

# Fostering Inclusion Builds Resilient Societies

*Based on the experiences of women peacebuilders preventing  
conflicts and atrocities on the ground*

POLICY MEMO

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## Summary

As the Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 points out, women have an irreplaceable role in building sustainable peace and they should not only be perceived as victims of violence or observers, but as key agents of change.<sup>1</sup> Increasing and improving efforts to foster women's inclusion and ensure better integration across the Women, Peace and Security (WPS), peacebuilding, and conflict and atrocity prevention sectors, including during humanitarian crises, will increase all stakeholders' abilities to develop more coherent policies and practices to better sustain peace. Integrating a conflict prevention and human security approach to the development agenda can ensure that social infrastructure responds to the goals of sustainable development, equality and peace by contributing to the transformation of structures to bring about peaceful, inclusive and resilient societies. Prevention and reconciliation mechanisms at all levels should address the specific harms women incur and create ways for women to resolve them, giving additional incentive for women to become actively involved throughout the process. Furthermore, these actions cannot be implemented in isolation to the development agenda, including national budgeting, democratisation and security sector governance processes in order to be effective.



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<sup>1</sup> The Global Study recommends to “desist from any use of observer status as a substitute for real and effective participation” in peace processes. Ibid. p. 58.

# Background

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by violent conflict, including atrocity crimes, whether it is as a result of direct targeting, such as in cases of sexual and gender-based violence, or in bearing the worst of the subsequent economic and social costs. The Global Study stresses that prevention of such conflict is at the centre of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, stating: “The women, peace and security agenda is about ending conflict, not making it safer for women.”<sup>2</sup> Women, in addition to being greatly impacted by violent conflict, also play a vital role in the implementation of conflict and atrocity prevention measures. In fact, as they are able to identify otherwise overlooked conflict drivers, women’s inclusion leads to the formulation of more effective prevention mechanisms.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the fact that women’s meaningful participation in peace processes has repeatedly been proven to increase the likelihood of establishing sustainable peace and building more resilient societies,<sup>4</sup> more work remains to be done in order to fully realise and effectively make use of the diverse ways in which women peacebuilders’ important contributions can be leveraged at all levels. This includes incorporating women’s equal participation in both long-term and short-term prevention and response measures, whether it is within their communities or at the national or international levels.

In recent years, the international community has begun shifting its focus by recognising the importance of holistic approaches to peace through the primacy of prevention and inclusive processes. This has also manifested itself in new trends around the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) to further include vital actors and partners working in the peace and security sphere in discussions and strategic events on the mutually reinforcing agendas working towards women’s empowerment in society.

As such, in October 2018, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung New York Office (FES New York), the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP), and Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), working in partnership within the Prevention Up Front (PuF) Alliance, convened a side event to the annual UN Security Council (UNSC) Open Debate on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) highlighting the benefits of and best practices for integrating and including women peacebuilders into prevention work. The panel brought together a diverse group of gender experts from Myanmar, Uganda, Ghana and Palestine to discuss ways to advance women’s roles in conflict and atrocity prevention. Reflecting on their personal experiences, the panellists developed a set of recommendations focusing on how to support collaboration and cooperation across communities of practice and contribute to women’s meaningful participation in peace processes, as well as emphasise the need to establish stronger linkages between the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and Sustainable Development.

## Meaningful Participation

Women are still typically seen as the victims of violence, or observers in conflict settings, and a

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<sup>2</sup> UN Women, “Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325,” p. 191, [http://wps.unwomen.org/pdf/en/GlobalStudy\\_EN\\_Web.pdf](http://wps.unwomen.org/pdf/en/GlobalStudy_EN_Web.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 198.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 41.

paradigm shift is needed to see women as key agents of change in conflict and atrocity prevention and peacebuilding. Crucial to determining their own roles and participation in negotiations and decision-making is that women reclaim their power and identity outside the labels of victims and observers.<sup>5</sup> Granting women “observer” status in order to reach gender parity is merely another way of “token” participation—a practice the Global Study notes that organizers and participants alike need to consciously fight.<sup>6</sup> On top of that, true gender parity should be a requirement from the outset in all dialogues and negotiations in order to help remove these labels and allow women to express themselves meaningfully. *“The shift needed is not just about women asking for a seat at the table, but redefining the table” to incorporate women’s voices in decision-making processes and the implementation of their specific recommendations*”, stated Ms Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, who moderated the event.

