BUILDING PEACE FROM THE GRASSROOTS: LEARNING FROM WOMEN PEACEBUILDERS TO ADVANCE THE WPS AGENDA

Report on Consultations on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), Sustaining Peace and COVID-19 with Local Women Peacebuilders in Colombia, Northern Ireland, South Africa and Uganda

OCTOBER 2020

To ensure that voices of local and national women peacebuilders are meaningfully included in discussions leading up to, during, and following the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325 – and to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on their work – the Government of Ireland commissioned the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) and UN Women to conduct a series of consultations on WPS and the Sustaining Peace resolutions with women from civil society in Colombia, Northern Ireland, South Africa and Uganda. This report reflects their voices, priorities and recommendations.

Introduction

Twenty years after the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), there is ample evidence that women are critical actors in fulfilling the UN's commitment to maintaining international peace and security. Women's participation makes the achievement of peace agreements more likely,[1] more lasting,[2] and more firmly rooted in respect for human rights and commitments to address

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[1] Tania Paffenholz and others, *Making Women Count—Not Just Counting Women: Assessing Women's Inclusion and Influence on Peace Negotiations* (2016). Available at http://www.peacewomen. org/sites/default/files/Making%20Women%20Count%20Not%20 Just%20Counting%20Women.pdf.

[2] Jana Krause, Werner Krause and Piia Bränfors, "Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace", *International Interactions*, vol. 44, No. 6 (2018), pp. 985–1016. Available at https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2018.1492386.

social inequalities.[3] Despite the evidence and the extensive normative framework – including ten UN Security Council resolutions on WPS, 84 National Action Plans, and 55 Local Action Plans in eight countries[4] – major gaps in implementation remain. The COVID-19 pandemic has put even greater strain on the WPS agenda, as many governments divert resources and attention away from implementation of WPS commitments to coronavirus response. Moreover, the pandemic is compounding many challenges faced by women peacebuilders on the ground and will continue to pose economic and security threats in the years to come.

This report seeks to address specifically the implementation of the intersecting provisions of the WPS agenda and Sustaining Peace resolutions[5] on women's leadership and participation in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding at the local level. In doing so, it has drawn from consultations with grassroots women peacebuilders across four regions who were asked to align their discussions with the six priority areas identified by the UN Secretary-General in his 2019 report on WPS to the Security Council (see Box 1 and Box 2).[6] The consultations took place just before lockdowns in response to the COVID-19 pandemic were introduced in all four countries. Through follow-up outreach and interviews with consultation participants, the findings and recommendations herein reflect how COVID-19 has impacted these grassroots women peacebuilders' work and lives.

BOX 1
UN Secretary-General priority areas

In his 2019 report on WPS to the Security Council, the UN Secretary-General identified six priority areas for urgent action to accelerate the implementation of the WPS agenda:

1. Generate and make available more data, evidence and analysis on women, conflict and peace.

2. Guarantee women's meaningful participation in peace processes.

3. Protect women human rights defenders and civil society in conflict situations.

4. Put more women in uniform in UN police and peacekeeping operations.

5. Ensure women are decision makers in economic recovery processes.

6. Boost financing for women, peace and security.

The consultations underscored many recurring themes on the implementation gaps that have been identified in previous years. At the same time, the women peacebuilders across each of the four countries identified **innovative and nuanced examples of good practices and locally-driven solutions that need to be recognized, amplified and replicated,** particularly in the context of COVID-19 recovery and the accompanying threats to stability that will almost certainly accompany this crisis. Across all four consultations, it was clear that when women are meaningfully included – for example, in COVID-19 response or in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration – the results are more gender-sensitive.

[3] Jillian Abballe and others, "Gender-Sensitive Provisions In Peace Agreements And Women's Political And Economic Inclusion Post-Conflict", Global Network of Women Peacebuilders and New York University Center for Global Affairs, 2020. Available at: http://gnwp.org/nyu-research-2020/.

[4] The number includes Local Action Plans developed as a result of GNWP's Localization of UNSCR 1325 strategy in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, the Philippines, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Ukraine

[5] The Sustaining Peace agenda is constituted by UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2282 and a substantively identical General Assembly Resolution 70/262, which introduced the concept of Sustaining Peace. The two resolutions put forth a vision of peacebuilding that is context-specific, locally-driven and demands coherence, coordination and concerted actions across the UN system, Member States, civil society and other stakeholders.

[6] See Box 1 for more details on the UN Secretary-General's priority areas.

The women peacebuilders shed light on new challenges and opportunities for WPS implementation created by the COVID-19 pandemic.[7] The pandemic has increased violence and security risks faced by women peacebuilders and further restricted women's access to already limited education and economic opportunities, as well as basic social services.[8] The implementation of peace agreements has been delayed,[9] and communal violence has increased in some regions.[10] Reduced funding has disrupted the work of many women's rights organizations and civil society groups that work to promote and protect women's rights, and build inclusive and sustainable peace.[11]

Despite these considerable challenges, women and youth peacebuilders continue to be on the frontlines of the COVID-19 response, especially in local communities. As one of the women leaders interviewed in Colombia emphasized, because of the pandemic, women peacebuilders now work three jobs: they continue their peacebuilding efforts, advocating for the implementation of peace accords and monitoring the implementation of ceasefire agreements; they provide humanitarian relief, such as making face masks and distributing them along with food packages and hygiene products to the elderly, people with disabilities, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs); and they work as primary caregivers for their children, elderly people and those in poor health.

