



**HOW UN AGENCIES AND
PROGRAMMES CAN ENSURE
WOMEN'S MEANINGFUL
PARTICIPATION IN THEIR
WORK**





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How UN agencies and programmes can ensure women's meaningful participation in their work

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INTRODUCTION



The United Nations (UN) of today is different from that of 1945, and faces a completely different world full of diverse and complex issues, threats and challenges. Adapting to these changing circumstances is of great importance if the UN is going to live up to its Charter and succeed in maintaining international peace and security, in developing friendly relations and partnerships among the nations of the world, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and international law on a global scale. As the world's biggest global peace organisation, the UN works to address issues that transcend national boundaries. However, this task is becoming increasingly complicated, and it seems as though the UN has lost its way.

Scandals about UN peacekeepers who commit sexual violence and exploit women and children in the countries of mission have been a consistent problem, from Sarajevo to Haiti. The UN's responses to such atrocities make civil society organisations and others question the purpose of UN peace missions. Peace missions that drag on indefinitely, as is the case in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the increasing number of military deployments for UN missions, further highlight the fact that changes are needed within the UN system.

With growing nationalism, populism and militarism worldwide, and 46 recognised ongoing conflicts around the world, now is the time to make changes and rethink our current multilateral system. The UN was set up as a peace organisation and one that would promote respect for human rights, but that purpose has been subordinated to the geo-political concerns and national interests of its strongest members.

As a reaction to the shrinking space of civil society and the lack of women's meaningful participation, WILPF held a convening in April 2017. This booklet, **How UN agencies and programmes can ensure women's meaningful participation in their work** draws from the discussions that took place during the three days of the Convening. More than 150 women's rights and peace activists from around the world as well as representatives of Member States and UN agencies gathered to discuss how to make the UN more inclusive and help it live up to the founding principles of its Charter. This booklet is designed specifically for UN agencies and provides recommendations ranging from supporting women human rights defenders and women's organisations to what the UN agencies can do to improve women's participation in the UN system and incorporate the main principles of gender equality in all its actions and frameworks.

» 2 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. AVENUES FOR TIMELY, ADEQUATE AND EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION

Representatives of UN agencies should:

- » Facilitate access to UN body decision-making for civil society through accessible venues, flexible translation, expanded financial support for UN civil society speakers to allow time for donor and advocacy meetings, and sharing of information and guidance for civil society engagement that reaches a wide audience including short films, videos, and webinars with accessible language.
- » Provide support to women in their visa applications, for example, through timely letters of invitation.
- » Strengthen access for women in the Global South by rotating the host country for important convenings, such as the yearly Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), and ensuring that the host country is one that will not create additional challenges of access.
- » Provide political, financial, and technical support for platforms enabling civil society participation at local, national, and regional levels that build on the Sustainable Development Major Group and Other Stakeholders system, and on principles of procedural justice.
- » Strengthen gender mainstreaming (including gender-sensitive analysis, sex-disaggregated data, and gender budgeting) within the organisational culture of all UN agencies, and ensure gender analysis and information based on local women's experience is central to all UN action around conflict prevention, response, and peacebuilding.
- » Ensure consistency and effective collaboration amongst all UN agencies at all levels, and coordinate analysis and strategic planning through a civil society participatory process and women's human rights lens.

2. LONG-TERM SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

Representatives of UN agencies should:

- » Ensure women's meaningful participation by substantially increasing funding to grassroots women human rights defenders to support and recognise their work on the ground and their participation and advocacy efforts in international human rights procedures. Funding should be coupled with a two-part approach that includes gender assessment before any project, and involving women in the design of any project.
- » Ensure the achievement of the Grand Bargain agreement's target to channel 25 % of all humanitarian funding to local civil society organisations.
- » Adapt funding to address the priorities identified by local women's civil society organisations, and support them with core and ongoing support.

- » Provide technical assistance and support to civil society organisations instead of competing with them for funding, and instead of creating duplicating platforms.
- » Implement a unified monitoring and evaluation system that follows UN agencies' funding to INGO programmes, analysing how much of the original funding reaches women beneficiaries, and create learning systems to improve impact for grassroots women.
- » Consult with local women's organisations and women community leaders on finding and developing the most secure ways to channel funding for civic and humanitarian activism into conflict areas.
- » Put pressure on states not to use counter-terrorism laws as a pretext for not sending funding to local organisations working in highly militarised or repressive environments.

3. ENSURING IMPLEMENTATION OF WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

Representatives of UN agencies should:

- » Put pressure on states to develop, finance, and implement UN Security Council (UNSCR) 1325 National Action Plans with holistic agendas and meaningful participation of civil society throughout. Also push states to ensure that national legislation is harmonised with ratified instruments (including through comprehensive and participatory gender budgeting), and to submit national reports to human rights mechanisms on time.
- » Provide political, technical, and financial support for women's civil society organisations on political advocacy (not just service provision) work, and support for advocates to learn and strengthen work on independent research, monitoring, and evaluation for accountability on human rights bodies' recommendations.
- » Ensure that the collaboration of UN agencies with governments does not undermine or compromise the application of fundamental UN principles and the promotion of human rights.

4. POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT THAT VALUES WOMEN'S CIVIL SOCIETY WORK

Representatives of UN agencies should:

- » Ensure that peace processes are informed by women's experiences and perspectives on the ground to reflect national priorities, including the priorities of the local communities and the different groups within them.
- » Support governments to ensure that every civil society actor has access to tools and information on the peace agreement. States must ensure regular exchange with civil society and leaders within the community, and bring their input to the centre of the negotiation process.
- » Ensure women organisations' real meaningful participation in peace processes, including by establishing an explicit procedure for women to participate in and impact peace processes, and by establishing regular regional and national consultation processes with women's groups and peace leaders.
- » Acknowledge women as experts and knowledge providers, recognise peace activists and women human rights defenders as having a mandate for peace, and establish means for their direct involvement in both formal and informal processes.
- » Re-think humanitarian action beyond the boxes of classic humanitarian sectors (e.g., food, shelter) to recognise and support the holistic contribution of women-led organisations to humanitarian assistance and protection.
- » Act as a proactive conflict prevention body instead of a conflict management body.
- » Support analyses of current dominant strategies and policy frameworks for economic reform and their role in perpetuating structural inequalities.
- » Ensure that peace processes embody democratic inclusion, support human rights and non-discrimination including by rejecting neoliberal structural adjustment and investing in gender reparations, social safety nets, and gendered transitional justice.
- » Ensure that women are not only at the table in peace negotiations, but also in governance, in international processes, including in any negotiations with International Financial Institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF).
- » Clearly define Peacekeeping Operations' (PKOs) mandates—purpose, mission, and duration—allowing a space for evaluation and learning.

- » Accept that militarism is not the only response to security, and recognise women human rights defenders as the true bearers of the peace mandate, not the military. Fundamentally reframe security away from militarised approaches to one based on human rights, sustainable development, and equality.
- » Introduce a feminist perspective into the implementation of the doctrine Responsibility to Protect, including shifting the emphasis into the pillars of prevention and protection.
- » Publicly name and shame countries that supply arms to countries in conflict, with fragile contexts, or with a high prevalence of gender-based violence, and pressure them to stop doing so. Pressure states to ratify, accede to, and implement the Arms Trade Treaty, along with other arms agreements, and to conduct transparent, comprehensive gender and human rights impact assessments before transferring weapons.
- » Enable increased participation of women in UN delegations to multilateral disarmament meetings.
- » Ensure a balanced gender representation of mediators.
- » Call for Member States to develop adequate budgetary allocations in order to ensure social safety nets and innovative social protection floors in line with 1992 Rio and 1995 Beijing commitments on innovative finance, including on reducing military spending and redirecting to gender equitable social development.

At WILPF's Convening [the Convening], participants from 40 countries discussed how to reclaim the UN as a peace organisation and bring it back to its Charter. A large number of women's groups and civil society organisations (CSOs) were represented, and participants shared their insights, experiences and ideas for a path forward. The discussions during the Convening resulted in a number of recommendations useful for Member State representatives.

» 3

WOMEN IN THE FIELD OF PEACE AND SECURITY

Women's real and meaningful participation in the debates within the UN system is both a human rights obligation and a catalytic investment for change. Women's meaningful participation is essential for obtaining an accurate picture of what is needed to prevent and resolve conflicts, rebuild society post-conflict, and ensure sustainable peace. Women's experiences during and after war and conflict differ from those of men. However, women are not a homogeneous group. Interventions should therefore not be based on stereotypes, but on the particular needs, issues, and experiences of the people they are meant to serve. This requires tailoring actions based on an inclusive approach with regard to gender, context, culture, and country.

"The UN is patriarchal in structure, in its processes and policies. It has proven largely incapable of addressing the challenges which we confront."
– Madeleine Rees, WILPF Secretary General

"Women are the first ones to feel the rise of extremism because no extremist movement in the world, whether they take on religion or they take on an ethno-nationalistic identity, will leave women alone. They have an issue with us in the public space. So if you are speaking out, they will come after you."
– Sanam Anderlini, International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)

Women human rights defenders face serious risks

Patriarchy has no specific religion or culture. It appears in all nations and cultures and affects political processes and decision-making at all levels. Patriarchal oppression is amplified during conflict, and militarism imposes and strengthens negative masculine identity. Patriarchy, militarism, and militarised masculinity increase the risks women face during conflict due to the increase of various forms of violence, often including organised sexual violence and the use of gender-based violence as a tactic of war.

Challenging patriarchal values, inequality, gender stereotypes, and sexism is not an easy task. It often comes with high personal risks for peace activists and human rights defenders on the ground. These can include persistent undermining of legitimacy, attacks on their morals, sexual and gender-based violence, harassment, hate speech, pressure, threats and personal, family, or cyber-attacks. UN personnel is not immune from contributing to these challenges. Providing safe spaces for women human rights defenders and peace activists is critical for building champions and movements for gender justice and peace.

Barriers to meaningful participation in decision-making

Women face enormous practical and structural barriers to their participation in decision-making. This is a global phenomenon that stretches across every level of society, and in local, regional, and global contexts. The United Nations is no exception.

Women human rights defenders and peace activists operate in a domain that historically has been seen as male. Unfortunately, it is still perceived as such. The idea that men are the protectors and women are the victims is still strong in narratives and discourses about conflict, its prevention, and resolution. Instead of being considered as experts or knowledge providers, women are seen as tokens or only allowed to participate in processes where they have no real influence and where the agendas have been decided on beforehand. They often find themselves having to constantly prove that they are “qualified” to participate in political fora.

A further obstacle to women's meaningful participation is the prevalent stereotype that all women have one voice. The assumption that there is a monolithic women's rights position leads to one woman being assigned to represent all women. This approach justifies having few women in decision-making fora.

Women's meaningful participation is essential to achieving sustainable peace

Excluding women from peace processes, peace agreements, and post-conflict reconstruction efforts has severe consequences—not least because it prevents the realisation of real and sustainable peace. Research shows that there is a strong connection between the inclusion of women in peace processes and a more stable, longer-lasting peace. Today, we see a tendency to give women symbolic roles in internationally driven processes. Too often, women are added to the peace table as token additions to the militarised sides, or engaged informally in peace talks without any formal role or follow-up. This may look good on state and UN agency representative records, yet it has little real impact. Changing the failed status quo requires that members of women's civil society have the opportunity to actively contribute to peace processes as independent leaders on women's rights and peace. As stated by the participants at WILPF's Convening: It is not 'political correctness' for women to participate—it is common sense.

