KEY VOICES FOR LASTING CHANGE

Shaping the WPS Agenda for the Next 10 Years



Introduction

The WPS agenda touches upon the fundamental organization of states and societies, going beyond strictly issues of peace and security, towards the realities of daily life. For societies to be able to prosper, all citizens must be involved. By bringing together a diverse range of perspectives from different countries, Key Voices for Lasting Change provided invaluable input for anyone working in and on WPS, all over the world.

In light of the 20th anniversary of UN resolution 1325 on women and peace and security and in preparation for the UN Security Council Open Debate week, Cordaid and the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS) held a week-long series of virtual dialogues showcasing good practices and inspiring examples for the WPS Agenda from the 19th to the 23rd of October 2020.

The series provided a dialogue space for sharing valuable input by women's (rights) activists and for showing the diversity of the WPS agenda. By providing a space for key voices to share how to shape the WPS agenda, this series contributed to the development of our sensitivity and contextual understanding and called for action to move from resolutions to implementation on the ground.

The five webinars that made up the WPS Series shed light on developments and debates around WPS and their impact on the WPS agenda. Speakers from the local partner networks and civil society partners of Cordaid and CSPPS provided the lens through which we examine these issues. Key Voices for Lasting Change gave a voice to different actors and groups in society that are involved with the WPS agenda, focusing on youth, civil society actors and (women's rights) activists. The series focused on aspects of social, cultural and civil life, from participation in electoral processes and peace processes, to the role of religion in implementing the WPS agenda.

This report will provide you with the outcomes of each side-event, as well as general outcomes and recommendations of the series altogether.

Sessions

- Youth-Led Activism for Women, Peace and Security: Looking for a new paradigm
- Shrinking Space for Women's Rights Organizations Working on the WPS Agenda
- Political Participation and the WPS Agenda: Challenges and inspiring practices from Burundi, CAR and Guinea-Bissau
- Religion and the WPS Agenda: Harnessing the potential of religion to improve opportunities for women in the most fragile contexts
- Women's Rights on the Line: Fighting for women's rights when it matters most peace processes

Youth-led Activism for Women, Peace and Security: Looking for a new paradigm

19 October 2020

Rewatch the discussion here

Much remains to be done to accelerate the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, but we are witnessing many successful efforts by young women and men, especially in the implementation of UNSCR 1325. In 2015 the UN Security Council adopted the Resolution 2250, which provided an effective roadmap on the inclusion of youth in Peace and Security. The resolution aims to complement and reinforce UNSCR 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, by raising voices of young women and men for peace and stability, acknowledging the positive role youth play in building sustainable peace and to enhance young women's full participation. For this event, young activists discussed the importance for a gender-responsive approach towards peacebuilding as well as the intersection of the two resolutions.

Aisha Altubuly of the Together We Build It foundation (Libya)

Post 2011-revolution, Libya went through major transformations: decisions and policies were made with regards to elections and the constitution, that would make or break the future of young citizens. But there is no space for young people to participate in the decision-making on matters that affected their everyday lives; young people need to step up and pushing national decision-makers to uphold international commitments. Trough the WPS and YPS agendas we need to ensure that young men and women have a seat at the peace negotiations table, especially as both women and youth are most affected by violence. UNSCR 1325 and 2250 open the way for women and youth to be more active and shape the future; but the tools need to be enhanced to ensure effective implementation and to uphold the states that are lacking NAPs. In Libya, activists face risks and human rights violations and are often targeted by armed militias when they try to voice their concerns through nonviolent means.

Recommendations:

- Support inter-generational peace and security co-leadership where women peace activists of all ages young and senior are encouraged to work together on WPS & YPS.
- Re-design the peace table and call for allocating quotas for youth and women in peacebuilding processes facilitated by the UN and member states.
- Establish effective international accountability mechanisms on human rights violations committed against women and youth activists especially in conflict areas.

Fryad Fouad of the Kurdistan Relief Association (Iraqi Kurdistan)

Amongst Iraqi youth there exists a great desire for a peaceful and secure society, without violence against women and hate speech. Free from social, economic and political problems. Young people play a key role in achieving this dream. October 2019, youth revolted and took over the streets in several Iraqi cities, to demand change and a better life. But unfortunately, this ended in many wounded and killed youth. To achieve change we need more programmatic and financial support from the international organizations, not only for livelihood projects, but also for peace and security.