"To us, peace means having a seat at the table, and a choice over our own lives" - Northern Irish women peacebuilders

The COVID-19 pandemic has also created opportunities to re-commit to women's meaningful participation in peacebuilding, conflict prevention and recovery. The pandemic throws into sharp relief the intersection of conflict and humanitarian crises, and the need to pay close attention to the root causes of violence, such as economic and gender inequalities, and weak state institutions, including health-care systems and communication infrastructure. To enhance our understanding of these dynamics, it is necessary to listen to and learn from the voices of local civil society, in particular local women and women's rights organizations.

This report shares important insights and recommendations directly from women peacebuilders on the ground, who are at the nexus of ongoing conflict and a global pandemic. Critically, the report highlights what the six priority areas identified by the UN Secretary-General mean to women peacebuilders, and identifies concrete, experience-based and practical examples of how best to secure their implementation.

Photo: Global Network of Women Peacebuilders
Flow Communications South Africa

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[7] Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, "COVID 19: GNWP Mitigation and Adaptation Strategy and Appeal", April 2020. Available at https://gnwp.org/covid19-strategy/ .

[8] Rosamund Hutt, "The coronavirus fallout may be worse for women than men. Here's why", World Economic Forum, 12 March 2020. Available at https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/the-coronavirus-fallout-may-be-worse-for-women-than-men-heres-why/ (accessed on 27 March 2020).

[9] Agnieszka Fal-Dutra Santos and Jenaina Irani, "Women, peace and a pandemic: Translating gender provisions in peace deals into peaceful and inclusive societies during the COVID-19 outbreak", Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, 16 June 2020. Available at: https://gnwp.org/nyu-research-launch-2020/.

[10] According to information provided by GNWP local partners, there have been spikes of communal violence in Jonglei, Warap and Lake states in South Sudan as well as an increase in farmer-pastoralist clashes in Kitgum, Uganda. These have been attributed to the limited presence of government and the UN due to COVID-19, as well as reduced capacities of peacebuilding organizations who usually work to lower tensions, mediate and address root causes of conflicts.

[11] Conducive Space for Peace, Humanity United and Peace Direct, *COVID-19 and the impact on local peacebuilding* (April 2020). Available from https://www.peacedirect.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-and-the-impact-on-local-peacebuilding.pdf.

BOX 2
Methodology and objectives

In-person consultations took place in March 2020 in Belfast, Northern Ireland; Bogotá, Colombia; Kampala, Uganda; and Pretoria, South Africa. The countries were selected based on the following criteria: (1) representation of countries at different stages of the conflict and peace process; (2) geographical diversity; (3) inclusion on the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission; and (4) access to women leaders, through the local networks of the Government of Ireland, GNWP and UN Women.

The consultations in Colombia, South Africa and Uganda gathered 30 women peacebuilders from across each country. The consultation in Northern Ireland convened 10 women activists. The participants were identified by the organizers through consultations with their in-country partners, and based on their knowledge of the local context. All participants were active peacebuilders and engaged in work to mediate and resolve conflicts, address their root causes, and/or implement the WPS agenda in their communities, or at the national level. To make room for diverse perspectives and an intersectional approach, consultation participants included grassroots women activists, young women, and women with disabilities. During the consultations, the women discussed what the implementation of the WPS agenda and Sustaining Peace resolutions means in their particular contexts, and identified remaining barriers to implementation. Key findings and preliminary recommendations from these consultations were shared with the Peacebuilding Commission, during its meeting on WPS in April 2020, as well as with the Peacebuilding Support Office, as an input to the UN Secretary-General's 2020 report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace.

The consultations concluded shortly before the World Health Organization (WHO) recognized the spread of COVID-19 as a pandemic on 11 March 2020, prompting the introduction of lockdown measures and severe travel restrictions across all four countries. To better understand how the pandemic has affected the work of the women peacebuilders, GNWP – in partnership with local researchers, and with support from the Government of Ireland and UN Women – conducted follow-up key informant interviews and virtual focus group discussions (FGDs) with women peacebuilders from all four groups.

The follow-up research used a combination of phone interviews, remote FGDs (conducted through online platforms), as well as in-person FGDs in Uganda, where health considerations and current COVID-19 regulations allowed. The FGDs and interviews used open-ended questions to solicit the women peacebuilders' views on how the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced (1) the peace and security situation broadly, including the implementation of peace agreements; (2) women's rights and gender equality; (3) their own work; and (4) implementation of the six priority areas identified by the UN Secretary-General.

Participants were also asked to re-validate the recommendations that emerged from initial consultations in March 2020, and provide additional recommendations for a gender-responsive and conflict-sensitive COVID-19 response and recovery. This report presents the information collated through the follow-up research and has also been included in the COVID-19 and WPS database, developed by GNWP. The database is an open-source, online tool that documents (1) impacts of COVID-19 on women's rights and gender equality; (2) impacts of COVID-19 on peace and security situations, including ceasefires, peace processes and implementation of peace agreements; and (3) initiatives taken by women peacebuilders to address the impacts of COVID-19. The database contains insights from local women peacebuilders around the world, is easily searchable and is accompanied by an interactive dashboard that visualizes its findings. The database and dashboard are available here: https://gnwp.org/resources/covid-19-wps-database/

Key Findings

Priority Area 1: Generate and make available more data, evidence and analysis on women, conflict and peace.

> ➢ **What does this Priority Area mean to women peacebuilders?**

Generating data requires working together and listening to local voices. Many international and national laws are not translated into local languages, or local action. This leads to a failure in coordination between different actors at local, national, regional and global levels. This disconnect led to COVID-19 crisis responses that are neither gender-responsive nor take into account women's distinct and diverse needs.