In a time when there is compelling research documenting that women's participation is crucial in achieving real and sustainable peace, it is more important than ever for the UN to take concrete actions to ensure women play the fulsome role that is demanded, by women, by law, and by common sense. Recognising women's agency and the vital roles played by women in-country is a critical first step; it needs to be reflected in the national and international political processes. Its full and effective inclusion in peace processes, in peace agreements, and in post-conflict governance structures, is required everywhere and at all levels.

“Organisations with feminist agendas in countries of conflict are facing a lot of challenges.”

– Laila Alodaat, WILPF

“In a survey of 1,200+ people, we found that different groups had different security issues. Women are not all the same.”

– Hajer Shareif, Libya

“We live in a world defined by inequality and conflict. Women and girls' rights and views as represented by women's rights organisations are the most salient and therefore women human rights defenders need to be at the table.”

– Lopa Banerjee, Civil Society Section Chief, UN Women

When women are included in peace processes there is a 20% increase in the probability of an agreement lasting 2 years. There is a 35% increase in the probability of an agreement lasting at least 15 years.

– UN Women

>> 4

WOMEN'S CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO UN AGENCY REPRESENTATIVES

4.1 AVENUES FOR WOMEN'S TIMELY, ADEQUATE, AND EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE UN SYSTEM

Women activists' freedom of movement from the Global South is restricted, including denial of visa

"Increasing restrictions for participation in UN spaces make it difficult for civil society organisations to ground UN and Member States in reality"
– ARROW

Participants identify general practical obstacles that prevent women civil society from accessing and participating in the UN system. Participants note that they do not get invited to international fora in the first place. Participants from NGOs without ECOSOC consultative status add that they cannot engage with some UN mechanisms that require ECOSOC status.

There is a lack of consistency in accreditation policies and guidelines, which detrimentally impacts women, and mothers in particular. From other WILPF activities taking place at the UN, we know that women who needed to bring their small children to UN human rights bodies' meetings in Geneva have reported that their children were denied access by UNOG Security; this was despite the fact the children would have been looked after by someone while their mothers were speaking at the meeting. In one case, the person who planned to bring her child to a CEDAW Committee's session had notified the relevant secretariat weeks prior to the meeting. Nonetheless, UNOG security refused to allow her child in, and when the mother protested, the security guard threatened to prevent the mother from entering UN premises. This practice prevents mothers of young children who cannot place their children in daycare, or who need to travel with their children, from accessing UN facilities and participating in UN meetings.

"It is important to engage with the UN because it is the only multilateral organisation and the place where all governments can be held accountable. Therefore, we must engage with the UN to form a collective voice and because governments are becoming increasingly conservative."
– Women Thrive

The US Administration's travel ban brought an issue that had long been present into the spotlight. Host countries' (visa) policies have significant detrimental effects on women activists' freedom of movement. Many multilateral fora and UN headquarters are located in the Global North, limiting women's mobility and possibilities to access these fora.

Participants also report that UN material, such as resolutions or recommendations, and admission rules and procedures for civil society actors, is disseminated in a technical and bureaucratic language. This can be intimidating and exclusionary for local grassroots activists working on the ground—particularly if they do not speak any of the six UN languages.

Recommendations

Representatives of UN agencies and programmes, including UN country teams and Resident Coordinators, should:

- » facilitate access to UN decision-making bodies for civil society through accessible venues, flexible translation, and expanded financial support for UN civil society speakers to allow for time for donor and advocacy meetings.
- » share information and guidance that reaches a wide audience for civil society engagement, including short films, videos, and webinars with accessible language.
- » provide support to women in their visa applications, for example, through timely letters of invitation.

Representatives of UN agencies and programmes should:

- » strengthen access for women in the Global South by rotating the host country for important convenings, such as the yearly Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), and ensure that the host country is one that will not create additional challenges of access.
- » allow mothers who need to take their young children with them to UN meetings to do so.

Representatives of UN agencies, including the UN Secretariat, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and the Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination, should:

- » revisit accreditation models and the criteria for NGOs qualifying for ECOSOC status.
- » apply expansive models of NGO participation in international UN meetings that ensure the participation of women's grassroots with or without ECOSOC consultative status.
- » evaluate NGOs' merit to be accredited based on whether they advance the Charter.

UN representatives are disconnected from women activists' perspectives

Participants highlight the UN country teams' lack of knowledge and interest on the ground for including gender and grassroots perspectives into their work. Strikingly, one participant reports that the head of a UN Women country office refused to name either herself or UN Women's work in the country as "feminist". The "F-Word" is not comprehensively used amongst UN Women staff, and feminist ideals are even less known and applied amongst other UN agencies.

Such disconnect between UN representatives and the experience and analysis of women's NGOs prevents the realities of women's lives being brought into the international domain, and undermines the stated objectives of the institutions.

Good practice:

Participants report that the United Nations Development Group facilitates visa applications by asking civil society organisations which are part of the Women's Major Group to vouch for other organisations and their representatives. The Women's Major Group, established in Rio de Janeiro during the Earth Summit in 1992, is open to all organisations promoting sustainable development and women's rights, and facilitates women's civil society input into the UN policy space.

