Women as the pioneers in conflict prevention and peacebuilding:
The linkages between Sustaining Peace and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS)
agenda

October 24th, 9:00 – 10:30am
Large Conference Room
3 Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, 10th floor

On October 24th, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), and the International Peace Institute (IPI), organized the sixth roundtable discussion on Operationalizing Sustaining Peace, titled, "Women as pioneers in conflict prevention and peacebuilding: the interlinkages between sustaining peace and the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda." The event, held during the week preceding the Open Debate on WPS and the 19th Anniversary of the adoption of the first WPS resolution, UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, provided space to discuss the progress achieved in the implementation of the WPS agenda, and the lessons from it, can be used to inform and strengthen the operationalization of sustaining peace.

While acknowledging the WPS and sustaining peace resolutions as being distinct, the roundtable served as an opportunity to highlight how they complement and mutually reinforce each other. Both agendas stress the centrality of women's leadership and meaningful participation in the prevention and resolution of conflict and in peacebuilding.

The adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000 was a historical moment, and a result of unyielding work of women's rights and peace activists around the world. The resolution established a normative framework for women's meaningful participation in decision-making, conflict resolution, conflict prevention and peacebuilding; protection of women and girls' rights; and prevention of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict-affected situations. Importantly, it also shifted the narrative from depicting women as passive victims of conflict, to recognizing them as actors and agents of peace.

Similarly, the sustaining peace resolutions ([A/RES/70/262](#); [S/RES/ 2282](#)) underscore "the importance of women's leadership and participation in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding, and recognize the continuing need to increase representation of women at all decision-making levels." Sustaining Peace, as such, supports the shift from conflict response and the vision that peacebuilding only happens in post-conflict settings towards "a goal and a process [...] aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict."

Therefore, in considering the operationalization of the sustaining peace resolutions, it is critical to reflect on progress and gaps in implementing WPS, and the ways in which the two agendas intersect, and how they can mutually reinforce one another on the ground.

The following is a summary of the themes and key recommendations raised during the discussion.

Women, especially local women, are critical actors in conflict prevention

Conflict prevention is a core of both WPS and Sustaining Peace. Experts, practitioners and women activists around the world have argued that the core goal of WPS implementation should be "sustained social change to undo the conditions that produce violent conflict in the first place,"[1] and that "the women, peace and security agenda is about ending conflict, not about making conflict safer for women."[2]

Roundtable participants provided numerous examples of women's contributions to peacebuilding and sustaining peace. Both WPS and Sustaining Peace resolutions also recognize that women have been critical actors in conflict prevention. While they continue to be excluded from peace processes, women lead initiatives to build social cohesion, raise awareness about negative effects of violence, and mediate conflict in their communities.[3] For example, in Bangladesh, following politico-ethnic violence in the Chittagong Hills, women and local civil society installed collective tube wells and solar powered energy stations to provide the community with energy, while addressing tensions caused by the scarcity of resources. Local women and civil society also mobilize communities, raise awareness, and promote peaceful dialogues in regions where intolerance and distrust lead to tension between different groups.

Gender inequality is a root cause of conflict

The nexus between gender equality and communities' resilience to conflict, and on the flip side gender inequality as a key indicator of fragility was one of the important aspects raised during the roundtable discussion. This nexus has been well-researched and documented.[4] Gender equality and inclusion, in particular of women and women's organizations, have been recognized as key drivers of peace, and studies have shown that their inclusion can lead to more durable and sustainable peace.[5] As such, the WPS agenda is not an add-on, but an essential component necessary to fully operationalize sustaining peace.

In 2016, shortly after the adoption of the sustaining peace resolutions, the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) adopted a gender strategy to "ensure a more structural integration of gender perspectives in all its work."[6] The strategy emphasizes that gender equality is at the center of the sustaining peace resolutions, as well as the 2030 Agenda. It sets out, among other things, to integrate gender perspectives in all its efforts; engage on gender-specific priority areas, such as women's economic empowerment, women's inclusion in early warning mechanisms, conflict prevention and resolution; and to advocate actively for dedicated technical expertise and funding on gender-responsive peacebuilding.