Across all four countries, consultation participants agreed that clear and transparent coordination and communication mechanisms between civil society – including women's organizations, national governments, UN entities, and regional and international organizations – are necessary to ensure accountability, joined-up analysis and strategic planning. Participants in South Africa and Uganda appreciated the role of UN Women in supporting coordination and civil society inclusion in WPS implementation.

However, they emphasized that there is still not enough coordination – both within the government, and between government and civil society. Consultation participants in South Africa noted that much of the work that contributes to the achievement of WPS priorities – for example, work to protect women's human rights or advance women's economic empowerment – takes place in silos, with little communication or coordination among different sectors. This was echoed by participants in the other countries where consultations took place, who emphasized that coordination mechanisms that successfully cut across implementation silos must be improved, and women's civil society networks require greater financial support to enable them to document and increase the visibility of their work.

Limited knowledge of the global, regional and national policy frameworks on gender equality and sustainable peace among local actors, including women peacebuilders and local authorities, exacerbates this lack of coordination. Consultation participants in South Africa and Uganda noted that even when policies that promote women's rights and gender equality exist, such as National Action Plans on WPS, they are not translated into local languages and are therefore unfamiliar to grassroots activists.

Similarly, in Colombia, the participants noted a lack of familiarity with the legal and normative frameworks on women's rights among local populations and a lack of capacity and understanding of gender issues in local institutions. This knowledge gap contributes to delays in the implementation of the gender-sensitive provisions of the peace agreement between the Colombian Government and the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces-People's Army (FARC-EP).

Across all four contexts, national-local coordination deteriorated further during the COVID-19 pandemic. As Yazmin Muñoz from the Colectivo de Pensamiento y Acción Mujeres, Paz y Seguridad in Colombia noted during an FGD, there is a "disconnect between the response to the pandemic at the national and local level". Given ineffective coordination and lack of capacity at the local level, women living in remote areas have become much more vulnerable to threats and attacks from armed groups and other violent actors.

Moreover, there is no clarity on the timeline and budgets for the implementation of the Territorial Development Programmes (*Programas de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial*, PDET), which are key components of the peace agreement.

Coordination on WPS implementation has also deteriorated during the pandemic, according to research participants from Uganda**.** They emphasized that while before COVID-19 there

was strong coordination and information sharing about the new National Action Plan at the national level, there is very little information available now. Women peacebuilders reported having limited access to technology and connectivity, making communication and coordination more difficult. They also highlighted that resources and attention were being diverted away from peacebuilding and gender equality work, towards immediate health and humanitarian responses to the pandemic. As one of the FGD participants noted, "I heard about WPS this year, but most young women do not know about this, and how they can use the resolutions." She emphasized that this challenge – exacerbated by COVID-19 – is a barrier to implementation because "people cannot implement what they do not know." The women consulted for this report in Uganda talked about the importance of local leadership in responding to the pandemic in a gender-responsive and conflict-sensitive way, citing the formation of district-level COVID-19 task forces as good practice. However, they also noted that most district heads responsible for leading these task forces are men and very few women participate in these structures.

Participants emphasized that investment in women's networks and civil society coordination networks is necessary to ensure more effective implementation and accountability. Across all four countries, participants underscored that coordination and joint advocacy conducted by the women's movement is a key element driving the implementation of the WPS agenda forward and allowing for women's meaningful participation.

"Women peacebuilders don't have the resources to document their work – this makes it more difficult to amplify and replicate their success!" - Consultation participants from Uganda

The participants in Colombia and Uganda emphasized the need to invest in women's networks and coordination mechanisms. The Ugandan participants reflected that coordination is an effort that requires time, resources and capacity; however, funding to support such work is often unavailable. Similarly, interviewees brought up the fact that there is no funding to document and disseminate the good practices and successes of women-led organizations, making it more difficult to grant them the visibility they deserve.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the strength of women's movements and their importance for effective coordination and implementation. While the pandemic is weakening coordination between civil society and the government, participants in the follow-up research pointed to the fact that women-led organizations have maintained high levels of coordination and collaboration, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. They have adapted to the virtual modes of working and have remained connected, to the extent possible, sharing accurate and timely information about the pandemic, preventative measures, and other threats.

In Northern Ireland, one interviewee spoke of how the pandemic led to the galvanization and greater mobilization of the women's movement, including through the work of the Women's Policy Group – a platform bringing together different civil society organizations that has continued its advocacy online through the development of the Feminist COVID-19 Recovery Plan.

In Uganda, women mobilized and coordinated with local task forces to address the gendered impacts of COVID-19. Gladys Faddy Akello, the head of Kitgum Women Peace Initiative was also a member of the national COVID-19 task force. She shared that her organization held a press conference to discuss the impact of the pandemic on women. This generated further recommendations, which she referred back to the task force, to advocate for emergency funds to support women during the pandemic. The resilience of women-led organizations, and their ability to maintain high levels of coordination despite unprecedented challenges further illustrate the importance of supporting women's networks and learning from their work.

In addition to insufficient support to women's networks, lack of institutional frameworks for WPS implementation leads to non-implementation and lack of accountability. Institutionalization of WPS commitments

was identified by participants across the four contexts as crucial to accountability and effective implementation. In Colombia, the consultation participants emphasized the importance of integrating the gender-responsive provisions of the peace agreement into local development plans, to strengthen coordination and ensure accountability for its implementation at the local level. They also called for the participatory and inclusive development of a National Action Plan on WPS.