*"We cannot let bureaucracy and patriarchy continue taking over the women's agenda within the UN."
– Katherine Ronderos, Colombia*

*"Let us not forget we need to explain the world to the UN, not the UN to the world. If it is not relevant for the local context, it is simply not going to work."
– Hajer Sharief, Libya*

“The UN must be the natural ally of civil society to reclaim human rights and to fight against violence, racism and governments’ fundamentalism.”
– Urgent Action Fund
Latin America

“I had the privilege to serve as Resident Coordinator in Colombia for three years. Together with some truly extraordinary women’s groups and with a very strong UN Women office, we really managed to promote women’s active participation in the peace process. While no doubt in many areas it could have been stronger, I think it remains a best practice example.”
– Fabrizio Hochschild,
Assistant Secretary-General
for Strategic Coordination in
the Executive Office

Recommendations

Representatives of UN agencies and programmes, including UN Country Teams and Resident Coordinators, should:

- » be trained on gender, and challenge traditional concepts of masculinity.
- » ensure that when recruiting the head of an agency or Resident Coordinator, particularly related to women’s rights, such as UN Women, the UN ensures that candidates have a strong track record of working on women’s human rights issues.
- » develop more inclusive governance models that strengthen women’s voices and create more space for the participation of non-UN actors in UN entity planning and action.
- » provide political, financial, and technical support for platforms enabling civil society participation that build on the Major Group and Other Stakeholders system at local, national, and regional levels to ensure space for civil society’s public participation and procedural justice.
- » lead by example and go beyond the “tick box approach” to gender mainstreaming at the project level, to gender mainstreaming (including gender sensitive analysis, sex-disaggregated data, and gender budgeting) within the organisational culture of UN agencies.

Good practice:

- » UNFPA has committed to support and strengthen commitment to gender-transformative action. 75% of UNFPA offices across the globe have engaged in involving men to advance gender equality.
- » “The Sustainable Development Goal Major Group and Other Stakeholders system provides a good practice mechanism for civil society engagement rooted in principles of procedural justice. This system recognises and builds space for participation with diverse communities, including: workers and trade unions, women, scientific and technological community, NGOs, local authorities, indigenous peoples, farmers, children and youth, and business and industry.”
– Sascha Gabizon, Women in Europe for a Common Future, Netherlands
- » “The UN needs to recognise and change the structured system of exclusion through a strategy for engagement and inclusion. UN must be a protector of feminist ideas.”
– Lopa Banarjee, Civil Society Section Chief, UN Women

UN headquarters and UN country teams are inconsistent in their standpoints

Participants address the discrepancy between positions held by the UN in international fora, and UN country teams' stance. Participants cite as an example the inconsistencies between UN representatives in New York, speaking out against travel restrictions for human rights defenders from Muslim countries, and UN country teams' silence on travel bans imposed on human rights defenders by their host countries.

Recommendations

Representatives of UN agencies and programmes, including UN Country Teams and Resident Coordinators, should:

- » ensure consistency amongst all agencies at all levels and coordinate analysis and strategic planning through human rights lens.
- » coordinate and collaborate more effectively on the ground and at the international level.
- » speak out against travel bans imposed on human rights defenders in countries where they operate.

4.2 LONG-TERM SUPPORT AND RESOURCES FOR WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS

Lack of sustained funding impacts women activists' ability to engage with the UN system

“According to a global research on LGBTQI funding conducted by the Global Philanthropy project, funding specifically focused on the needs of gay and bisexual men and men who have sex with men is more than two times higher than the amount of funding focused on lesbian and bisexual women and queer women.”
– Kseniya Kirichenko, ILGA, Geneva

Engaging with the UN, including through submitting shadow reports to the CEDAW Committee, requires women's organisations to have significant financial and human resources. The travel costs associated with participating in a UN meeting are also unaffordable for many grassroots activists. Often, because of scarce funding, participants suggest that they are faced with the choice between engaging with the UN or continuing their day-to-day work. Such challenges are heightened for marginalised groups, or groups that face multiple forms of discrimination—such as indigenous women and LBTQI individuals.

Recommendations

Representatives of UN agencies should:

» ensure that funding includes provisions for engagement with UN human rights and other bodies, and support local women leaders' participation and advocacy efforts in the UN system.

Lack of sustained funding poses obstacles to the work of women's organisations

“Five UN agencies receive 50% of the available humanitarian funding for Syria. Local groups deliver 75% of interventions.”
– Rola Hallam, Can Do

According to the participants, there is a serious lack of funding for organisations working on the ground. Available resources are disproportionately channelled towards state or UN agencies or International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs), and tend to focus on service delivery. The UN receives funding, allows for sub-granting to other UN agencies and finally distributes smaller sub-grants to actors on the ground delivering the services. Such a system is ineffective and inefficient, creates barriers, and (indirectly) questions local organisations' capacity to absorb funding and resources.

Participants also point to a normalisation of violence of particularly at-risk groups outside of traditionally understood conflict settings that are not appropriately addressed by funding priorities. For instance, trans- or intersex advocates living in Western Europe are underfunded, as donors perceive them to live and work in “generally” privileged and safe regions.

Participants observe that the UN is creating parallel structures by funding UN agencies and INGOs instead of strengthening local capacity.

There is a lack of trust in the skills and expertise of grassroots organisations. The donor community also tends to provide short-term grants, which are restricted to six months or a year. Such “compartmentalised” funding prevents long-term, strategic thinking and political commitment, as grassroots organisations have to spend long hours writing project proposals and project narrative reports instead of focusing on their actual work.

Policies linked to counter-terrorism agendas, including Countering Terrorism Financing, and increased militarised security, have had a catastrophic impact on grassroots organisations around the world. These rules have been designed and implemented in a way that fails to take account of the challenging settings under which grassroots organisations in conflict countries need to survive and operate.

- » Under the “Grand Bargain” agreement, 22 Member States and 28 UN agencies or international organisations have committed to provide 25 % of global humanitarian funding to local and national responders by 2020 and to increase multi-year funding.