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[1] Kirby, P., Shepherd, L.J., 2016. The futures past of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Int. Aff. 92, 373–392. doi:10.1111/1468-2346.12549

[2] Coomaraswamy, R. et al, (2015). Preventing Conflict Transforming Justice Securing the Peace A Global Study on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325. Retrieved from: http://wps.unwomen.org/~/media/files/un%20women/wps/highlights/unw-global-study-1325-2015.pdf

[3] For examples of women's contributions to conflict prevention, see Agnieszka Fal-Dutra Santos et al., "Building and Sustaining Peace from the Ground Up: A Global Study of Civil Society and Local Women's Perception of Sustaining Peace", Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, 2019. Available at: https://gnwp.org/publications/sustaining-peace-report-en/

[4] Cf. Caprioli, M., 2005. Primed for violence: The role of gender inequality in predicting internal conflict. Int. Stud. Q. 49, 161–178.; Gizelis, T.-I., 2009. Gender Empowerment and United Nations Peacebuilding. J. Peace Res. 46, 505–523. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343309334576

[5] Coomaraswamy, R. et al, (2015). Preventing Conflict Transforming Justice Securing the Peace A Global Study on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325. Retrieved from: http://wps.unwomen.org/~/media/files/un%20women/wps/highlights/unw-global-study-1325-2015.pdf; Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security. S/2017/861. 16 October 2017.

[6] Peacebuilding Commission's Gender Strategy, Available at: https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/07092016-_pbc_gender_strategy_final_1.pdf

Effective implementation of this strategy is necessary for the operationalization of sustaining peace. This was recognized during the PBC Ambassadorial Meeting on WPS on 21 October 2019. At the meeting the importance of strengthening the synergies between sustaining peace and WPS was highlighted, as well as the imperative to strengthen the inclusion of local women in sustaining peace implementation – for example through the engagement of women's organizations in PBC country visits.

Annual meetings to track the implementation of the PBC gender strategy are critical to gauge the outcomes of the Commission's efforts in this area and to advance the integration of a gender perspective in the UN's peacebuilding and sustaining peace work.

Localization is a key to WPS and sustaining peace implementation

One of the conclusions of the roundtable discussion was the necessity for a locally-led operationalization of both WPS and sustaining peace. The actors working on operationalization of WPS and sustaining agendas should seek to support the existing conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives led by local women, and to include women at all levels of conflict prevention, peacebuilding and sustaining peace. Localization is therefore a key strategy for operationalization of both agendas.

The UN Secretary-General has cited "Localization of WPS" as a key implementation strategy in his reports to the Security Council in 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019. Localization refers to a process wherein local actors – including local women, local authorities, traditional leaders and other key stakeholders – analyze the global and national policies on WPS and/or Sustaining Peace, to discuss their applicability to their local context, and identify concrete actions for local implementation.[7] It is an important implementation strategy because it allows global policies – including WPS and the sustaining peace resolutions – to be translated into concrete and necessary actions on the ground.

Equally important is guaranteeing local women's access to global policy spaces. Some of the roundtable discussion participants pointed out that local women are still often excluded from global policy discussions, as well as from the setting of donor priorities the design of programs. The Secretary-General's 2018 report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace noted that engagement and consultations with local communities should be more "continuous and systematic". The findings of the GNWP's global research on Sustaining Peace reinforce this point, illustrating that efforts to consult local communities and civil society when designing peacebuilding interventions are still limited. For example, 20 percent of respondents reported that local civil society is not able to influence the design of programs implemented by international donors and partners at all, and 17 percent reported they could do so only to a limited extent.[8]

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[7] Localization of WPS is people-based, bottom-up strategy pioneered by GNWP. It is based on evidence that local ownership and participation leads to more effective policy making and policy implementation. It convenes governors, mayors, councilors, community leaders, paramount chiefs, indigenous leaders and traditional leaders, religious leaders, women leaders, youth leaders, teachers, the security sector and all other key local actors — to formulate local action plans (LAPs), local legislation, and integrate UNSCR 1325 and the supporting WPS resolutions into community development plans. As of November 2019, GNWP has implemented Localization in 16 countries, and over 50 provinces, communities and municipalities. The strategy has also been implemented by other actors – for example, in Ukraine, Nigeria, Nepal and Indonesia.

[8] Agnieszka Fal-Dutra Santos et al., "Building and Sustaining Peace from the Ground Up: A Global Study of Civil Society and Local Women's Perception of Sustaining Peace", Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, 2019. Available at: https://gnwp.org/publications/sustaining-peace-report-en/

In follow up to the Secretary-General's report, the Joint UN-CSO Working Group chaired by the UN Peacebuilding Support Office is developing guidelines for community engagement on peacebuilding and sustaining peace. The guidelines are expected to guide UN agencies in their efforts of cooperating with local civil society and community actors that are active in peacebuilding, particularly through building capacities, fostering a conducive environment for robust civil society, the sharing of good practices and an active engagement of these stakeholders in analysis, planning, programming and monitoring and evaluation.