"We need sustainable programs and investments - not only short programs - to have a real impact on the ground in Iraq. Investments should not only focus on livelihoods, but also on youth, peace and security."

Recommendations:

- Establish permanent decision-making mechanism including youth.
- Sustain programmatic and financial investment in youth, peace and security not only in livelihood programs.
- Strengthen programs building bridges between different communities in Irag.

Sofia Ramyar of the Afghans for Progressive Thinking (Afghanistan)

Resolution 1325 and 2250 are both important in the context of Afghanistan, as they highlight the role of youth and women in Afghanistan and started bringing them into positions of influence.. The active participation of woman and youth in the peace process, that needs the support of the international community, will enable them to fight injustices, inequalities, and gender-based discrimination. Young Afghans are an inspiration for the people of Afghanistan at a time when they are so exhausted of a war that is taking a toll on the nation. They form by large the absolute majority of the population. Unfortunately, their rights and gains are threatened the most during the ongoing peace process. The peace process will not succeed if we fail to integrate women's perspectives in the first negotiations from the start.

Recommendations:

- Discuss 1325 and 2250 in every meeting with Afghan leaders and international influencers.
- Put out regular public statements in support of Afghan women and youth during the peace negotiations and after a potential peace deal.
- Active and established organizations like APT should be supported and strengthened to carry on their mandate.

Firyal Majdi of Youth Without Border Organization for Development (Yemen)

In 2019, the Prime Minister issued a decision to approve the first Yemen NAP 1325, a great accomplishment. UN women formed the Yemeni Women Pact as a consultative body for the Office of the United Nations Envoy to implement the NAP 1325 on the ground. A number of CSOs conducted all possible activities in order to pressure the implementation of the resolution on the ground too. On UNSCR 2250, there have been several accomplishments, such as local projects on knowledge expansion and awareness raising. There are also projects to support the reopening of the youth section in the office of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy in Yemen. Currently, the UN is also considering a Yemeni Youth Pact for Peace and Security, an advisory body that will work to implement this resolution on the ground. Unfortunately, in Yemen both UNSCR 1325 and 2250 are politically marginalized by the government as youth or women are not accepted at the negotiating table.

Recommendations:

- Accelerate the preparation of a NAP to implement the resolutions .
- Supporting youth and women to implement the outcomes of the national dialogue, which stipulated that 20% of decision-making sites are dedicated for youth and 30% for women.
- Increase the support of youth and women participation in decision-making, political and public life.

Shrinking Space for Women's Rights Organizations Working on the WPS Agenda

20 October 2020

Rewatch the discussion here

Over the past two decades global commitment towards gender equality and the participation of women in peace processes and security efforts has grown. Conversely, the spaces for civic engagement on peace and security are increasingly shrinking along with the participation and influence of women leaders and women's rights organizations from fragile and conflict-affected contexts in national, regional and global policy or decision-making. These pushbacks, now compounded by limitations associated with COVID-19, impede women's efforts to ensure accountability for the implementation of the women, peace and security frameworks at all levels, as well as the realisation of feminist peace.

The Women's International Peace Centre (WIPC) presented their research findings from a study on the shrinking space at regional and global levels for national women's rights organisations. The study focused on the evolution of the WPS agenda, the nature of pushbacks against the feminist goals of WPS and identifies opportunities to rethink and strengthen the WPS agenda in sustainable ways.

"Women's voices are not being heard, are not being allowed in the policy making spaces: many grassroots women's organizations don't have the capacities, resources or even visas to be in those (national and international) spaces. There are many limitations."

Helen Kezie-Nwoha, Executive Director of the Women's International Peace Centre

Helen Kezie-Nwoha of Women's International Peace Centre (Nigeria)

Helen Kezie-Nwoha is a feminist peace activist and human rights defender from Nigeria, and currently, the Executive Director of the WIPC. According to Helen, states need to be held accountable for the lack of advancement on the WPS agenda. She mentioned that "intentional efforts from the government to silence the voices of women's rights organizations" can be perceived. For instance, counter-terrorism is used as "an excuse to restrict the space for WPS".

