Women for Peace and Participation (WPP)

Women Peacebuilder's Forum
30 January 2018
TABLE OF CONTENTS

3 Overview
4 Key Outcomes
9 Concluding Remarks
OVERVIEW

Eighteen years since the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (October 2000), the Women, Peace and Security agenda has become ever more critical in the face of violent extremism, rising levels of conflict and failing states. In this context, women's crucial role as active participants in the prevention and resolution of war cannot be underestimated. Despite their many achievements at local and national levels, women's participation levels in formal peace-making and peace-building fora remain low.

Experience demonstrates that women are more likely to participate meaningfully in peace-building when they operate within international and domestic networks. Such networks have strengthened their role in peace processes and have supported lobbying efforts for their inclusion in decision-making. In particular, diaspora women have had considerable influence on policy agendas in recent years and have contributed greatly to the socio-economic development of their home countries. Many of these women, who have felt the effects of war first-hand, possess unique skills and a deep understanding of the local context.

Against this background, Women for Peace and Participation (WPP) launched United Women for Peace (UWP) in April 2017, a unique platform that convenes women peace-builders from various countries and backgrounds whose work directly and indirectly impacts social pacification. This includes women in politics, civil society and the private sector, women in the diaspora and refugee communities, all of whom possess the skills and first-hand experience to make a positive impact. Through UWP, these women can share insights, discuss challenges and strategies and collectively decide how and what to talk about when it comes to advocacy and representation.

In line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), WPP developed the platform based on the needs identified by women peace-builders - including both those on the move, such as refugees and migrants, and those who are now part of established diaspora communities. Over the years, it has become quite evident that there is a huge disconnect amongst women living inside and outside conflict regions. In an effort to close this gap, the WPP is creating and supporting safe spaces for women to convene and establish a strong foundation for advocacy and participation.

Less than one year after its establishment, United Women for Peace convened its first Women Peacebuilders’ Forum on 30th January 2018. The conference brought together women across various conflict regions to engage in dialogue, share their experience, and identify pathways for their continuous and meaningful engagement. The conference provided a space where women from both the diaspora and conflict regions came together to define a common agenda and reaffirm the importance of coalition-building, peer-to-peer exchange, and collective action.

Women affected by conflicts in Afghanistan, Colombia, Turkey, Kosovo and Yemen can together to identify lessons learned, develop a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities women encounter in peace and security processes, and lay the foundations for continued engagement on the WPS agenda. During the conference, participants highlighted the approaches they have taken in countering violent extremism, promoting social pacification, and rebuilding social cohesion. These approaches, it was mentioned, should inform and shape future policies and actions around the inclusion of women and young people.

In addition to women from conflict zones, the conference included expert facilitators from Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS), WPP and Leicester University. The chair of the conference brought together the concluding points, highlighting some of the most important, such as socio-economic and political, aspects of peace-building.
The conference was designed around two main themes: (1) the Role of Women in Peace Processes; and (2) the Role of Women in Civic Engagement and Sustainable Development. Panel discussions were followed by smaller breakout workshops. The report findings reflect these two key themes and several sub-themes under each key theme.

I. Women and Peacebuilding, Spaces for Women in the Diaspora

A. Women and International Frameworks

UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security is one of the most important resolutions addressing the inclusion and equal participation of women in processes and policies of peace-building. However, it has fallen short in achieving its objectives. Speakers discussed the lack of inclusivity in its implementation, noting that only a few elite women were consulted. Most importantly, they noted, the resolution excluded those women it explicitly purports to support - refugee women forced to flee their countries because of war and conflict. The fact that the resolution clearly states the need for these women to be equal participants in the decisions and processes of peace and security, makes this shortcoming particularly acute.

To begin, UNSCR 1325 has a specific mandate and agenda and its implementation is supported by National Action Plans (NAP) developed at the country level. Consequently, the agenda is being driven by politicians dissimilarly across different countries. Furthermore, international focus and support towards the actual implementation of the resolution shifts from country to country, depending on the political relevance for the international community directing aid and advisory support to countries of minor and major conflicts. The shift of focus from Asia to the Middle East over the past few years came up as a strong example of this.