Recommendations

Representatives of UN agencies, including those who have committed to the Grand Bargain's target, should:

- » ensure that the Grand Bargain's target is achieved and continue to work to have grassroots organisations recognised for their contribution and financially supported.
- » substantially increase funding for grassroots women human rights defenders and peace activists.
- » provide technical assistance and support to civil society organisations instead of competing with them for funding.
- » make sure that funding goes to organisations, whether male- or female-led, that holistically address the needs of women on the ground. Funding decisions should comprise a two-part approach that includes gender assessment before any project, and involving women in the design of any project.
- » be willing to be trained by local organisations on local priorities, and adapt funding priorities accordingly.
- » implement a unified, obligatory monitoring and evaluating system that follows UN agencies' funding to INGO programmes, analysing how much of it reaches the beneficiaries, and women in particular.
- » consult with local women's organisations and women community leaders on developing the most secure ways to channel funding for civic and humanitarian activism into conflict areas.
- » put pressure on states to not use counter-terrorism laws as a pretext for not sending funding to local organisations working in highly militarised or repressive environments.

Good practice:

“The Global Fund for HIV/AIDS disburses \$110 billion per year, and is one of the most accountable governance systems out there, including a board comprised of Member States, UN Staff, and civil society, where civil society has a high influence.”
– Dean Peacock, Sonke Gender Justice, South Africa

“The UN has the financial and political resources, so they have the opportunity to make a difference on the ground. But to make that change on the ground they have to include the civil society organisations on the ground in the designing and implementation of that support.”
– Hajer Sharief, Libya

Funding for women's income-generation activities is not empowering

Participants report that UN programming for women is often based on stereotypes and low expectations, mostly concerned with small projects teaching women to knit and sew, or start-ups of small business or agricultural production. Participants explain that the end product of such funding is the increase of few individual women's household income. Yet, it does not enable economic empowerment for women as a group, and further perpetuates patriarchal power structures.

Participants also note that heavy and unequal responsibility for unpaid care work, such as child care, and the resulting structural inequality remains an issue left out of policies on women's economic empowerment and participation in the formal sector.

Recommendations

Representatives of UN agencies should:

- » fund programmes which train women in financial and project management.
- » prioritise investments in accessible, affordable and quality social infrastructure and essential services that reduce and redistribute women's unpaid care and domestic work, and that enable their full participation in the economy.
- » support adequate budgetary allocation to ensure social safety nets and innovative social protection floors.

4.3 WOMEN'S UNIQUE ROLE IN SECURING SUSTAINABLE PEACE

Women's participation in peace processes is not valued

Successful, sustainable peace depends on the degree of political will, social mobilisation, and inclusivity. Inclusivity entails the meaningful engagement of civil societies and local communities in the peace process, framing countries' national priorities through regular exchange with them.

Participants note that the UN's approach to including women in conflict affected contexts is not appropriate. For instance, one of the participants informs that a UN facilitated event required the participation of women coming from high-risk areas. The UN required these women to sign a waiver stating that the UN was not responsible for any incidents that occurred while the women were travelling.

When female participants speak about their experiences of participating in peace processes or in other decision-making fora, they quote men's responses in these fora: "no time for your gender analysis"; or "you are welcome to engage—but not here". Women's inclusion is almost always met with indifference, or even resistance.

The overwhelming conclusion participants are drawing is that if women are physically present in decision-making processes, they are merely included for political point scoring. This is the case both nationally and internationally. Furthermore, participants specify that "consultations" with women for programmes, policies, or peace agreements, which national governments and UN agencies often pride themselves on having had, are, in fact, pseudo-consultations. Firstly, the mechanism of consultation lacks effective transfer strategies that would systematically communicate results to relevant stakeholders. Secondly, consultation as a notion is not participation. The concept undermines any opportunities for real, sustained and meaningful participation of women in decision-making processes, programmes, and policies that affect them.

Participants also note that the international community consistently selects men for inclusion in high-level UN mediation teams. Women are underrepresented in high-level political appointments to pursue conflict diplomacy.

"At the Security Council, I have spoken, and everybody claps. But then it does not go anywhere. We are not there to be wallpaper!"
– Julienne Lusenge, Fund for Congolese Women, DRC

» Of 31 UN-led mediation processes between 1991 and 2011, only three were led by women as the chief mediator.
– UN Women

“UN Women's role was good in Colombia because it did more by doing less: it stepped back to create space for women civil society to do the work they were doing.”
– Katherine Ronderos,
Colombia

Recommendations

Representatives of UN agencies, including UN country teams, UN Special Envoys, and UN mediators, should:

- » ensure that peace processes are informed by women's experiences and perspectives on the ground to reflect national priorities, including the priorities of the local communities and the different groups within them.
- » support the implementation of a mechanism to ensure the population's effective and meaningful participation in the peace agreement's implementation.
- » ensure that every civil society actor has access to tools and information, including training programmes on the content of the agreement, and wide dissemination of informative videos, booklets and the like, including rural and remote areas of the country. States must ensure regular exchange with civil society and leaders within the community, and bring their input to the centre of the negotiation process.
- » support existing local women's coalitions and organisations, instead of creating duplicating platforms, and ensure their real meaningful participation in peace processes, without them being associated with militarised sides, including by establishing regular regional and national consultation processes with women's groups and peace leaders.
- » support establishing an explicit procedure for women to impact peace processes, as their leadership will set the conditions for their leadership in a political economy post-conflict.
- » acknowledge women as experts and knowledge providers, and recognise them as peace activists and women human rights defenders who have a mandate for peace.
- » break the stereotype that all women have consensus, and instead acknowledge their diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives, and make sure to represent those in decision-making fora.
- » ensure a balanced gender representation of mediators.
- » prioritise the UN's role as impartial facilitator and prevent guardianship and politicisation when mediating among national actors.

Neoliberal policies do not address conflicts' root causes

The political economy of peace processes is complex and must be understood in the context of both the political and economic actors, and their influence on decision-making, participation, and gender relations. This includes understanding the consequences of the strong influence of a neoliberal economic agenda in post-conflict recovery processes.