Dr. Amon Mwine of Makerere University (Uganda)

Dr. Amon Mwine is lecturer and assistant researcher in Women and Gender Studies at Makerere University and presented the findings of the WIPC study. It was found that in terms of presence and participation, women peacebuilders across the world appear to have had global, national and local agency. Women peacebuilders were namely invited at the UNSC and were given other international platforms. However, the study noted that activists were often being invited to speak, but that their voices did not translate into action. In 2020, we still have spaces with exclusively men (e.g. the peace process in Libya and Morocco), the UN is male-dominated and AU special envoys have no effect. The UN Peace department even acknowledges a failure to include women.

Recommendations

- The UNSC needs to urge states, national and international actors to better implement 1325, and to reconceptualize women's participation as a fundamental right. More women in local and national structures should be able to participate at all levels.
- Women's rights organizations need to:

- Strengthen feminist models of mentorship
- Build activism for peace from grassroots
- Strengthen women peace builders' potential in leadership and decision-making structures
- Widen existing financial and human resource support networks to facilitate movement building; call upon global and regional funding agencies to invest in implementation of 1325; invest in psychosocial self-care for women activists to address trauma emerging from attending to victims of SGBV.

The study will be published in November.

Hibo Yassin Yussuf Hagi of IIDA Women's Development Organization (Somalia)

Hibo Yassin Yussuf Hagi is the Executive Director and Head of Policy, Resource Mobilization and Communication of IIDA Women's Development Organization. She argued that the implementation of the WPS agenda has been limping in the last years in Somalia: basic pillars still need to be achieved. She gave the example of Civil Society and UN Network on Peacebuilding, achieved to have ½ of women counsellors, but not institutionalized, and once the project was over there was no lasting impact. In all peace reconciliations in Somalia, women were the front runners, but when it was time to take decisions, the men took over, and the international community witnessed and did not interfere.

Shrinking space in Somalia is something women are confronted with on a daily basis. Women are threatened and there are very few allies on the inside. Journalists are being threatened. For the future, the youth of Somalia is extremely important. Using social media, they hold parliament accountable, but a lot of people are afraid to be associated with them. For example, only in the last 4 months, more than 30 boys and girls were raped and there were several executions without a proper judgement. To make it even worse, parliamentarians tried to free men who had raped and killed girls. Women still face violence on a daily basis.

Nadia Roguiai of the African Union (Ethiopia)

Nadia Roguiai is the gender, peace and security coordinator in the Peace and Security Department at the African Union. She thought the study was interesting and timely, and repeated how important it is to include women in peace processes, as gender equality is a key component for lasting peace. However, she thought the study lacked research on the mechanisms of the AU. It did not mention the Livingstone formula, which lets civil society contribute to reports on the implementation of WPS agenda. Thus, the study has omitted talking about AU mechanisms that work on 1325, but Nadia says part of the blame lies with the AU as these mechanisms are not well advertised. Overall, she says the study focuses too much on the UN and not enough on the AU. She believes we need to localize more, and thus focus and use AU mechanisms instead of always turning towards the UN when it comes to the implementation of the WPS agenda. Nadia believes we should further work on the establishment of working groups of African women on the WPS and believes the WPS agenda should indeed be mainstreamed.

Political Participation and the WPS Agenda: Challenges and inspiring practices from Burundi, CAR and Guinea-Bissau

21 October 2020

Rewatch the discussion here

The third webinar revolved around the subject of women's participation into political processes; a subject of crucial importance for the attainment of SDG 5. Three activists shared their perspectives on the place of women in

decision-making processes: Udé Fati from Guinée Bissau, Concessa Barubike from Burundi and Rosalie Mologbama from the Central African Republic (CAR). All three of their countries have recently known or are approaching election time. After interventions by the three activists, further reflections were given by Queeneth Tawo from the West African Peace Network and M. Ulrich Sandy from UN Women CAR.

In Burundi, CAR and Guinee Bissau, women are underrepresented at decision-making levels. They do participate in preparations for the elections, but despite measures taken by the international community, national authorities and the activism of civil society, women are underrepresented in key decision-making positions. They tend to be active in lesser roles that have to do with logistics or folklore events during the campaigns for example. Legislation to increase women's participation exists in all three countries, with for example quotas of representation and parity measures. However, top decision-making positions remain overwhelmingly occupied by men.

