The Issue

Formal mediation processes around the world remain largely stalled, and women’s meaningful participation limited. Gender-inclusive peace processes is an area within the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda that remains particularly resistant to change since the passing of the landmark Security Council resolution 1325. Between 1992 and 2018, women’s inclusion in formal processes has been far from full or equal.¹

Policy actors are increasingly calling for inclusive and holistic peace processes, new approaches to conflict resolution, effective conflict prevention and a sustained focus into transition and recovery. This call demands smarter design and the involvement of women and others traditionally excluded from shaping pathways to peace. The most important effects of women’s engagement in peace processes are not just increased attention to gender-related elements in deliberations and texts of peace agreements, but also a shift in dynamics and a broadening of the issues discussed. This subsequently increases community-buy in, the possibility of addressing root causes of conflict and the amount of pressure on conflict parties to reach an agreement or go back to the negotiating table when talks have faltered. The need for effective and sustainable solutions has only grown more urgent with COVID-19. The global pandemic has brought into sharp relief the criticality the WPS agenda as a lens to understand and respond to peace and conflict dynamics.

While there has been a rise in rhetoric supporting inclusive peacemaking in policy spaces, there has not yet been a corresponding and equivalent change in everyday practices. Indeed, questions about ‘how’ to practice inclusivity, with whom and around what issues are still very much under discussion. Transformative and deeply inclusive approaches to deliver positive peace are urgently needed, and there is no better time than now with the 20th anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325.
The Approach

This Programme seeks to address two major challenges to women’s participation and influence in official peace processes. The first is the restrictive operating environment for women’s participation, which is primarily a political challenge. The second challenge is the lack of sufficient technical expertise, space for strategic planning and partnerships through which to support women’s meaningful participation.

After a successful Phase I starting in 2017, UN Women is now well into Phase II with lessons learnt from political and technical perspectives, as well as greater focus and clarity. What has proved essential in achieving results to date is UN Women’s quick responsiveness as political processes evolve, the application of a multi-pronged approach and the use of strategic partnerships, especially with civil society and those who are influencing and making decisions at formal levels. UN Women has also worked in partnership with Member States, including with those who are part of the UN Security Council Informal Experts Group on WPS and the WPS National Focal Points Network to achieve critical gains together. Finally, being at the forefront of global knowledge generation and policy-making, as well as having a unique ability to convene a diversity of actors, allows UN Women to multiply its Programme results for wider impact.

In turn, the Programme promotes coherence across UN Women, enabling the institution to strengthen its leadership role on women’s meaningful participation, driving and shaping global policy discussions which are informed by implementation experiences on the ground.

Outcome and Outputs

The Programme outcome is for women to participate meaningfully in peace and transition processes. The activities are structured around three output areas:

- **Knowledge Generation**
  - Increased evidence-based knowledge and systemization generated and available to inform peace process actors on the variety of mediation related topics that require gender analysis (e.g. political power-sharing).

- **Provision of Capacity & Expertise**
  - Strengthened capacity and technical expertise through needs-based advice and learning for peace process actors, including those working to promote justice. This includes civil society mentoring and tailored technical support at country, regional and global levels.

- **Dialogue & Partnership Building**
  - Enhanced dialogue and partnerships for strategic action between UN Women and global, regional and country-level policy institutions and actors, alongside support in linking civil society to formal processes for increased inclusivity.
Track Record of Results

After nearly four years of Programme implementation, substantial progress has been demonstrated at the outcome level. In addition to increased consultation with women through official mechanisms, the Programme has seen valuable gains in instances where women’s participation or their rights/interests are reflected in peace process design, outcomes and relevant global or country-level policy. Still, making women’s direct participation consistently full, equal and meaningful in formal processes remains far from reality, and this is where much more investment continues to be needed. Just a few examples of the Programme’s successes are presented below.

GLOBAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT:

Leading and partnering across the UN system to create sustainable change through joint policy-making

Following the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, the UN Secretary-General, women civil society actors from across the MENA region and many others called for a global ceasefire to urge for peace in response to the pandemic and armed conflict alike. In this context, UN Women initiated and co-published a joint policy brief with UN DPPA on women’s meaningful participation in ceasefires and peace processes. The brief recognizes the vital role of women’s civil society organizations in mobilizing support for a cessation of hostilities, inclusive ceasefire processes and comprehensive peace talks. It also provides a preliminary analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on women’s participation and offers a series of recommendations, including the need ensure gender expertise, support gender-responsive conflict analysis and encourage a ‘building back better’. Throughout the process, UN Women was able to feed Programme-related research, experiences and lessons learnt into the policy tool, pushing the agenda for women’s participation forward through policy formulation and online outreach to attract widespread global attention.

LIBYA:

Building linkages and partnerships between actors to mobilize for women’s direct participation in high-level peace discussions

With multiple strategic alliances, including with the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, the Nordic Women Mediators, as well as with Libyan civil society, UN Women contributed toward ensuring Libyan women’s participation in political deliberations, specifically the Palermo Conference in November 2018. These joint efforts and the participation of Libyan women themselves led to a reference to women’s engagement and inclusion in the conference’s final statement.

CUTTING-EDGE RESEARCH:

Identifying knowledge gaps and commissioning research with partner institutions that are equipped to help fill those gaps

UN Women collaborated with the Political Settlements Research Programme at the University of Edinburgh to publish a set of papers that directly respond to peace process issues arising in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region with strong implications for evolving global thinking on mediation. UN Women suggested research topics and provided feedback to strengthen the quality of research outputs, including on gender analysis specifically.

Paper topics included, for example:

- Re-invigorating Stalled Peace Negotiations: Challenges and Opportunities for Women’s Inclusion
- Women and the Renegotiation of Transitional Governance Arrangements
- Local Peace Processes: Opportunities and Challenges for Women’s Engagement
- Gender Mainstreaming in Ceasefires: Comparative Data and Examples
- Humanitarian Assistance and Gender Perspectives in Peace Agreements
IRAQ:
Supporting networking and alliance building across peace tracks to influence decision-making towards sustainable peace in a post-conflict context

UN Women provided technical and facilitative support for the formation of an alliance between women activists and members of parliament to increase their meaningful participation in peacebuilding. The alliance then led to the creation of a caucus of women’s parliamentarians. Officially announced in October 2018, it has called for 25 percent women’s participation in the cabinet and committee leadership, as well as for the establishment of a fully-fledged Ministry of Women Affairs.

YEMEN:
Providing on-demand and flexible expertise to various actors involved in peace and political processes

By making on-demand expertise available to a variety of actors, from civil society to the UN, the Programme has already responded to more than 45 requests for timely and flexible support to date. For example, upon request, UN Women provided technical feedback around the establishment of the women’s Technical Advisory Group (TAG) for the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (OSESGY), including to support the finalization of its terms of reference, identification of potential TAG members and coordination between other Yemeni women’s groups and the TAG.

COMPARATIVE LEARNING:
Creating spaces and opportunities for global and regional cross-country peer exchange of ideas, strategies and approaches to ensure women’s meaningful participation

UN Women organized a two-day convening entitled ‘Women’s Meaningful Participation in Peace Processes: Modalities and Strategies Across Tracks.’ There were over 60 practitioners, experts and policy-makers in attendance from around the globe, including approximately half from the MENA region and others from, for instance, Cyprus, Georgia, Iraq, Kenya, Kosovo, Myanmar, Nepal and Northern Ireland. Discussions carried an emphasis on contributing toward new and existing peacemaking efforts in the MENA region through the cross-fertilization of ideas and exchange of experiences. The conference also included an active learning element with three, parallel pilot learning sessions including: (1) preparation phase for peace talks; (2) securing gender-responsive ceasefire agreements; and (3) integrating gender perspectives into political power-sharing arrangements. These substantive discussions on new issue areas in the WPS space yielded concrete recommendations that are now being taken forward by UN Women and others.

Despite these successes, the gains made to date require protection against risk of erosion as global norms, including human rights and gender equality, have increasingly come into question. Moreover, women’s direct participation in formal, peace and political processes remains a persistent challenge where consistent exclusion has continued into the 21st century. There is a need to act now, not only for women’s right to participation, but also for more effective conflict prevention and peacemaking, an end to wars and sustainable peace after conflicts come to an end.

2 For example, women’s advisory board models and formal civil society consultations.

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