a change of political will to move forward with the full implementation of the WPS Agenda in order to tap into its transformative power.

Recommendations

Based on the discussion, the following recommendations have been identified to support the development of an effective, transformative approach to the development and implementation of NAPs:

Change priorities and meanings.

Global, regional and national institutions, as well as CSOs should:

- Prioritize "Prevention", as prevention of violent conflict and not just of sexual and gender-based violence - SGBV (e.g., promotion and sharing of a culture of care) in policies and their implementation.
- Prioritize "Participation" of local women peacemakers and peacebuilders, WPS experts, and civilians - women and men - in conflict prevention and resolution.
- Shift from "Protection" as an end in itself to "Protection" as a means to enhance peacebuilding and participation.

Change the narrative.

- **Major international and multilateral organisations/institutions** must change the narrative of peace and security from traditional and hard security to human security, positive peace by peaceful means and conflict prevention, according to their original mandates (UN, OSCE, EU).



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- The **international aid community** must shift the narrative from peoples' resilience to recognition and local ownership, supported by legitimate and accountable institutions.
- **National governments** must increase transparency and strengthen the relationship with CSOs, avoiding the risk of co-optation of CSO representatives and women activists by governments (even authoritarian regimes) and government-controlled organisations. Networks and Registers promoted by governments (i.e. the ASEAN Women for Peace Registry/AWPR) must be built on local expertise, should recruit practitioners with field experience, and should produce concrete results and measurable impact.

Change the approach.

- **CSOs advocacy action** should be based on concrete results, including professionalisation and financing, not just inspired by activism. Therefore civil society should continuously invest in collecting learning and knowledge and changing policy and action based on that knowledge.
- **Governments** must ensure that NAPs represent all peace constituencies (including the Youth) and reinforce the synergies between the WPS and YPS Agendas within the global framework of Sustaining Peace in order address intersectional inequalities that are at the root cause of violent conflict and achieve transformative change.