In Uganda, participants stressed the importance of developing Local Action Plans as a way to institutionalize commitments and translate them into concrete actions at the grassroots level. They called for the use of localization as a strategy for effective implementation.[12]

In Northern Ireland, participants highlighted the importance of formal institutions – such as the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission – in the protection and promotion of women's human rights. They stressed that the absence of a gender equality strategy or a mechanism to integrate a gender lens across the government in Northern Ireland is a significant obstacle to leadership accountability for the implementation of WPS commitments. Northern Irish women interviewed in the follow-up research emphasized that the lack of a gender lens was also reflected in the government's COVID-19 response, which did not address women's specific needs and the new threats they faced. For example, the proposed economic recovery measures do not take into account the increased childcare burden and unpaid care labour performed by women. Moreover, the implementation of the WPS agenda, and support to women-led peacebuilding initiatives remains marginalized in the wake of the pandemic.

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[12] The Global Network of Women Peacebuilders' Localization of UNSCR 1325 strategy institutionalizes the integration of WPS commitments, as well as provisions of peace agreements, in local development planning. It has been cited in the 2016 and 2017 UN Secretary-General's reports to the Security Council on WPS as a key tool for translating policy into practice; and allows for the transformation of international, regional and national WPS commitments into local action which in turn ensures that local needs and priorities inform national, regional and global policy development.

Priority Area 2: Guarantee women's meaningful participation in peace processes

> ### What does this Priority Area mean to women peacebuilders?

Meaningful participation requires participation of women in all their diversity, including young women, indigenous women, women with disabilities, women living in remote areas, as well as LGBTQI people. COVID-19 has brought to light the multiple layers of discrimination affecting women: for example, women with disabilities faced increased difficulties because not all online platforms and materials were made accessible. Indigenous women and women living in remote areas faced exclusion because of lack of access to the internet and necessary equipment.

Consultation participants emphasized that women's participation in peace processes leads to more inclusive and effective policies. For example, participants in the consultation in Colombia noted that women's participation in the peace negotiations between the Government and the FARC-EP contributed to making women's rights organizations and their work more visible in Colombia, which in turn led to the inclusion of women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) persons in the consultations that fed into the peace negotiations. Conversely, exclusion of women results in processes and policies that are not gender-responsive, and not conducive to inclusive and sustainable peace. For example, in Uganda, women are often excluded from local peace committees, as well as local and national legislative bodies. As a result, key policies relating to peacebuilding – such as the transitional justice policy – are gender-blind, do not reflect women's concerns and priorities, and do not respond to women and girls' specific needs.

Participants from all countries agreed that women remain excluded from both official negotiation processes, local mediation mechanisms and decision-making more

broadly – including those who are highly skilled and have been trained as mediators. Women in South Africa noted that even when women play key roles as peacebuilders and mediators in their local communities, they are not included in official discussions and negotiations at the regional or national levels. They called for a commitment from mediators in official processes to ensure women's meaningful participation, nothing that this also requires systematic institutional linkage between local level mediation and national, regional and global level mediation. This can be achieved, for example, by increasing the financial and political support for local and national women's networks that often work across these levels and can bring important perspectives, and galvanize broad-base support, for a peace process. Interviewees in Northern Ireland highlighted systemic exclusion of women from decision-making, despite the key roles they have played in the peace process – and continue to play in implementing the peace agreement – and building a culture of peace. As one interviewee commented, "Policy-making in Northern Ireland is actively gender-blind. It's an aspiration, not an accident. This leads to lack of spaces for women's participation."

In addition to the lack of political will, consultation participants in Colombia and Uganda pointed to the structural barriers to participation. They talked about how low levels of education among indigenous and rural women, lack of language skills and economic dependence are key barriers to women's meaningful participation. Participants in Colombia pointed out that, in indigenous communities, men are more likely to have access to education and learn Spanish than women. This prevents women from participating in negotiations and consultations between local government and indigenous communities.

COVID-19 has brought to the fore and aggravated challenges to women's meaningful participation. Women in Colombia shared that the pandemic has "put the brakes" on women's political participation, especially at the local level. Planned consultations and other participatory processes had to be cancelled, and mass protest marches and public demonstrations that

have been ongoing since 2019 were disrupted. Similarly, in South Africa, interviewees pointed out that their work has been affected and delayed due to the lockdown measures. Moreover, **the increased care burden imposed by the pandemic – including additional childcare and homeschooling duties – has limited women's capacity to participate in trainings, consultations and advocacy across all four contexts.** In Northern Ireland, the pandemic has also shone a light on barriers to women's meaningful participation, as they have been excluded from discussions and decision-making on pandemic response and recovery, including from national COVID-19 task forces.[13]

"Women are being asked to give more, and at the same time are being deprived of opportunities for participation" - Sara Cook, Northern Ireland

According to the interviewees across Colombia, Northern Ireland, South Africa and Uganda, women have been at the forefront of the COVID-19 response: disseminating information, delivering food packages, advocating for more inclusive policies, and monitoring cases of police brutality. As Sara Cook, a WPS expert and activist from Northern Ireland observed, "Women are being asked to give more, and at the same time are being deprived of opportunities for participation."

The pandemic has also created opportunities for strengthening women's meaningful participation. Women across the four contexts have continued their work, either in person (with appropriate preventative measures) or through the use of information and communication technologies. In Colombia and Uganda, FGD participants discussed how the pandemic allowed for a diversification of communication channels, and encouraged women to use social media and

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[13] This reality reflects a broader global trend. According to a study by CARE International, on average, women make up less than a quarter of national-level committees established to respond to COVID-19. See CARE International, "WHERE ARE THE WOMEN? The Conspicuous Absence of Women in COVID-19 Response Teams and Plans, and Why We Need Them" (2020). Available at https://www.care.at/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CARE_Where-are-the-women-in-Covid-19-response.pdf.

other virtual platforms for their coordination and advocacy. For example, women activists in Cauca, Colombia, used online platforms to continue their advocacy to include gender-responsive and conflict-sensitive provisions in local development plans. Thanks to their efforts, the Departmental Development Plans and 19 out of 42 Local Development Plans include concrete actions designed to implement the gender provisions of the peace agreement between the government and the FARC-EP.