In order for women’s participation to be considered “meaningful,” women must be able to speak up about their experiences and needs. Women need to have their reports equally responded to and considered “meaningful, while their personal security has to be protected in the process. For example, the Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN) and West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) have been involved in constructing an anonymous reporting system that allows for women to report situations in their community without compromising their safety.<sup>7</sup>

A second aspect of the paradigm shift needed to create spaces for women in peacebuilding and prevention processes is the dismantling of inequalities and patriarchal structures that undermine the contributions women are able to make. Women’s perspectives and experiences are often undervalued or ignored, limiting the ability of conflict-affected communities and other stakeholders to holistically and adequately assess needs going forward.<sup>8</sup> Gender power relations that already exist in the society have a strong influence on the inclusion of women in the peace and dialogue processes and recurrent related obstacles include: a lack of political will to include women in dialogue and peace processes and often direct/indirect pressure to exclude them is a result of societal gender norms that place women in the private sphere of the society; an absence of effective legal mechanisms that enable women’s inclusion in formal peace and security processes; persistent gender stereotypes; and a lack of women’s initiative and solidarity to participate in peace and dialogue processes and to support each other in some national and regional contexts. *“Traditional patriarchal norms often kept women and girls from obtaining the education and information they need to participate in decision-making dialogues in substantive ways”*, as Ms Zedriga pointed out.

## Collaboration

Often times the space for women and girls to share their experiences has been based upon, 1) a lack of capacity, and 2) a lack of information. Increased inclusion and utilisation of networks

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<sup>5</sup> The Global Study gives the example of Timor-Leste, whose creation of a Vulnerable Persons Unit and collaboration with community centers provides women with spaces to meet, build their capacities and protect women’s organisations to empower and develop their identities outside labeled and pre-determined roles (p. 181).

<sup>6</sup> The Global Study warns of “tokenism” and cautions against the use of qualitative data alone in assessing gender parity in peace negotiations (p. 45).

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.wanep.org/wanep/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=7&Itemid=11-accessdate=7](http://www.wanep.org/wanep/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=7&Itemid=11-accessdate=7)

<sup>8</sup> During violent conflicts, women often become leaders in their community and heads of houses, with male relatives participating in the fighting. As such, women have a better sense of what they need and what is available. However, in post-conflict situations “whatever the leadership roles women may have played during the conflict, they found themselves largely locked out of the decision-making forums for building a new society once the conflict was over,” whether it be in development priorities, approaches to justice, or distribution of power. (Global Study p. 168).

of likeminded actors can strengthen the goals and objectives of the peacebuilding and prevention movements. Unity and strength in numbers can amplify the voices of women, increasing and creating the spaces for their perspectives to be heard. Similarly, connecting actors is central to building women's inclusion in formal dialogue processes. Using the women's movement in Liberia as inspiration, Ms Zedriga pointed out that she and her colleagues were able to mobilise women in countries across the Great Lakes region to march for and insist upon the inclusion of women in the Juba Peace Talks between the Ugandan government and Lord's Resistance Army rebel group.<sup>9</sup> She attributed the momentum gained, and subsequent support built, as key reasons behind the inclusion of women's provisions in the peace accords, whose change in language and components from its initial to final stages have been shown to change considerably after the consultation of women.<sup>10</sup>

As illustrated above, horizontal collaboration and solidarity of women contributes to their meaningful participation in peace processes. However, for the solutions to be sustainable and inclusive it is crucial to establish mechanisms for vertical collaboration and exchange, as well as transfer of knowledge. In West Africa, women are connecting inter-generationally in order to address sexual violence in schools saying, "We are trying to shift the power to young women and the next generation" giving voice not only to parents, but also empowering young women leaders, and educating them on how to bring about a culture of peace.

## Women, Peace and Security and links to Sustainable Development

The panellists often remarked on the linkages and mutually reinforcing nature of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goals 5 and 16, which aim at gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, and the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies, respectively. Education and access to information, as previously acknowledged, was a factor that can limit effects on the roles of women in their communities and higher-level decision-making discussions. Violent conflict and extremism too often attack women's rights, particularly their rights to education, which further widens the gender gap in education during conflict situations,<sup>11</sup> making it more difficult for women to become informed participants in peacebuilding.

Integrating a conflict prevention and human security approach to the development agenda, can ensure that social infrastructure responds to the goals of sustainable development, equality and peace by contributing to the transformation of structures to bring about peaceful, inclusive and resilient societies. This can be achieved by tackling root causes of conflict through enhanced early warning and early response measures, as well as national budgeting for sustainable infrastructure aimed at addressing the needs of societies and holistic and inclusive security sector governance processes. The panellists pointed out the need for recognised and established links between the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and women's equal participation as a means to build resilient societies and reach sustainable peace.

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<sup>9</sup> Uganda Women's Peace Coalition formed a Peace Caravan in 2006, marching with the UNIFEM peace torch from Kampala, Uganda, through Uganda and what is now South Sudan, ending in Juba to protest the underrepresentation of women in the peace negotiations between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and Uganda.

<sup>10</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/03AWomenPeaceNeg.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Global Study, p. 80.