Participants note that the neoliberal economic model used in macroeconomic reforms and transition processes entails deregulation, austerity measures, and a reduction of social services, among other things. These reforms often perpetuate or even exacerbate structural inequality and decrease the ability of the government to fulfil its human rights obligations; they can therefore become a cause for continued conflict and an inherent obstacle to sustainable peace. For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the reform agenda has turned social ownership into private ownership, with no transparency or public participation in the process. These trends are recognised to be occurring across the globe and are specifically pronounced in countries declared to be “post-conflict”.

Participants see the lack of a gender and human rights based approach to economic reforms in peace agreements and transition processes as a serious threat to peace. In fact, the notion that free-market and neoliberal models can “fix” peace is widespread, and neoliberal policies do not account for the distinct impact they have on women. Participants emphasise that participation in post-conflict recovery cannot only revolve around political aspects. Liberal peace and neoliberal approaches assume that you can divide the political and the economic, and that issues such as gender inequality and obstacles to sustainable peace can be addressed separately. At the international level, there is currently no alternative to neoliberalism, and there is very little room to challenge neoliberal programmes.

Part of this system of global and national political and economic decision-making, and influencing national macroeconomic policies and public finance at a global scale, are the International Financial Institutions (IFIs)—in particular, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Known for their neoliberal economic framework, participants question whether IFIs' advice, programmes and conditionalities are contributing to further socio-economic inequality, and therefore also to sustained gender inequality, without mechanisms for accountability and civil society participation.

Short-term projects created for women, but within a neoliberal agenda, do not create any change in the underlying structural inequalities. Such neoliberal programmes effectively prevent civil society—and even governments—envisioning and planning an alternative political and economic model that addresses the interconnectedness of institutional rules, policies, and inequality, including gender inequalities.

A feminist political economy analysis argues that socio-economic inequality is the basis of political inequality in terms of access and participation, and that these inequalities concentrate political power of the few, sustaining systems of gender inequality and exclusion, and favouring patriarchal values. Such analysis would allow scrutiny of the interrelationship of political and economic power and decision-making and how it impacts structural norms, values and institutional practices.

“In Bosnia, we see that creating peace from a neoliberal framework means an absence of a conflict analysis. The international community's idea that austerity and privatisation magically cures all is blind to effects of war.”
– Nela Porobić, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Recommendations

Representatives of UN agencies should:

- » act as a proactive conflict prevention body instead of a conflict management body.

To that end, they should:

- » support analyses of current dominant strategies and policy frameworks for economic reform and their role in perpetuating structural inequalities.
- » support international, national and locally-driven movements and platforms dealing with gender and economic justice and peace.
- » re-channel and increase resources to fund more policy-oriented research on women, peace and security, in an attempt to understand the economic drivers of conflict and peacebuilding.
- » transform peace processes from their current project-based approach to a long-term, inclusive, and gendered processes.
- » ensure that peace processes embody democratic inclusion, and support human rights and non-discrimination, including by rejecting neoliberal structural adjustment and investing in gender reparations, social safety nets, and gendered transitional justice.
- » ensure that women are not only at the table in peace negotiations, but also in political governance, in international processes, and in negotiations with IFIs such as the IMF.
- » push for state representatives to conduct gender and human rights impact assessments before accepting conditionalities, and to always adopt a rights-based approach when implementing economic re-structuring.
- » push for IFI representatives to ensure a women, peace and security perspective is included, and demand IFIs' gendered impact analysis of macro-economic reforms, especially the impact of conditionalities.

4.4 WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION IN HUMANITARIAN SPACES

Women's contribution in humanitarian contexts is not recognised

Women do not receive the recognition, support or resources to participate formally in humanitarian contexts. Women are predominantly perceived as victims or “passive beneficiaries,” say the participants, and highlight that such notion could not be further from the truth.

On the rare occasions where women's agency has been acknowledged, participants address the dangerous trend where women are praised for their “resilience”. In doing so, stakeholders exploit such discourse to shy away from providing any recognition and support to women's work, which poses serious risks to women's physical and mental well-being. Women are at the frontline providing humanitarian support, yet they do not fall into the “typical” notion of a humanitarian due to their informal participation.

Moreover, the rapid response to humanitarian crises and lack of contextualisation of humanitarian policies mean that work for women's rights is underfunded and de-prioritised.

In summary, the participants state that women's work and contribution in humanitarian contexts is unrecognised, unappreciated, and underfunded.

Recommendations

Representatives of UN agencies should:

» re-think humanitarian action beyond the boxes of classic humanitarian sectors (e.g., food, shelter) to recognise the holistic contribution of women-led organisations to humanitarian assistance and protection.

» challenge the depoliticisation of peace work with a gender lens to ensure women's meaningful participation in humanitarian spaces.

» re-imagine who is a humanitarian in order to re-balance the distribution of resources for humanitarian purposes.

» factor support for women-led organisations into humanitarian funding under the Grand Bargain.

“Women are addressing peace and security issues, breaking siege, mobilising convoys to ensure supplies, addressing violent extremism. Women identify early warning signs of radicalisation, they are first responders and provide medical support, yet they are not trusted with the necessary space for participation and resources to develop and continue their work.”

– Rasha Jarhum, Yemen

“In Syria, out of 2,000 individuals at senior positions in humanitarian organisations, only 25 of them are women, despite women's massive participation at the informal level.”