Others shortcomings highlighted were: (1) inadequate funding for the implementation of National Action Plans; and (2) the limitations of inclusion of women more broadly, in particular geographic limitations. It is important to note that NAPs operating in developed countries such as the UK are outward-looking. This furthers the disconnect amongst women in diaspora communities, those in refugee camps, and women in conflict zones.

In the breakout workshop, Zarina Khan, director of GAPS moderated a deeper discussion on parts of the resolution that could support the inclusion of strong women-led organizations focused on peace and security, especially that work as bridge builders between policy-makers and grassroots organizations.
B. Why Policy?
After first reaffirming the importance of policy and its impact on the work of women’s groups, participants also highlighted shortcomings and provided recommendations:

- Policies provide important benchmarks and, with sufficient lobbying, are open for continuous modifications. Yet, those affected most by these policies are often excluded from policy-making and have little influence over policy changes.

- Policy directly influences decision-making processes, making it an effective bargaining tool. Therefore, it is important that policies are inclusive.

- It can address the need for excluded groups, such as women, to attain equal participation.

- Policies are often devised by the elite in order to advance political motives. Bringing in excluded groups is essential to break the norm and make policies more inclusive and effective.

- Policy setting is important to assess progress, development and implementation.

- International policies or policies devised by donor countries are often outward-looking and ignore the links and connections between the inside and outside. Inclusivity, especially of the diaspora and refugee communities, at all levels is thus important for effective and successful policies.

As mentioned before, the overall WPS agenda has ignored the voices of women forced to flee their countries of origin. This represents a major gap and missed opportunity. Including the voices of refugees and others displaced by war and conflict – perspectives that may be different than those forced to remain in a war context – can help advance more robust policies and leverage assets from within communities. Some important points were raised and reiterated:

- The diaspora can act as an important link between the home country and host country. They should be explicitly and meaningfully included in the WPS agenda.

- Engaging diaspora women in the WPS agenda allows these women to influence decisions and participate in building peace and addressing security in their home countries and regions.

- Diaspora women are often better placed to disseminate information and guide policies, and they possess a better understanding of the link between the grassroots and policy.

- They can bridge the political and social divides, and encourage balance of information.

- They can be effective allies for women in their war-affected countries and act as a bridge between women in their home countries and those who support the WPS agenda in their adopted countries.
D. Recommendations and Outcomes of Group Discussions

Workshop participants raised several recommendations and laid out desired outcomes and objectives for the WPS agenda and, in particular, considered how best to mainstream diaspora and refugee women within this agenda.

In addition to highlighting the need for economic independence in order to advance the meaningful and sustainable inclusion of women in the peace and security agenda, they also stressed the importance of civil societies and local authorities in developing policy and National Action Plans. At the same time, grassroots organizations and key individuals are equally important as they can provide a granular understanding of changing dynamics on the ground and identify opportunities for transformation.

Workshop participants made the following recommendations for sustainable peace-building:

- Recognize and address the connection b/w peace and security with economic and social issues. Long-term stability is driven by financial, educational, etc issues.
- Include human rights violations (e.g. FGM, child marriage, mental health) into the WPS agenda – with a special focus on women on the move.
- Include women as investigators, commissioners, and ambassadors. Diaspora women are best placed and their skills can best be utilized in these roles.
- Bring to the table women from conflict regions and those forced to flee as equal partners, not as recipients of decisions and solutions.
- Policies around WPS should be including women broadly, systematically and sustainably over long periods of time.
- Take a needs-based approach for women’s inclusion and not one that is politically driven.
- Use diaspora women’s expertise through partnerships and long-term engagement.
- Recruit women as negotiators of the peace process (the vast majority have historically been men)

Participants listed the following long-term objectives and outcomes for the WPS agenda:

- Policy-makers consider women as partners in the policy development process and systemically involve diaspora women in peace and security efforts.
- Educational and employment opportunities are provided to young people, especially young boys and men, in order to prevent potential recruitment by violent groups.
- Human need cannot be covered in one document, such as UNSCR 1325. Need to work more realistically to address some of the root causes of political, social, and economic instability in countries.
- Diaspora women to become more involved in international politics in order to influence policy. Furthermore, there should be long term support for organizations and groups equipping diaspora and refugee women with necessary tools and resources to achieve their objective of participation.
II. Women’s Role in Sustainable Development and Civic Engagement in Peace Processes (Education, Campaigning, Networking and Lobbying)

The second workshop began with a case study of Syrian refugees in Turkey which, among other things, highlighted the challenges refugee women face as well as the perceptions of Turkish citizens of the refugee community. The moderated discussion that followed highlighted the importance of civic engagement and sustainable development in peace-building. It also further defined the role of women in social pacification and the overall WPS agenda. Participants then identified specific challenges to civic engagement and sustainable development in the context of conflicts. These include:

- Cultural Barriers
- Education
- Community resistance
- Leadership
- Advocacy
- Campaigning and Lobbying
- Fragmentation

Finally, participants brainstormed the opportunities, needs and resources necessary for addressing these challenges.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Solutions/Needs</th>
<th>Resources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Own identity</td>
<td>Human rights education opportunities and resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Take a new start</td>
<td>Support for diaspora as well as regional platforms for advocacy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role models</td>
<td>Work on yourself</td>
<td>Policies/Principles/Rules</td>
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<td>Rules,</td>
<td>development and</td>
<td>Education support / funds</td>
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<td>regulations</td>
<td>create your own</td>
<td>Media/Social Media</td>
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<td>and guidelines</td>
<td>environment</td>
<td>Human Resources</td>
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<td>Stakeholders in peace</td>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>Stories of shared approaches</td>
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<td>Diversity, Sharing of experiences and cultures from different backgrounds</td>
<td>Roundtable discussions</td>
<td>Scholarships in relevant educational Institutes</td>
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<td>Languages</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>Training Programs</td>
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<td>Funds</td>
<td>Community awareness</td>
<td>Funding</td>
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<td>Media/Social Media</td>
<td>Mobilization</td>
<td>Expert resource.</td>
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<td>Common Goals</td>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>Media engagement</td>
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<td>Leadership building</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mentoring</td>
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<td>Respecting cultures and diversity – social and cultural events</td>
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<td>Power of decision making</td>
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<td>Training and skill development</td>
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The passage of UNSCR 1325 was a landmark decision and has inspired much discussion and action on the inclusion of women in peace-building efforts. While women’s participation has gained wider acceptance in the nearly two decades since its passage, much remains to be done in order to achieve meaningful representation of women in peace-building and decision-making processes.

Throughout the forum, it became increasingly evident that a major gap in the Women, Peace and Security agenda is the inclusion and consultation of diaspora women. With their knowledge and experience of their home country’s social and political landscape, their unique set of skills as well as their access to and knowledge of host countries, diaspora women remain to be an incredibly rich but untapped resource. As discussed by forum participants, diaspora women can be effective allies for women in war-affected countries and act as a bridge to those who support the WPS agenda in their adopted countries. Moreover, they are in a position to effectively lobby and shape policy, a critical component to effective and long-lasting peace.

Empowering diaspora women to have a voice and seat at the table is thus critical to achieving sustainable peace. Several recommendations were made to this end: actively involve diaspora women in the implementation of NAPs, recruit women as negotiators of peace, provide long term support for organizations and groups equipping diaspora and refugee women with the necessary tools and resources to participate in peace-building efforts, among others.

The legal framework set forth by UNSCR 1325 recognizes that women bear heavily the consequences of war and should be actively included in peace-building efforts. However, the experience of many forum participants indicates that there has only been modest improvement in bringing women to the table. The glaring absence of diaspora women - women who have experienced conflict first-hand - from national and international frameworks is a missed opportunity and ultimately a detriment to the goal of building comprehensive and durable peace.