*“Gender balanced leadership is what we want in all of these processes”*  
*Meaningful participation is the use of participatory community media practice to enable anyone to work with the available media technology to bring their own perspectives directly to peace talks because “ it is not possible for everyone to be at the table, but it is possible to raise voices [through the use of technology] to that table. People can do that with authenticity and tell their own stories, get their own voices [heard at] the table. This is participation too.”*

– Lucy Nusseibeh of the Middle East Nonviolence and Democracy network and the Chair of the Nonviolent Peaceforce.

## In Conclusion - Gender Responsive Mechanisms

The lack of recognition and lack of response to women’s specific needs in peacebuilding and prevention work is an area all panellists sought improvement upon. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and consequent resolutions are proof that there is an international commitment and established language on the issue of women’s inclusion. The broader Peace and Security Agenda, however, needs to actively institute the Women Peace and Security Agenda. Glaringly, mechanisms intended to address women’s unique experiences are often forgotten, with women’s inclusion being seen as a box to tick, rather than a call for participation and response to women’s concerns. To secure the necessary shift, prevention and reconciliation mechanisms at all levels should address the specific harms women incur and create ways for women to resolve them, giving additional incentive for women to become actively involved throughout the process. Furthermore, these actions cannot be implemented in isolation to the development agenda, including ensuring strategic national budgeting to invest in tackling root causes of conflict, advancing democratisation and applying a conflict and atrocity prevention lens to security sector governance processes in order to be effective.

## Recommendations

### UN Agencies, Actors, and Mechanisms

#### Ensure the inclusion of gender-specific responses

Prevention and reconciliation mechanisms at all levels should address the specific harms women incur and create ways for women to resolve them, giving additional incentive for women to become actively involved throughout the process. Since the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1325 in 2000, the international community has taken note that women are disproportionately affected by conflict and atrocities, and since then the international community has repeatedly called for bringing the WPS Agenda into actuality. Priority must be placed on including women in peace processes with the aim of “ending conflict, not making it safer for women.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 191.

### Gender parity as a prerequisite

Gender parity should be a requirement from the outset in all dialogues and negotiations in order to counter harmful gender norms and allow women's meaningful participation.

### Need for of the peace, development and humanitarian nexus

In order to remove barriers and accelerate progress for gender equality, encourage investment in gender-responsive social systems, build services and infrastructure that meet the needs of women and girls as well as to ensure women's participation in both political and peace processes. The peace, development and humanitarian agendas cannot be implemented separately.

## International Donors and Aid Organisations

Conflict entrepreneurship and profiteering must be better monitored and flagged. There is a dire need to track policies and investments by international and non-governmental actors, as in many conflict-affected countries there is often a lack of free press or media that can undertake such a task.

### Encourage locally developed solutions

Women often bear economic repercussions during conflicts and thereafter and should be engaged with as a vital resource for monitoring, reporting, and decision-making in order to reach inclusive solutions for sustainable peace.

### Remove State and aid-based barriers

Restrictions on the roles women can play throughout peace processes must be eliminated, including ensuring the establishment of safe spaces for engagement. Economic conditions, whether formal or informal, are often attached to the financing of peacebuilding and conflict and atrocity prevention platforms. The influence of the international community and donors can have an unintended limiting effect for populations from different backgrounds, impeding a diversity of voices from being heard.

### Address root causes through sustainable development

States and the international community should build local and national capacities by investing in projects, peacebuilding programming, and conflict and atrocity prevention processes that will eliminate legal and socio-cultural restrictions on the roles women can have. Humanitarian and other conflict-related programming is often short-term, and more attention should be given to addressing root causes in order to strengthen resilience and establish more sustainably peaceful societies.

## National Institutions

### Create safe spaces for communication

States should create national reporting mechanisms where women can share information and see their concerns acted upon to encourage further participation in peacebuilding and conflict and atrocity prevention work, without fear of retribution or ostracisation. Women actors on the ground struggle to find spaces and outlets in which their concerns and perspectives can be shared and respected.

### Increase access to information and education

National and local actors should focus on increasing educational opportunities on tolerance and inclusion, as well as human rights, including women's rights, beginning at younger ages, to encourage resilience and train the next generation of leaders. Access to information, through formal education and training, or informally through various forms of media is important to establish credibility and strengthen women's voices in decision-making and conflict prevention dialogues.

## Civil Society

### Facilitate safe spaces for communication

Civil society organisations should establish ways for women to be able to come together and share experiences as a conduit to affect change, particularly when other platforms for dialogue and representation may be barred to them.

### Increase access to information and education; create opportunities for more informed participation

Provide training to women on human rights monitoring and reporting, including on women's rights, and the use of non-violent methods to stand up against discrimination and exclusion.

## Religious leaders

### Advocate against violence against women and girls

Condemn gender-based violence, including against the use of rape as a weapon of war, promote open discourse on the importance of gender equality within and among religious communities and society.

### Include and elevate women faith leaders

Increase inclusion of women in religious communities and strengthen the profile of women, particularly women faith leaders, to promote female interest and trust in religious institutions and combat the marginalisation of women.