"Since UNSCR 1325, there has been more dynamism at country level for the inclusion of women in all spheres of society. However, there are also many remaining challenges."

Udé Fati, representative of Voz di Paz in Guinée Bissau

The speakers of this third side-event noted several markers of (non-)participation:

- Social pressure and expectations are different according to gender. Women are expected to take care of the household, to get married. Their participation in politics tends to depend on the will of their husband.
- Cultural beliefs and education in schools tend to perpetuate the image of a stay-at-home woman, ignoring the role of women in peace and state building. In CAR for example, several women have occupied important positions in governments since the seventies. However, in spite of these models, women are currently underrepresented in all decision-making instances.
- Financial barriers and a lack of awareness of women's rights keep slowing progress on the matter.
- Ms. Barubike from Burundi observed that there is also a defiance from the entire population to elect women at decision-making positions. In conflict-affected countries, such as CAR, politics are strongly associated with war and violence, thus deterring participation.

Recommendations

Increasing women's participation and representation will take time. The multiple charters, conventions and high-level fora are not enough to shake the current model. Stronger action is necessary. According to the speakers of this third side-event, changing the status quo relies in key areas:

- Education and youth: to keep raising awareness on women's rights, providing young boys and girls with strong models showing women in power positions.
- Trainings for women leadership: education and economic empowerment
- Ensuring implementation of the existing legislation, with an emphasis on the access of women to meaningful decision-making positions.
- Build a common agenda and strengthen coordination between international, national and local actors and stakeholders.

Religion and the WPS Agenda: Harnessing the potential of religion to improve opportunities for women in the most fragile contexts

22 October 2020

Rewatch the discussion here

Religion is often seen as a barrier in relation to the implementation of the WPS agenda, but research by Cordaid shows that a linkage between religion and WPS also bears important potential that is worthy of further exploration. The fourth side event in the series accorded attention to this topic, bringing together research insights and perspectives from the field, and introducing a Community of Practice that will be working on the topic.

A presentation by Hanna Scheffer of Cordaid on the findings of her research set the stage for an interesting discussion. The starting point for her research was the fact that religion constitutes an important part in the daily lives of a majority of the world's population. If we were to shut our eyes for religion and keep it outside of work relating to the WPS agenda, we would lose a significant connection of the agenda to people's daily lived experiences, as well as the norms and values that people hold. Through her research, Hanna gathered a range of good practices and formulated recommendations in order to shift the focus on the barriers of religion, to a focus on the potential of religion for the WPS agenda. In particular, it is important to consider the range of different interpretations that are given to religious traditions. Religion, in its many forms, is not inherently good or bad for the position of women and for women's peace and security needs. Therefore, we need better engagement with religion and a better understanding of the ways in which religion informs the lives of people across different contexts. This requires a distinction between religious institutions on the one hand, and people and personal understandings of religion on the other hand.

"We need to continue the dialogue so that we can discuss issues [like religion and religious values] that can bring us together."

Florence Andrew, chairperson of Support Trust for African Development

The discussion that followed was moderated by Anne-Floor Dekker, program manager at WO=MEN, and included reflections from Florence Andrew, chairperson of Support Trust for African Development (STAD) and Fidèle Djebba, founder of Association Rayons de Soleil.

Both Florence Andrew and Fidèle Djebba recognized the importance of Hanna's research. Florence mentioned that a respectful understanding of each other and an awareness of each other's backgrounds facilitates discussion and cooperation between different actors. Fidèle reiterated the relevance of Hanna's recommendation to look at religion beyond religious institutions and to focus on people and personal understandings of religion. By being more attentive to the realities of the people that the WPS agenda is set out to serve, we can improve our work on the WPS agenda.

Amidst a range of different actors, Florence and Fidèle pointed out that you have to be strategic when bringing religion and the politics around women's issues together. Here, the ways in which issues are framed or the narratives that surround a discussion play a critical role.

On integrating religion in work on the WPS agenda, Florence and Fidèle highlighted that we need to raise awareness of the WPS agenda and get people, especially women and young people, involved and empower them to engage with politics and societal issues. An attentiveness towards religion and religious diversity makes us

more attentive to the diversity that characterizes people, which is of the utmost importance if we want to confront generalization and strengthen inclusivity.

