Amplifying voices, generating ownership

Report from consultations on Women, Peace and Security and the Peacebuilding Architecture Review with local and national women peacebuilders in Colombia, Northern Ireland, South Africa and Uganda

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The promise of “maintaining international peace and security”\(^1\) is one of the most important commitments of the United Nations (UN), and securing peace one of its most central tasks. Yet, it is also a promise that has proven to be the most elusive. 75 years after the creation of the UN, and 20 years after the adoption of the groundbreaking UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), conflict and instability remain to be widespread across the world. Armed conflict continues to be a major obstacle to the fulfilment of women’s rights and gender equality. Peacebuilding and sustaining peace is primarily a responsibility of national governments. However, UN has a critical role, through its peacebuilding architecture, in supporting and catalyzing the efforts of states and civil society to identify and address the root causes of conflict, in order to build a lasting and inclusive peace.

The Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace Resolutions (A/RES/70/262 and S/RES/2282) adopted in 2016 stress the centrality of women’s leadership and meaningful participation in the prevention and resolution of conflict and peacebuilding. They recognize the need to increase the representation of women at all levels of decision-making and call for strengthened partnerships with women’s groups and other civil society actors. In a similar vein, the Global Study on UNSCR 1325 recommends to “support and invest in participatory processes, social accountability tools and localization initiatives to link global, national and local efforts and ensure the voices of the most affected and marginalized populations inform and shape relevant responses and monitoring of progress.”

The 2020 Peacebuilding Architecture Review provides an important opportunity to reflect on concrete strategies for more integrative, inclusive, and cross-sectoral implementation of the Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace resolutions and other key agendas, including WPS. To ensure that voices of local and national women peacebuilders are meaningfully included in the Review, the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, in partnership with UN Women and Ireland, conducted a series of in-country consultations on WPS and the Peacebuilding Architecture Review with women from the civil society in Colombia, Northern Ireland, Uganda and South Africa. This report summarizes the key insights and recommendations that emerged from the consultation process.

A stark reality: Challenges identified through the in-country consultations

Despite a global consensus on women’s right to meaningful participation in decision-making on peace and security, and ample evidence showing that meaningful participation of women is a pre-requisite for sustainable peace, women continue to face obstacles that undermine their important contributions to conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding.

1. Women remain severely under-represented or excluded in national and local governance, conflict-management structures, mediation and peace negotiations, and security forces, including peacekeeping forces despite ample evidence of the benefits of women’s inclusion. For example, participants in the consultation in Colombia noted that women’s participation in the peace negotiation between the Government and the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) contributed to strengthening of the women’s rights organizations in Colombia, and led to a change in the Colombian society towards more inclusive and respectful of women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons. Conversely, exclusion of women results into processes and policies that are not gender-responsive, and not conducive to inclusive peace. For example, in Uganda, women are often excluded from local peace committees, as well as local and national legislative bodies. As a result, key policies related to peacebuilding – such as the transitional justice policy – are gender-blind and do not reflect women’s concerns and priorities.

Women also remain excluded from both official (Track 1) negotiation processes and from local mediation mechanisms – even when they are highly skilled and have been trained as mediators.

2. **Women’s exclusion is exacerbated by widespread violence they continue to face.** The 2019 UN Secretary-General report on WPS concludes that over 50 parties to conflict are credibly suspected of committing sexual violence; and that at least 1 in 5 refugee or displaced women experience sexual violence. This was validated by the participants of the in-country consultations, who also emphasized that survivors of sexual and gender-based violence often do not have access to justice and necessary services, including trauma counselling. Participants in Northern Ireland also noted that sexual violence can be used as a means of community control and coercion, both during conflict and afterwards. Participants in Colombia noted that peacebuilding work is made more difficult by the ongoing violence and attacks by armed group in some parts of the country.

Furthermore, **women leaders, peacebuilders and human rights defenders are under attack.** Participants in Northern Ireland noted that women worldwide are “under threat like never before”. Participants in South Africa and Uganda noted that the shrinking space for civil society is a principal barrier to effective peacebuilding and conflict prevention. In some communities in Uganda, there is a sense of shame associated with being an activist, or human rights defender. Women activists are referred to as “men”, “impossible women” or “home-breakers”. As a result, they are often shunned by their families or exposed to verbal or physical violence.

3. **There is limited coordination and collaboration on the implementation of WPS and protection of women’s rights.** This weakens the institutional frameworks for WPS implementation – where they exist – and leads to non-implementation. In Northern Ireland, the participants emphasized the importance of formal institutions – such as the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission – in the protection and promotion of women’s human rights. They emphasized that there is no gender equality strategy and no mechanism to integrate a gender lens across government in Northern Ireland. Similarly, participants in South Africa noted that much of the work that contributes to the achievement of WPS priorities – for example, work to protect women’s human rights or advance women’s economic empowerment – takes place in silos and there is limited coordination both among civil society and between government and civil society. On a similar note, participants in Colombia emphasized the importance of building networks at the local level, and integrating gender-sensitive provisions into local development plans, to strengthen coordination and ensure the implementation of the gender provisions of the peace agreement at the local level.