Challenges to Sustaining peace and WPS implementation persist

Despite nearly 20 years of implementation efforts, progress towards the implementation of WPS resolutions remains slow and uneven.[9] The 2019 the UN Secretary-General's report on WPS notes that "We still live in a world where women face exclusion from peace and political processes; where the number of attacks against women human rights defenders, humanitarians and peacebuilders continues to rise; where the attempted erosion of international human rights standards persists; and where xenophobia, racism, intolerance, homophobia, transphobia and violent misogyny continue to spread."[10]

By recognizing the central role of women, and the importance of gender-analysis in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, the sustaining peace resolutions offer an opportunity to revitalize the implementation of WPS, and to bring attention to its central tenet – preventing conflict and addressing its root causes. WPS resolutions provide a normative framework for effective inclusion of women and a gender perspective in peace processes – without which the sustaining peace resolutions cannot be fully operationalized.

The 2019 report of the UN Secretary-General on WPS analyzed the implementation of gender-related recommendations in three 2015 peace and security reviews, including the peacebuilding architecture review, which led to the adoption of the sustaining peace resolutions. The report found that only 50 per cent of these recommendations have been implemented or are in the process thereof; 40 per cent were found inconsistent in their implementation or required further progress; and for 10 per cent no progress had been made at all.

Some of the persistent gaps to implementation noted by the Secretary-General's report, and raised during the roundtable discussion include:

(1) Lack of gender analysis in discussions on peace and security (this is reflected, for example, in the fact that less than 20% of UNSC Resolutions include references to gender).

(2) Pervasive and increasing rates of political violence against women (which have reached a historical new high in May 2019), misogynistic, sexist and homophobic speech, as well as sexual violence in conflict.

(3) Lack of gender analysis in humanitarian needs assessments (in 2018, only 28% of such assessments recognized the different needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls in crises.

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[9] For example, the 2015 Global Study on UNSCR 1325 pointed out that "much of the progress toward the implementation of resolution 1325 continues to be measured in 'firsts', rather than as standard practice. Obstacles and challenges still persist and prevent the full implementation of the women and peace and security agenda."
[10] S/2019/800, Available at: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2019_800.pdf

(4) Insufficient funding to women's organizations (only 0.2% of total bilateral aid to fragile and conflict-affected situations in 2016-2017), contrasted with military spending ($1.8 trillion globally in 2018). In this context, it is important to mention efforts being taken to channel funding to local women's organizations, who are often the first responders and most effective peacebuilders, such as the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, which allocates 50 percent its funds to civil society groups working in local communities directly affected by conflict or humanitarian emergencies. The Peacebuilding Fund's Gender and Youth Peacebuilding Initiative is another noteworthy initiative in this regard.

(5) Political and economic exclusion of women – with only 19% of parliamentary seats held by women in conflict and post-conflict countries, and limited property rights in 40% of economies.

Strengthening synergies between WPS and sustaining peace – practical priorities

In order to address these gaps, the following steps are recommended:

- **The PBC should accelerate implementation of its Gender Strategy,** and hold annual substantive meetings on gender-responsive peacebuilding, to track progress of its implementation, and to ensure that WPS resolutions are integrated into the PBC's work.

- **The Security Council should strengthen gender analysis in all of its discussions,** and include references to gender equality, gender-specific needs and WPS in all its resolutions.

- **UN Country Teams, humanitarian and peacebuilding actors should include gender analysis in all** needs assessments and program design and consistent with the minimum requirements agreed upon by the UN Sustainable Development Group in the UNCT System Wide Action Plan (SWAP) Gender Equality Scorecard.[11]

- **All actors involved in the operationalization of Sustaining Peace and conflict prevention and peacebuilding** should ensure that women, including local and rural women, and diverse civil society is meaningfully consulted during design, implementation and monitoring of peacebuilding and sustaining peace initiatives.

- **The UN Secretary-General should give special attention to the progress in supporting the roles of women in preventing conflict, as well as the recognition of gender inequality as a root cause of conflict** in his 2020 report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace, and include a gender analysis across all of his reports to the Security Council.

- **The international community and bilateral donors should increase their technical and financial support to local women's organizations working on peacebuilding and conflict prevention**, including through contributing to the Women Peace and Humanitarian Fund

- **The United Nations, including its Member States, and all regional and international actors should give greater** recognition and support to the value of the work of women

[11] https://undg.org/document/unct-swap-gender-equality-scorecard/

activists, peacebuilders and human rights defenders in preventing conflict and sustaining peace, and condemn all attacks against them.