Photo: Global Network of Women Peacebuilders
Flow Communications South Africa

However, due to the "digital divide", not all women have been able to take advantage of virtual participation modalities, and those most vulnerable have often been excluded. Only 55 per cent of the households globally and only 19 per cent of households in the Least Developed Countries have access to internet.[14] The digital divide or gap is also gendered, as women are 23 per cent less likely than men to use mobile internet.[15] In Uganda, the gap is further aggravated by the so-called "social media tax", which makes the use of the mobile internet more expensive.[16] According to some

research participants, the gap extends beyond the digital media. As Gorett Komurembe, Director of Programmes at the Coalition for Action 1325 in Uganda puts it, "rural women don't have access to the radios. Radios in Uganda are mostly owned by men."

FGD participants in Colombia stressed that women in some regions – for example in the Ariari region in the Meta department – were unable to participate in the advocacy related to the local development plans because they lacked access to the necessary infrastructure and equipment (including phones or smartphones, and internet), and did not have the skills needed to use the virtual platforms. **The women said that while support from donors and international partners to purchase phones, laptops or internet credit has been appreciated, it does not address infrastructural barriers, such as lack of phone lines or mobile signal.**

Additionally, FGD participants in Uganda flagged that participation during the COVID-19 pandemic has been even more difficult for women with disabilities. For example, those with hearing or visual impairments struggled as information about the pandemic, and the available channels for participation were usually not provided in accessible formats. As a result, women with disabilities have been excluded from decision-making. They are also often deprived of access to relief packages and other services, and exposed to abuse, as lack of access to information and basic goods increases their dependency on their caregivers, families, and service providers.

Some types of peacebuilding work – in particular reconciliation and support to victims of violence – is not easily done in the virtual space. Women peacebuilders from both Colombia and Northern Ireland shared that while advocacy for the institutionalization and implementation of the WPS agenda and peace agreements continued, other types of work had to stop during the pandemic. Participants in Colombia underscored the fact that victims of violence are often not comfortable speaking about their experiences on the phone because of the lack of privacy in their home, or they are

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[14] International Telecommunications Union, *Measuring digital development Facts and figures 2019*. Available at https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/FactsFigures2019.pdf.

[15] International Telecommunications Union, "THE STATE OF BROADBAND 2019' REPORT HIGHLIGHTS". Available at https://broadbandcommission.org/Documents/SOBB-REPORT%20HIGHTLIGHTS-v3.pdf.

[16] Rebecca Ratcliffe and Samuel Okiror, "Millions of Ugandans quit internet services as social media tax takes effect", *The Guardian,* 27 February 2019. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/feb/27/millions-of-ugandans-quit-internet-after-introduction-of-social-media-tax-free-speech.

unable to do so if they live with the perpetrator. Similarly, interviewees from Northern Ireland discussed how work on improving relations between nationalist and unionist communities – for example, through mediation and community dialogues – has been impossible, as community members do not feel comfortable discussing sensitive and personal issues online. On the other hand, Northern Irish women peacebuilders also noted that confronting the common threat posed by the pandemic has created a sense of unity and fostered collaboration across communities, and may provide an opportunity to foster greater collaboration and trust.

Priority Area 3: Protect women human rights defenders and civil society in conflict situations

> ➢ **What does this Priority Area mean to women peacebuilders?**

Women peacebuilders and human rights defenders are under threat like never before. During COVID-19, women are experiencing a surge in domestic violence, targeted attacks, and threats from armed groups. There is a need to increase investment to ensure that women who face violence and threats have access to safe spaces, basic services, justice, and trauma counselling – all of which have been deprioritized during the pandemic.

Women leaders, peacebuilders and human rights defenders are under attack. The study participants in Northern Ireland raised the fact that women leaders, peacebuilders and human rights defenders worldwide are "under threat like never before". The participants in South Africa and Uganda testified that the restrictions placed on civil society work are a principal barrier to effective peacebuilding and conflict prevention. In some Ugandan communities, there is a sense of shame associated with being an activist or human rights defender. Women activists are referred to as "men", "impossible women" or "home-breakers".

As a result, they are often shunned by their families or exposed to verbal or physical violence.

COVID-19 has also aggravated violence against women leaders, peacebuilders and human rights defenders. In Colombia, the number of attacks against women human rights defenders has increased during the pandemic, due to mobility and travel restrictions, which enables attackers to more easily identify and track targets.[17] According to one interviewee, in the department of Cauca alone, as of September 2020, there have been 41 reported murders of women leaders since the beginning of the pandemic. The FGD participants also pointed out that due to a limited state presence in certain parts of the country, which was further diminished during the lockdown, women facing violence in conflict-affected regions turned to women leaders and activists for help. Women leaders who intervened directly with perpetrators exposed themselves to threats and violence.