"We are not used to discuss religion when we talk about peace and security, but in our country [Cameroon], we know that religion plays a key role. It is important that we put religion and the WPS agenda together."

Fidèle Djebba, founder of Association Rayons de Soleil

The closing remarks were given by Anne Kwakkenbos, expert Gender, Peace and Security at Cordaid. She noted that the webinar session brought forward how relations between people, from power structures and leadership to empowerment and support, are at the core of work on the WPS agenda. Moreover, the session confirmed that there is still a lot to learn on the linkages of religion to the WPS agenda. In any case, Cordaid will continue to work on this subject by facilitating a Community of Practice. You can find more information here.

Women's Rights on the Line: Fighting for women's rights when it matters most – peace processes

23 October 2020

Rewatch the discussion here

The fifth and final side-event of the series started off with a passionate welcoming address by Melanne Verveer, Executive Director of the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security. Melanne Verveer provided a context on 20 years of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, its continuing relevance and its connection to the situations in Afghanistan and Yemen. She stressed that "women and men experience conflict and security differently" and that "the WPS approach recognizes that women's experience, knowledge and perspectives are vital to ending conflicts, forging agreements and sustaining peace". Accordingly, sustainable peace can only be built if women are involved.

"It is fitting that we are marking the anniversary of 1325 with these two powerful examples [Afghanistan and Yemen] of the critical role women are playing in their war-torn countries."

Melanne Verveer, Executive Director of the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security

The subsequent panel discussion was moderated by Rina Amiri, senior fellow at New York University's Center for Global Affairs. The discussion further dived into the contexts of Yemen and Afghanistan, paying attention to the current situations in these two countries, the obstacles and tools for women's inclusion in peace processes and the role of the international community in strengthening inclusivity. Firyal Majdi, project coordinator for peacebuilding projects at the Youth Without Borders Organization for Development (YWBOD) in Yemen, reported on the situation in Yemen. She noted that civil society in Yemen is struggling to get the diversity of their voices heard, and that it is hard for women to accomplish their involvement in peace processes.

Regarding the peace process in Afghanistan, Zarqa Yaftali, Executive Director of the Women and Children Legal Research Foundation (WCLRF), and Dr. Sima Samar, Special Envoy of the Afghanistan President, pointed out a lack of progress. A factor that especially complicates the situation in Afghanistan is the increase of violence, which is used as a pressure tool by the Taliban. Violence overshadows real commitments for peace and it stands in the way of maintaining a level playing field in negotiations. Furthermore, the protection of women's rights has not been taken up in the Afghan peace negotiations and it is unclear what the position of the Taliban and the Taliban's definition of Shariah is in this respect.

"It is not the responsibility of just these four women [of the negotiation team of the Afghan government] to raise the voice of women at the negotiation table; (...) this is the responsibility of **all** the members of the negotiation team."

Zarqa Yaftali, Executive Director of the Women and Children Legal Research Foundation (WCLRF)

While the circumstances are dire, Firyal Majdi, Zarqa Yaftali and Dr. Sima Samar also emphasized gateways for action and a role for the international community. Firyal Majdi explained how peacemakers across Yemen have tried to coordinate their efforts, and stated the importance of connecting these efforts to regional and international political levels. Moreover, she described how more structural funding is needed from the international community for women's organizations and women's campaigns in Yemen.

On the intra-Afghan peace talks, Zarqa Yaftali noted that it is the responsibility of everyone involved to raise women's voices and ensure the protection of women's rights. Dr. Sima Samar added that the inclusivity of the peace talks has to be improved and that the design of the peace talks should reflect the interests of different groups in Afghan society. They should in particular involve more women, people from civil society, minority groups and victims, and thereby accord more attention to the different ways in which people in Afghanistan have been impacted by the conflict.

Dr. Sima Samar mentioned specific tools or mechanisms to engender inclusivity, like Track 2 mechanisms and the establishment of advisory groups on, for instance, minority rights or disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR). Furthermore, Dr. Sima Samar noted that a facilitator or a mediator to the peace talks could be useful, but that it is critically important that such a third party would be equally trusted by both sides of the intra-Afghan peace negotiations.