– Rola Hallam, CanDo

4.5 REVISITING WOMEN'S SECURITY

"Yemen was a defining moment. The Security Council is tasked with preventing war between Member States, but voted to enable one state to attack another. It has become the "Unsecurity Council" and there is a crisis of its legitimacy."
– Sanam Anderlini,
International Civil Society
Action Network

"The elephant in the room is arms trade: people are profiting from war. Until the international community connects the dots from arms to violence and takes action, we will not have peace."
– Madeleine Rees, WILPF
Secretary General

"Security Council supposedly gathers some of the most renowned security experts. However, what is missing is the perspective and experience of those on the ground, who live these wars and continue to work in a hope to bring peace one day."
– Hajer Sharief, Libya

Arms proliferation is a major obstacle to peace and to women's participation

Participants are concerned about heightened militarisation and power politics within the Security Council and among states, and about the Security Council's lack of neutrality.

The budget for peace processes or humanitarian aid is dwarfed by expenditure on the arms industry, which, in turn, is a cause of the need for humanitarian aid in the first place. Arms trade and arms proliferation has a distinct impact on women's rights and safety, and affects women's ability to participate in the public sphere.

Participants highlight that UN agencies, particularly the Security Council, do not prioritise disarmament, as they believe it is neither feasible nor realistic, and militarism is seen as the only response to security.

Participants raise the issue that if the Security Council uses the Responsibility to Protect doctrine (R2P), interventions, such as in Libya, prioritise militarisation over the doctrine's other pillars of prevention and protection of civilians from the abuse of sovereignty.

Furthermore, participants identify a particularly hindered access to the Security Council.

The implementation of a peace agreement requires meaningful and qualified participation of the whole population. However, peacekeeping operations are not adapted to the population's needs, report the participants from countries with peacekeeping operations.

Recommendations

Representatives of UN agencies, including the UN Security Council, should:

- » evaluate peacekeeping operations, have the courage to acknowledge if they have not worked, and seek alternatives.
- » clearly define the mandates of peacekeeping operations: purpose, mission, and duration.
- » for UN Security Council country visits, prioritise exchange with women organisations.
- » accept that militarism is not the only response to security; recognise women human rights defenders as the true bearers of the peace mandate, not the military.

» fundamentally reframe security away from militarised approaches to one based on human rights, sustainable development, and equality.

» make use of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine, and introduce a feminist perspective into its implementation, including shifting the emphasis to the pillars of prevention and protection, instead of intervention and militarism.

» to that end, ensure sufficient funding, exercise political pressure, and use the developing Responsibility to Protect doctrine to achieve protection and justice for civilians.

» publicly name and shame countries that supply arms to countries in conflict, with fragile contexts, or with a high prevalence of gender-based violence, and pressure them to stop doing so.

» pressure states to ratify, accede to, and implement the Arms Trade Treaty, along with other arms agreements, and pressure states to conduct transparent, comprehensive gender and human rights impact assessments before transferring weapons (this includes instances, amongst others, where there is a high prevalence of gender-based violence, reported cases of child soldiers etc.).

Widespread perception that women's participation in disarmament is unnecessary

There are multiple types of weapons; their impacts on women are either disproportionate or differentiated. Yet this is not always properly taken into consideration in the design, development or implementation of disarmament programmes and policies.

Although they are beneficiaries, women and their experiences are often excluded from these activities, largely because arms are considered as a tool of protection and intimately linked to masculine identities, and therefore fundamental in highly volatile security settings. As such, they tend to fall short in adequately addressing women's needs or experiences with arms.

Participants report that in national and multilateral fora, there is a common perception that arms and disarmament is the “realm of men”, and so women are rarely included in any discussions. Participants highlight the crucial role of donors in enhancing the role of women in disarmament.

Furthermore, participants raised the importance of the underlying economic factors and lack of employment opportunities that incentivise men and women to participate in conflict-related income-generating activities.

“The largest agency of the UN is the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), and there is a self-interest of keeping this part of the organisation large. It is therefore necessary to untangle the entrenched norms within the UN, and the political and economic interest of the organisation itself and its Member States. There are interests to continue war, highly economic benefits.”
– Medina Haeri, OAK Foundation

“DRC is the site of the largest UN peacekeeping operation. 20,000 men have been in the country for 20 years at a cost of around \$1 billion per year. These efforts have shown no result and have not succeeded to prevent war. Now is the time to evaluate and change the approach.”
– Julienne Lusenge, DRC

"Despite decades of strong evidence that women are most invested in disarmament and the fact that men use and value weapons in ways women do not, UN disarmament is seen as a man's process."
– Participant

Of 693 diplomats registered for the UNGA First Committee meeting in 2015, around 70% were men and 30% were women. Similarly, at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in 2015, 901 of the 1,226 registered diplomats were men (73.5%) and 325 women (26.5%).

Recommendations:

Representatives of UN agencies should:

- » increase or re-channel funding, both in building capacities around disarmament issues and around funding local initiatives that seek to foster peace based on human rights.
- » support designing alternative opportunities for livelihoods and jobs that do not incentivise proliferation and use of arms for economic security.
- » enable better participation of women UN delegations to multilateral disarmament meetings or in related programmes.
- » enhance women's role in disarmament, and prioritise women's participation when funding disarmament programmes or developing policies.

Good practice:

- » "Donors have asked demining organisations to have a gender component, which leads to more women meaningfully participating and generating income, making it empowering for them and useful for society as a whole. Women have become professionals on landmine clearance in many countries, such as Colombia, Lebanon or Laos, for example."
– Amelie Chayer, International Campaign to Ban Landmines

4.6 IMPLEMENTING WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

UN agencies are inconsistent in their approach to promoting and protecting women's human rights

Participants raised the fact that UN agencies often do not work consistently for the protection and promotion of (women's) human rights. One participant recounts how the UNDP in Iran provided funding to government-friendly non-governmental organisations to prepare a joint report for the Universal Periodic Review of Iran. This report provided only a positive assessment of the human rights situations. The same participant mentions that for the review of Iran under the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), the committee organised a briefing, at which local human rights defenders and UNICEF were present. She recounts that UNICEF's evaluation of Iran's implementation of the CRC was also entirely positive.