COVID-19 both highlights and aggravates gender-based violence and violence against women peacebuilders – both in the private and public spheres. In Colombia, the domestic violence hotline ("*linea purpura*") in Bogotá experienced a doubling of reports of domestic violence during the lockdown.[18] Participants in Northern Ireland, South Africa and Uganda also reported increases in domestic violence and violence against women during the pandemic. In Uganda, FGD participants witnessed an increase in early and child marriage, fuelled by the economic hardship caused by the pandemic. One participant recalled the case of a "ten-year old girl, who was married during the COVID-19 lockdown after her parents were promised one kilogram of sugar and 20 thousand Uganda shillings [5.50 USD] per week." Betty Adio, from the John Paul II Justice and Peace Centre in the Yumbe district in Northern Uganda, highlighted that there has

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[17] Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, *COVID-19 Mitigation and Adaptation Strategy and Appeal: Colombia Country Update*, June 2020. Available at https://gnwp.org/covid19-strategy/

[18] Observatorio de Mujeres y Equidad de Genero Bogotá, *Cuarentena por la Vida. Línea Púrpura Distrital* (2020). Available at http://omeg.sdmujer.gov.co/index.php/home/mediciones-propias/linea-purpura.

been an increase in teenage pregnancies – 116 girls of school age have been reported pregnant between May and July. Participants of a follow-up consultation organized by the Irish Embassy in South Africa in August 2020 flagged that xenophobic violence has also increased during the pandemic, placing migrant and refugee women at particular risk.

Women peacebuilders in Colombia and Northern Ireland also pointed to the threats women face from military groups and violent militias. In Colombia, women from Antioquia, Cauca and Caquetá departments, talked about how there has been a proliferation and increased activity of illegal armed groups during COVID-19, creating new and increased risks for women activists and peacebuilders. In Northern Ireland, participants pointed out that sexual violence is sometimes used as a means of community control and coercion, both during conflict and in its aftermath. They noted that COVID-19 may lead to an increase in these threats. Some interviewees shared that there is anecdotal evidence that paramilitary groups positioned themselves as first responders early on in the pandemic – including through participating in the distribution of food packages and hygiene products. This may have an impact on how these groups are viewed and supported within communities.

Moreover, as one interviewee noted, the pandemic has diverted attention from political issues that have threatened to strain the peace in Northern Ireland – such as the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union.

Survivors of sexual and gender-based violence often do not have access to justice and necessary services, including trauma counselling, which makes the impacts of the violence they face even more severe. There is a prevalent culture of silence and impunity surrounding all forms of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, as well as attacks on women activists, peacebuilders and human rights defenders. Women peacebuilders from Northern Ireland underscored that there is insufficient funding for mental health support and trauma counselling, including for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. This is particularly concerning in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic

as evidence mounts regarding its adverse effect on mental health – especially for those who had already suffered trauma.[19]

Moreover, due to the lack of gender mainstreaming in public policies, there are no "safe spaces" or adequate channels for women to seek support or justice when they face violence. In Uganda, the consultation participants discussed how judicial redress is expensive, lengthy and intimidating, and therefore inaccessible to many women. The situation is aggravated by several factors: corruption, which makes legal proceedings longer and more expensive; women's lack of access to financial resources; and a lack of awareness of human rights and existing laws and policies. As a result, customary justice – which is deeply embedded in patriarchal culture and therefore often fails to protect women and punish perpetrators– is often used as an alternative. FGD participants in Uganda also noted that survivor access to basic services and justice decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic. The abuse of power by security services during the lockdown has affected community trust in the police, and women are more afraid than ever to report domestic and sexual violence to the police.

Priority Area 4: Put more women in uniform in UN police and peacekeeping operations

> **What does this Priority Area mean to women peacebuilders?**

Patriarchal culture and toxic masculinity that permeate security services create a barrier to increasing the number and influence of women uniformed personnel. There is a need to go beyond simply increasing the numbers and commit to changing the over-militarized culture that exposes women to harassment and abuse.

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[19] World Health Organization, "Substantial investment needed to avert mental health crisis", 14 April 2020. Available at https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/14-05-2020-substantial-investment-needed-to-avert-mental-health-crisis

Women face both physical barriers to participation, such as the lack of appropriate equipment and facilities, and cultural ones, such as the fact that these spaces tend to be dominated by toxic masculinity and a culture that dismisses women's needs. As a result, women remain underrepresented in peacekeeping missions and national security services, in particular at leadership levels. Women peacebuilders in South Africa and Uganda observed that the physical environment in the armed forces – for example, lack of adequate bathroom facilities, lack of access to feminine hygiene products, military equipment not suited to women's anatomy – makes it difficult and, at times, unsafe for women to work in security services. Consultation participants in Northern Ireland and Uganda shared that women within the security sector are also often treated as inferior to men and can face harassment and abuse from colleagues. Interviewees highlighted the lack of confidential and appropriate channels for women to report such abuse.

Participants from Colombia emphasized that it is not enough to include women in the security sector – there is also a need to change the culture within it. They highlighted that violations of women's rights are often committed by security forces. These affect both women within the security sector, and those outside of it. During the COVID-19 pandemic this has been particularly visible. According to an interviewee from Cauca, Colombia, the police force uses the pandemic as an excuse to abuse power and intimidate populations. These violations have increased distrust between the police and local communities, in particular local women.

Similarly, an FGD participant from Uganda stated that "some people were shot dead by the security officers, which is a violation of human rights. A camera footage of a member of the Local Defence Unit [armed civilian force in Uganda] shooting a civilian on a motorcycle went viral on social media." They also shared that security forces enforcing COVID-19 lockdown at the local level were dominated by men.

As a result, women across all four contexts

judged the COVID-19 response as completely conflict-blind and lacking a peacebuilding lens. Most interviewees across Colombia, South Africa and Uganda, rated the conflict-sensitivity of the response as 1, on the scale from 1 to 5, where 1 meant "not conflict sensitive at all" and 5 meant "very conflict sensitive". As Parcella Makelani from the Bana Ba Ba Khanya Centre in South Africa stated when justifying her criticism: "The police officers failed us. There was a lot of police brutality, which fuels conflict."