"We cannot bring peace without women; that is very clear. They have to accept that we exist and that we are equal in rights and dignity according to Quran and Sharia."

Dr. Sima Samar, Special Envoy of the Afghanistan President

A subject that was noted to be of relevance to the contexts of both Yemen and Afghanistan is the role of religion and the existence of a diverse range of religious interpretations, connecting well with the previous Cordaid-CSPPS webinar on "Religion and WPS". Firyal Majdi referred to the broad impact of religion on societies and the struggles they face, including women's particular struggles, stating that "you cannot take religion out of this discussion". Both Firyal Majdi and Dr. Sima Samar referred to the different definitions that are given to Islam, whereby in Afghanistan for example, "the Taliban is not the only guardian of Islam". An awareness and understanding of these different interpretations are key, also on the part of the international community. According to Dr. Sima Samar, it is not religion per se, but "the package of patriarchy and the *misuse* of religion" that we have to watch out for and fight against.

The panel discussion ended with the reiteration of words that denoted the universality of the struggles that the people in Yemen and Afghanistan face. Moreover, the panel members stressed the importance of standing united on and fighting for the values, norms and rights that support peace and inclusivity. Hereby, there is a role for the international community to support and link up with local, national and regional efforts.

Conclusions and Outcomes of the Series

The series provided a space for dialogue and for sharing. It fulfilled its aim to encourage activists, policy makers and donors to continue or renew their commitment to the WPS agenda, and to accelerate action towards full implementation of the WPS agenda.

The varied panels shared their experiences and recommendations and the most prominent take is that in the 20 years since the landmark resolution has been passed by the UNSCR, we have been witnessing progress on the implementation of women's involvement in peace and security issues, with increased attention for women's specific roles and needs in diverse conflict-affected settings. These discussions however highlighted that one major issue around the WPS agenda was that it is often implemented in isolated programmes, and that the lack of the mainstreaming of the agenda means it is still lagging behind. In moving forward, there needs to be international commitment to ensure we all embark upon a more inclusive and participatory process.

Main Outcomes and Recommendations

- The international community needs to push for the preparation of a national plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325
- Governments need to support youth and women in the implementation of the outcomes of the national dialogue.
- The international and national communities needs to increase its support of youth and women participation in decision-making and political and public life.
- Establish effective international accountability mechanisms on human rights violations committed against women and youth activists especially in conflict areas.
- Women's rights organizations need to play a bigger role in the implantation of UNSCR 2325 and in peace process
- Schools need to raise awareness on women's rights, providing young boys and girls with strong models showing women in power positions.
- In many countries, there are laws ensuring gender parity in governing positions, this needs to be respected and implemented
- Context, culture and religion cannot be disregarded in the implementation of UNSCR 1325, and need to be seen as potential allies

THANK YOU!

Cordaid and CSPPS would like to express our thanks to all the speakers, organizations, moderators, translators, and all others who helped to arrange, facilitate, and run the webinars over the course of the week – especially addressing the challenges of going digital.

We would like to thank UNOY Peace Builders, Afghans for Progressive Thinking (APT), Together We Build It (TWBI), Kurdistan Relief Association (KRA), Nederlandse Jeugd Raad (NJR), Youth Without Borders Organisation for Development (YWBOD), Women's International Peace Centre (WIPC), School of Women and Gender Studies – Makerere University, IIDA Women's Organization for Development, the African Union (AU), Cercle, Association des Femmes Rapatriées du Burundi (AFRABU), Voz di Paz, Support Trust for African Development (STAD), Association Rayons de Soleil, WO=MEN - Dutch Gender Platform, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, and the Women and Children Legal Research Foundation (WCLRF) for contributing their invaluable expertise and sharing their unique perspectives to feed into the discussions.

Finally, we'd like to thank all those who participated and asked incisive and insightful questions over the course of the series.

Contact

CSPPS

Email: info@cspps.org
Website: www.cspps.org
Twitter: @idps_cspps

Facebook: @civilsocietyplatform Instagram: @cspps_global

Cordaid

Email: anne.kwakkenbos@cordaid.org

Website: www.cordaid.org/en

Twitter: @cordaid Facebook: @Cordaid Instagram: @cordaid