Participants question to what extent collaboration between UN agencies and governments is acceptable, if such collaboration takes place at the expense of denouncing violations or otherwise criticising governments.

Recommendations

Representatives of UN agencies should:

- » put pressure on states to develop, finance, and implement UN Security Council (UNSCR) 1325 National Action Plans with holistic agendas and meaningful participation of civil society throughout.
- » push states to ensure that national legislation is harmonised with ratified instruments (including through comprehensive and participatory gender budgeting).
- » pressure states to cooperate with UN human rights bodies, including by submitting reports to UN treaty monitoring bodies on time, and accepting requests for visits by UN Special Procedures and commissions of inquiry.
- » support (financially and otherwise) women's civil society organisations wishing to engage with UN human rights bodies and act on their recommendations, and develop effective strategies on improving this approach.
- » name and shame other states who do not implement ratified treaties, marginalise the voices of regressive states, and hold to account progressive states.
- » question to what extent collaboration of UN agencies with government-friendly NGOs and governments is acceptable, and evaluate such collaboration against how it is detrimental to the application of fundamental UN principles, the promotion of human rights, and to civil society.
- » explore the possibility of a fifth World Conference on Women in 2020, possibly focusing on implementation instead of re-opening commitments.

*"The UN must adhere to recommendations by its treaty bodies! To do otherwise is hypocrisy."
– Lisa Davis, MADRE*

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WILPF'S CONVENING IN GENEVA

As a matter of principle, WILPF decided not to participate formally in the 61st session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW61), which took place in New York, US, from 13-24 March 2017.

On 26-28 April 2017, WILPF therefore held a convening on women's meaningful participation in the UN system as a response to the exclusion of women advocates and activists.

The Convening took place inside the UN and at Palais Eynard, Geneva, and more than 150 people participated. Participants included women's rights and peace activists, civil society organisations, and representatives of Member States and UN agencies.

All the open sessions at the Convening were live-streamed through WILPF's Facebook-page in order to make the knowledge, recommendations and shared insights accessible to a broader audience. As a way to make the Convening more inclusive, the moderators at the panel discussions included questions asked by live-stream viewers, and people unable to attend the Convening thereby had the opportunity to engage in and contribute to the discussions.

List of countries:

<i>Australia</i>	<i>Greece</i>	<i>Palestine</i>
<i>Benin</i>	<i>Iraq</i>	<i>Senegal</i>
<i>Bosnia and Herzegovina</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>Serbia</i>
<i>Canada</i>	<i>Jordan</i>	<i>South Africa</i>
<i>Chad</i>	<i>Kenya</i>	<i>Sweden</i>
<i>Colombia</i>	<i>Kosovo</i>	<i>Switzerland</i>
<i>Croatia</i>	<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>	<i>Syria</i>
<i>Democratic Republic of the Congo</i>	<i>Lebanon</i>	<i>Turkey</i>
<i>Denmark</i>	<i>Libya</i>	<i>UK</i>
<i>Egypt</i>	<i>Macedonia</i>	<i>Ukraine</i>
<i>France</i>	<i>Malaysia</i>	<i>USA</i>
<i>Germany</i>	<i>Morocco</i>	<i>Yemen</i>
<i>Ghana</i>	<i>Netherlands</i>	<i>Zimbabwe</i>
	<i>Nigeria</i>	

ABOUT WILPF

WILPF is the oldest women's peace organisation in the world. With offices in Geneva and New York, and active national sections on every continent, WILPF brings together women from all around the world to work for peace and non-violent conflict resolutions, to end discrimination, and to promote political, economic and social justice for all.

WILPF was founded in 1915, and in 1948, the women-led organisation became one of the first NGOs to be granted consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Since its inception, WILPF has acted as a bridge between the UN and women's organisations around the world. WILPF has always seen it as an inevitable requirement to the multilateral system that it shall be guided by the people and the realities on the ground.

This access to ECOSOC is crucial for WILPF's advocacy as it allows the organisation to influence decision-makers at the highest international level by delivering statements, participating in negotiations and holding side events at the UN. Through the ECOSOC status, WILPF assists its sections and partners in bringing their experience and advocacy to the highest level. WILPF sees it as its finest duty to mediate global and local efforts in order to implement a holistic and transformative approach to human rights, gender equality and disarmament.

WILPF is, and has always been, a strong supporter of the UN, but only a UN which upholds its Charter and Human Rights law. A UN which builds and maintains peace. A UN which works for the people.

WILPF believes that an important missing ingredient for the UN to fulfil its Charter is women's meaningful participation. Women's voices, experiences and insights need to be both heard and acknowledged in decision-making processes. It is not just about counting women; it is about making women count.

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"WILPF is known for its unique capacity and expertise in analysing the root causes of conflict through gender lenses and in accompanying feminist movements in their action for peace and justice for all."

– Michael Møller, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva

"As human rights defenders, we should speak the language of people in the communities we wish to serve."

– Randa Siniora, Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling, Palestine

"We must #ReclaimUN. For all its problems and failures, it is still all we have got to uphold universal human rights norms and standards."

– Everjoice Win, Zimbabwe

In 2017, the newly elected US Administration's—a UN host state—travel ban on people from first seven, then six, named countries led to the exclusion of several women advocates and activists at the 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW61), taking place annually in New York.

The shrinking space for women's voices at the UN has been an issue for a long time, and the happenings around CSW61 illuminated a serious structural problem. In order to guide the UN away from a slippery slope and back to its Charter, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) gathered more than 150 women's rights and peace activists from around the world in April 2017 to discuss how to make the UN more inclusive and make women count within the UN system.

This booklet is an outcome of the discussions that took place during the three days of WILPF's Convening in Geneva.