4. **Women’s lack of access to economic resources and financial dependence aggravates their insecurity and poses a threat to building and sustaining peace.** The participants noted that due to discriminatory laws and practices around property inheritance and land ownership, as well as social norms that prevent women from fully participating in the labor market, most women are economically dependent on men. Even when they are the primary earners in the family, due to the traditional power structures, they do not have a say in the decision-making on family finances. This fuels domestic violence and affects women’s security and access to justice – as they are not able to cover legal fees or pay for basic services. It also exacerbates other forms of gender-based violence, such as human trafficking and early, child and forced marriage.

5. **There is limited knowledge of the global, regional and national policy frameworks on gender equality and sustainable peace among local actors – including women peacebuilders and local authorities.** Consultation participants in South Africa and Uganda noted that even when gender-sensitive policies such as National Action Plans on WPS exist, they are not translated into local languages therefore not known at the local level. They emphasized the importance of localization as a strategy to transform policies into concrete actions at the grassroots level. Similarly, in Colombia, the participants noted that there is a lack of knowledge of women’s rights among local populations and lack of capacity and understanding of gender equality in local institutions. This leads to delays in the implementation of the gender-sensitive provisions of the peace agreement between the government and the FARC.

The same holds true for the Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace resolutions and other global frameworks on peacebuilding. Many of the local women peacebuilders who attended the

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consultations were not aware of the Sustaining Peace resolutions, and the ways the UN Peacebuilding Architecture can support and strengthen their work.

6. Women’s contributions to conflict prevention, peacebuilding and sustaining peace are unrecognized and underfunded. Participants in the consultations noted that women peacebuilders lack both financial and political support to their work. When funding for conflict prevention and peacebuilding exists, it is often not accessible to women’s rights organizations, especially those working at the local level, due to limited dissemination of information, and complex application procedures. In Northern Ireland, the participants noted that funding is often only made available to women’s organizations “only after they proved their effectiveness in engaging paramilitaries”, and that majority of the post-conflict recovery funding is directed to projects designed “by men for men”.

The participants in Uganda also highlighted that donor priorities are often not aligned with the realities and needs on the ground. This is in line with GNWP research on local civil society and local women’s perceptions on Sustaining Peace, in which 20 percent of over 1,000 women and men who responded to a multi-lingual survey reported that local civil society was not able to influence the design of donor programs at all, and 17 per cent reported they could do so only to a limited extent.

Recommendations

During the consultations, the local and national women peacebuilders discussed and validated the six priority areas identified by the UN Secretary-General in his 2019 report on Women and Peace and Security to the Security Council. Ahead of the Peacebuilding Architecture Review, and based on the outcomes of the in-country consultations, they proposed the following recommendations to realize the priority areas; and improve the UN’s efforts to build sustainable and inclusive peace:

1. Make the UN leadership accountable for the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda, through targeted data collection, joined-up analysis, strategic planning and raised visibility

   a) UN Resident Coordinators and Peace and Development Advisors should more proactively engage women peacebuilders in their planning and conflict analysis to ensure that it is gender-sensitive and reflects local women’s realities; and work closely with UN Women Country Offices to support the advancement of the WPS agenda.

   b) The Peacebuilding Commission should also continue to seek to include perspectives of local women peacebuilders in its deliberations, including by inviting more women civil society briefers, and providing opportunities for civil society to provide concrete recommendations to its work.

   c) The UN should support national- and local-level coordination and coherence, including by encouraging the appointment of gender focal points across all Ministries, and supporting the training and capacity of those focal points to ensure that they have a strong understanding of peacebuilding, capacity to conduct gendered conflict-analysis, and are aware of their role in implementing WPS and Sustaining Peace resolutions.

   d) The UN, Member States and other international development partners should invest in outreach to local communities to raise awareness and share information about international frameworks, including WPS and Sustaining Peace resolutions and relevant national policies; and in Localization of these frameworks, including the development of local action plans to ensure effective implementation.

   e) The UN and Member States should continue to make use of the existing mechanisms – including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) – to ensure accountability for the implementation of peace agreements, as well as WPS and Sustaining Peace resolutions.

   f) The UN, Member States and other international development partners should recognize that meaningful coordination requires time and resources, and support women’s networks and

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3 The participants cited the consultation facilitated by the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) and UN Women in South Africa and Uganda in partnership with the Irish Embassies in both countries, as an example of a platform for civil society to provide their recommendation to international processes.
coalitions and that dedicated funding and technical support for improving coordination among civil society, establishing and strengthening women’s networks and movements, and documentation and dissemination of the impacts of the work of local women peacebuilders.

