

Empowering Young Women to Become Leaders and Agents of Peace

By Global Network of Women Peacebuilders

Young women are often subject to double marginalization – as women, and as young people. In many societies and families, they are the last to eat, to speak, to receive an education. They do not have a voice, and only speak when spoken to. With little or no education or training, young women and girls are relegated to caretaking, cooking, childbearing, collecting firewood and fetching water – the unpaid labour, which is often not regarded as important by the society, and does not provide the women with financial means of their own. In conflict-affected situations, all of this is aggravated. Yet, humanitarian policies and programs rarely recognize the specific challenges and double marginalization faced by young women. The discourse on violent extremism also tends to characterize young women as passive victims. As a result, their agency and potentials as leaders and peacebuilders are not realized.

Responding to the absence of young women in policy spaces and programming on peace and security, GNWP initiated its “Young Women for Peace and Leadership” (YWPL) program, formerly Girl Ambassadors for Peace (GA4P), which empowers young women from conflict-affected countries to be leaders and agents of peace.

The overarching goal of the Young Women for Peace and Leadership program is to enhance the capacities of young women and girls to promote and protect their rights, and to use UNSCR 1325 and 1820 to hold duty bearers accountable and find peaceful solutions to conflicts.

The four components of the program are:

1. Leadership: built through training workshops, as well as through giving the young women various responsibilities related to managing the Young Women for Peace and Leadership program;
2. Literacy: in DRC and South Sudan, the program targets literate young women, and trains them to become literacy trainers, travel to their villages and teach other women and girls how to read and write, thereby raising the literacy rate in their conflict-affected communities;
3. Peacebuilding: the young women learn interactive techniques to raise awareness about the importance of peace in their communities, including through theatre skits and the use of social media, and then use them to promote peacebuilding in local communities and villages, to which they travel;
4. Economic empowerment: In 2017, GNWP introduced the Economic Empowerment and Preventing Violent Extremism components to the program, responding to the needs identified by local communities in Bangladesh and Indonesia. During the Focus Group Discussions conducted by GNWP prior to the YWPL training in Indonesia, the lack of economic opportunities was identified as a major “pull factor” attracting young people to

violent extremism, more important than religion or ideology. As a response, GNWP included economic empowerment as a key component of the YWPL training. In 2018, the economic empowerment component will also be added to the YWPL program in the DRC.

The Young Women for Peace and Leadership program has had a tangible impact on the lives of young women and girls. It has also provided GNWP with unique insights and perspectives on violent extremism and how it can be prevented with the involvement of young women; as well as innovative ways of preventing conflict and sustaining peace.

To enable the young women to make their voice heard in global policy discussion, and use their leadership skills at the international arena, GNWP also identifies advocacy opportunities and facilitates the young women's participation in global fora. For example, during the International Youth Day in August 2017, two Young Women from DRC delivered a video testimony in the United Nations Headquarters to highlight the role of young people in peacebuilding.

GNWP is currently developing a Toolkit to enable easy replication and implementation of the Young Women for Peace and Leadership program in other countries.