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Increasing synergies to deliver the SDGs for women and girls in conflict and fragile settings

Side Event – 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly
Wednesday, 25 September 2019, 5:00pm-6.30pm
The United Kingdom's Mission to the United Nations
One Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, New York, NY 10017

Background

Four years into the SDGs, no single country is on track to achieve gender equality (SDG5) by 2030. Progress has been the smallest amongst fragile and conflict affected countries, the 2019 SDG Gender Index identifying the bottom ten countries in the index as Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nigeria, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Yemen, Congo, DR Congo, and Chad¹ – which all also appear on the OECD's 2018 list of fragile states.² It is well known that gender inequalities are often exacerbated in times of crises, with pre-existing and deeply engrained discriminatory social norms, and patterns of violence worsen and new threats emerge. Women and girls face heightened risks including gender-based violence, increased maternal morbidity and mortality, forced and early marriage of girls. Their access to essential and life-saving services, including pregnancy care and GBV services may be extremely limited or impossible.

Women and girls in countries facing humanitarian emergencies are among the most vulnerable and the least visible. Similarly, women survivors of conflict are also the most marginalised and the poorest, and are not, like refugees, internally displaced persons, and other people caught in crises, included in SDGs progress reports, as well as data collection systems. Finally, despite their critical role as peacebuilders and first responders, women's participation and meaningful engagement in peacebuilding processes and crisis responses remain overwhelmingly insufficient.³ Women remain poorly represented in formal mechanisms for negotiating and sustaining peace. Whilst a study found that women's involvement in peace building increased the probability of ending violence by up to 24%⁴, 95% of the 1,187 peace agreements signed between 1990 and 2017 did not contain any reference to conflict related GBV.⁵

¹ Equal Measures (2019) SDG Data Index <https://www.equalmeasures2030.org/products/sdg-gender-index/>

² The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (July 2018) States of Fragility 2018
<http://www.oecd.org/dac/states-of-fragility-2018-9789264302075-en.htm>

³ Saferworld, Center for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient and Yemen Polling Center (2016) Women's role in peace and security in Yemen – Literature Review

⁴ The Guardian (August 2014) Can women make the world more peaceful? <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2014/aug/11/women-conflict-peace-society>, retrieved 14th December 2018.

⁵ Council on Foreign Relations <https://www.cfr.org/interactive/womens-participation-in-peace-processes>, retrieved on 14th December 2018.

What is the issue?

Whilst the 2030 Agenda recognises that many of the drivers of humanitarian crises threaten to reverse much of the development progress made in recent decades, without increased attention on women and girls in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, it will not be achieved.

One of the main challenges that impacts on the delivery of the gender equality agenda in fragile and conflict settings is the lack of a gender lens to the implementation of Goal 16, and the chronic silo working across the peace, security, development and gender sectors. For example, although Goal 5 includes several targets that are similar to those under Goal 16, representatives from the gender sector who work on Goal 5 are absent from most debates on Goal 16 implementation. This was most obvious in the recent review of SDG 16 at the 2019 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) where the connections between SDG5 and SDG 16 were only limitedly addressed.

This disconnect is even broader and greater between the 2030 Agenda and other gender-related frameworks and agendas, not least the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda – in particular UNSCR 1325, and the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies, and between the institutions that govern and oversee the implementation of these agendas across the humanitarian and development nexus, including the UN Security Council.

Event focus: Increasing synergies to deliver the SDGs for women and girls in conflict and fragile settings

The event will consider the key challenges to effective coordination and integration across agendas and the impact on women and girls in fragile and conflict settings and how proven approaches to ending violence against women and girls must be worked across the triple nexus (humanitarian-development-peace and security) in order to address the intersection between gender-based violence and conflict. We will also consider the critical steps that need to be taken to strengthen and effectively deliver a coordinated, mutually benefiting, coherent agenda that meet and respond to the needs of women and girls in fragile and conflict settings. It will consider stories from the field to showcase the critical role of women as actors of change and drivers of development in fragile and conflict affected contexts. Finally, the panel event will consider the upcoming political accountability moments in 2020, including the review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, for increasing synergies across all agendas. Importantly, it will focus on tangible actions that can be taken to deliver on commitments to women and girls in fragile and conflict affected settings.

Speakers

- Joanna Roper, CMG – UK Special Envoy for Gender Equality
- Brita Fernandez Schmidt – Senior Vice President for Europe and External Affairs, Women for Women International
- Marcy Hersh - Senior Manager for Humanitarian Advocacy, Women Deliver.
- Abigail Ruane - Women, Peace and Security Programme Director, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
- Nicole Behnam – Senior Director for Violence Prevention & Response, The International Rescue Committee
- Aisha Dennis – Program Director, Women Now for Development
- HE Dame Karen Pierce DCMG