2. Enable, facilitate and ensure the meaningful participation of women in peace processes, the implementation of peace agreements and in all peace and security decision-making processes

a) The UN should intensify its efforts to include women in Track 1 peace negotiations, including by refusing to support processes that do not include women in negotiation teams, and not solely as observers or advisors.

b) The UN, Member States and other international development partners should support innovative solutions to link the informal, Track 2 and 3 peace processes, with the official peace negotiations, including through dialogues between women leading the informal processes and official negotiators.

c) The UN and Member States should scale up training of local women leaders as mediators, resolution and ensure their deployment post-training by creating national pools of women mediators to react to outbreaks of violence; and including women in local peace committees.

d) The Peacebuilding Commission should use its strategic advisory position to strongly demand meaningful women’s participation, which goes beyond observer or advisory roles, in all peace processes.

e) The UN, Member States and other international development partners should increase the financial oversight of donor funding for the implementation of peace agreements, to ensure that it is used efficiently and that implementation of gender-sensitive provisions is prioritized.

3. Publicly condemn human rights violations and discrimination and prevent all forms of gender-based violence, including against women human rights defenders

a) The UN, including the Peacebuilding Commission, should encourage and support the establishment of rapid response mechanism for women activists, peacebuilders and human rights defenders, who are facing threats.

b) The UN, including the Peacebuilding Commission, should encourage and support the establishment of civil society-driven early warning and response mechanisms to address violence against women, especially women activists, peacebuilders and human rights defenders.

c) The UN should put in place strict zero-tolerance policy and budgeted action plans for addressing sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, and ensure that there are clear, accessible and safe reporting pathways and that perpetrators are prosecuted and punished; and urge all other actors to do the same.

d) The UN and Member States should guarantee the availability of basic services to women, in particular victims of gender-based violence, including sexual and reproductive health services and trauma counselling.

e) The UN, Member States and other international development partners should support victims’ access to justice, and work with local women and victims’ organizations to ensure that cases of sexual and gender-based violence are recognized and prosecuted, and that the victims’ experiences are made visible.

4. Increase the number and influence of women uniformed personnel in peacekeeping missions and national security services

a) Member States should review their security sector policies to ensure that they are gender-sensitive; and adopt comprehensive policy frameworks on gender parity in the deployment of women in security sector and peacekeeping operations, including affirmative action measures to encourage and facilitate women’s joining and promotion within military and police.

b) The UN should continue to support the provision of pre-deployment gender-sensitivity trainings for peacekeepers at all levels, and make such training compulsory.
c) **The UN Security Council** should ensure that there is a full-time, dedicated gender advisor in every peacekeeping operation throughout the mission not just on a rotational basis, and ensure that the advisor has mandate and capacity to conduct community engagement.

5. **Guarantee access for women to economic security and resources**

a) **Member States** should ensure a minimum of 50% women’s representation in public financial institutions, and at all decision-making levels.

b) **The UN and international development partners** should design interventions that intentionally address barriers to women’s ownership and control over economic resources, including land.

c) **The UN and international development partners** should invest in and support women’s economic empowerment initiatives, including through skills building and support for micro-economic and micro-loan initiatives, and ensure that gender-disaggregated data is available for all programs, initiatives and analysis related to economic development.

d) **The UN and international development partners** should invest in better understanding and addressing the specific barriers different marginalized groups, including women refugees and internally displaced persons; women veterans; women with disabilities; & LGBTI persons face.

6. **Finance the women and peace and security agenda and invest in women peacebuilders**

a) **The UN and international development partners** must ensure that their priorities and programmes are aligned with grassroots needs and priorities, and include women peacebuilders in priority-setting and program design from early stages.

b) **Member States** should set up pooled funds for implementation of National Action Plans, to pool national funds and attract donors in order to guarantee financing for full and effective implementation of WPS.

c) **The Peacebuilding Fund** should ensure that its Gender and Youth Peacebuilding Initiative (G/YPI) is widely disseminated and more accessible to grassroots women.

d) **The UN and international development partners** should monitor the extent to which their funding is accessible to local organizations – including in particular those led by women and youth – and track percentage of funding that goes to grassroots organizations.

e) **The UN and international development partners** should simplify their requirements and application process, to make the funds more accessible to grassroots organizations.

f) **The UN and international development partners** should encourage partnerships and use of consortia with strong involvement and leadership from local organizations in their funding processes.

g) **The UN and international development partners** should invest in and conduct capacity building and skills transfer to local organizations, including on accounting practices and monitoring and evaluation, to ensure sustainability of work.