Participants of the FGD in Colombia called for better regulations of the use of armed force, increased respect for human rights, and more attention to gendered power imbalances, as a prerequisite to creating an environment conducive to increasing the number and influence of women in uniforms.

"It is not enough to include women in the security sector – we have to change the culture within it" - FGD participants, Colombia

The first step towards changing the culture is meaningful consultation on mission priorities with women from civil society. In Colombia, as of June 2020, women constituted 38 per cent of the international observers in the UN Verification Mission, including uniformed, military personnel. The participants highlighted that the Mission has also maintained an active dialogue and pursued coordination with women's organization at both national and local level. As a result, the Mission has adopted a strong gender focus, including by implementing actions to prevent and respond to sexual violence in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration zones.

Photo: Global Network of Women Peacebuilders
Flow Communications South Africa

Priority Area 5: Ensure women are decision makers in economic recovery processes.

> ### What does this Priority Area mean to women peacebuilders?

Economic inequality and women's economic marginalization are root causes of conflict and violence. Women's lack of financial independence presents a significant barrier to WPS implementation, as it increases women's exposure to threats and violence and aggravates their exclusion from decision-making. To address this, it is necessary to create more inclusive economic systems, in which care work is valued, and women meaningfully participate in decision-making.

Women's lack of both financial independence and access to economic resources were identified as key obstacles to women's security and building and sustaining peace across all four countries. Consultation participants in Northern Ireland discussed how inequality, including economic inequality, breeds conflict, and they called for research to document the economic costs of gender inequality. Similarly, women in Uganda stated that non-implementation of the WPS agenda has negative economic implications because conflict and insecurity prevent them from pursuing economic activities. The women underscored that such impacts require better documentation and analysis.

Women's economic dependence fuels domestic violence and increases their insecurity, while at the same time hindering their access to justice and decision-making.

Participants in Uganda pointed out that because most women are financially dependent on men, they are not able to cover legal fees or pay for basic services. Across all four countries, the participants highlighted that women's economic dependence exacerbates other forms of gender-based violence – such as human trafficking and early, child and forced marriage. **Ensuring women's economic empowerment and**

promoting prosperity in local communities is a conflict prevention strategy since it reduces the probability of disputes around access to, and control of, economic resources.

Ensuring women's economic empowerment is a conflict prevention strategy – it reduces the probability of disputes around access to, and control of, economic resources.

Barriers to women's economic participation as identified by research participants included: discriminatory laws and practices around property and land ownership; social norms and negative stereotypes that lead to discrimination in the labor market; and austerity measures. According to women in Uganda, because of traditional power structures, even when women are the primary earners in the family, they do not have a say in decision-making on family finances. Moreover, gender norms in Ugandan society prohibit women from taking on certain jobs and compel them to leave work upon marriage. Participants noted that these challenges are even more pronounced for women with disabilities who are not expected to go to school or work, and are often prevented by their families and social norms from earning an income.

Participants in South Africa related similar challenges regarding women's access to land ownership. They emphasized that this affects women's ability to access loans, since banks often require collateral guarantees, such as land or other property. Participants in all countries suggested that since gender-inequality and economic inequality are the main drivers of conflict, inclusive and sustainable peace will not be achieved until these issues are fully addressed.

Economic crises – including the downturn caused by COVID-19 – and austerity measures disproportionately affect women. Women in Colombia, Northern Ireland, South Africa and Uganda all agreed that women are more impacted than men by the COVID-19 induced economic crisis given their overrepresentation in the informal sector, especially as domestic workers but also in the hospitality and service

industries and in education. In Uganda, FGD participants observed that many women lost their small businesses because they could not keep up with loan repayment. Price inflation due to the pandemic aggravates the economic hardship faced by women in Uganda, many of whom are the primary breadwinners in their household. As a result, Lukwago Eva, an interviewee from Mbuya, Uganda, observed that some women have been forced into sex work: "I know a woman who attends to her grocery stall by day, and works as a prostitute by night to sustain her family, since her husband was laid off".

Women in Northern Ireland noted that economic recovery has focused on big businesses and has not taken into account the needs of small entrepreneurs and those working in the informal sector – many of whom are women – or the disproportionate burden of care work undertaken by women. This sentiment was also shared by FGD participants in Colombia. In Uganda, FGD participants noted that while the Uganda Development Bank created emergency loans to support those affected by COVID-19, the process to access these funds is very complex and bureaucratic. As a result, many women cannot access them. Similarly, according to FGD participants in South Africa it has been extremely challenging for women and other vulnerable groups to access the funds from the stimulus package announced by the government. They discussed long delays in the delivery of the relief goods, including food packages. Interviewees highlighted that access has been particularly difficult for migrants and refugees, who fear being deported if they apply to the authorities for support.

Women peacebuilders from Colombia and Northern Ireland recognized that the COVID-19 pandemic has created an opportunity to design more feminist economies built on an appreciation of the value of care work. As Maria Eugenia Ramirez from Mujeres por la Paz, Cumbre Nacional de Mujeres y Paz (Women for Peace, National Summit of Women and Peace) in Colombia contends, "women cannot go on working three jobs – as caregivers for their families, educators for their children,

and professionals. The care economy must be recognized as a viable option and supported both politically and financially by national and local authorities." The study participants also indicated that public debates about universal basic income are a positive development, but warned that to be effective, recovery policies – including universal income – must be rooted in gender analysis and recognize the unpaid care work performed by women.

"Women are working three jobs – as caregivers and educators at home and in their own professions. This is not sustainable" - Maria Eugenia Ramirez, Mujeres por la Paz, Cumbre Nacional de Mujeres y Paz

Consultation participants from all four countries also called for the meaningful participation of women in financial institutions to ensure their participation in decision-making about the economy, and about COVID-19 recovery. Their insights and experiences will help ensure that economic recovery plans are equitable and based on an understanding and appreciation of unpaid care work.

Priority Area 6: Boost financing for women, peace and security

➢ **What does this Priority Area mean to women peacebuilders?**

Financing peacebuilding work led by women is not sufficiently prioritized by donors. Funding is limited, and when it exists, it is not accessible to local peacebuilders. COVID-19 creates the risk that peace-building and implementation of WPS will be further deprioritized. There is a need to review and remove administrative and bu-reaucratic barriers that prevent women from accessing funding, and to provide more core funding for women's rights and peacebuild-ing organizations.

Across all four countries, participants agreed that there is insufficient funding for the implementation of the WPS agenda. In Uganda, study participants pointed out that the Ministry of Gender, which is responsible for coordinating the implementation of the National Action Plan on WPS, operates with an insufficient budget. In Northern Ireland, several of the interviewed women peacebuilders noted that there is a shortage in funding for gender equality and women's rights more broadly. As one interviewee stated, "It is really hard to get money simply for women's rights: it has to be 'women and children', 'women and disability', 'women and something.'"

Women peacebuilders are concerned that the COVID-19 pandemic will lead to de-prioritization and defunding of peacebuilding work and impede the implementation of WPS. Women who participated in follow-up interviews and FGDs across all four contexts stated that women's rights and peacebuilding organizations have seen funding cuts and delays, rendering it more difficult to carry out their work. One FGD participant in Uganda remarked: "We are not prioritizing peacebuilding right now. Most of the funds are focused on COVID-19 [humanitarian] response." Women in Colombia have expressed concern that the pandemic is being used as an excuse to cut funding for institutions dedicated to the implementation of the peace agreement, including the transitional justice mechanisms: Special Jurisdiction for Peace (Jurisdiccion Especial para la Paz, JEP) and the Clarity and Truth Commission (Comisión de Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, CEV).

"Women are working three jobs – as caregivers and educators at home and in their own professions. This is not sustainable" - Maria Eugenia Ramirez, Mujeres por la Paz, Cumbre Nacional de Mujeres y Paz

At the same time, COVID-19 is an opportunity to recognize the cross-cutting nature of WPS, and the important roles of women peacebuilders across all pillars of the UN's work. Women in South Africa recognized that pre-existing difficulties such as lack of access to water exacerbate the impacts of the pandemic.

Due to the water shortages, women and girls have had to walk long distances and are now more exposed to gender-based violence and police brutality. Participants in a follow-up consultation organized by the Embassy of Ireland to South Africa expressed that COVID-19 has brought to the fore issues of human security and highlighted that "peace means different things to different people". Indeed, the women echoed the sentiment, noting that during the pandemic, peacebuilding organizations have broadened the scope of their work to address root causes of conflict, such as poverty, and have strengthened their collaboration with other organizations and actors.

When funding for WPS implementation exists, it is often not accessible to women's rights organizations, especially those working at the local level. Participants across all four contexts also agreed that civil society, especially women's organizations working on WPS, are severely underfunded. This situation is attributed to limited dissemination of information and complex application procedures. In Northern Ireland, participants shared that funding was only made available to women's organizations "after they proved their effectiveness in engaging paramilitaries", and that the majority of post-conflict recovery funding is directed to projects designed "by men for men".

In South Africa, consultation participants pointed out that international funding is often not accessible to women because of administrative requirements relating to the size of the organization and experience in managing international grants. Similarly, women from Colombia highlighted the difficulty in accessing national grants and resources due to the bureaucratic nature of the system and restrictive requirements. They underlined that international and national grants go to large organizations, as donors do not have confidence in the ability of youth and women-led organizations to manage funds. As a result, small organizations remain dependent on self-financing, voluntary work and sub-grants from larger organizations.

In addition, donor priorities are often not

aligned with the realities and needs on the ground, which makes the use of funds for WPS implementation less efficient. This is in line with GNWP research on local civil society and local women's perceptions on Sustaining Peace, in which 20 per cent of over 1,000 women and men respondents to a multilingual survey reported that local civil society was not able to influence the design of donor programmes at all, and 17 per cent reported they could do so only to a limited extent.[20]

There is a need to increase core or unearmarked funding available to women-led organizations to strengthen their institutional capacity. Women in Colombia and South Africa suggested that core funding would allow organizations to enhance their capacity and organizational structures to be able to apply for other grants in the future. Furthermore, core funding would allow local organizations to adapt more quickly to evolving conflict dynamics and mitigate the impact of crises that impede women's work to implement the WPS agenda.

Recommendations

Across all four contexts, the women identified some areas where the WPS agenda had been more effectively implemented. They pointed out, however, that **where progress was made, more often than not it was due to the tireless work of women peacebuilders and activists**. Certainly, women's movements and networks have played key roles in ensuring women's meaningful participation in peace processes in Colombia and Northern Ireland, and in the localization of the WPS agenda in Uganda. **Therefore, to accelerate the implementation of the WPS agenda and to achieve its ambitious goals, it is necessary to recognize and support the work of women peacebuilders at local, national, regional and international levels.**

In practical terms, it is possible to expedite

implementation by following these key recommendations:

1. **Adopt national and local laws, policies and strategies to translate global commitments into concrete actions.**

    a) **National and local governments** should institutionalize their commitments to the WPS agenda by developing, adopting and implementing gender equality policies and both National and Local Action Plans on WPS. These policies must be developed in an inclusive manner, with the meaningful participation of women from diverse backgrounds. It must be accompanied by clear objectives and monitoring frameworks, realistic budgets, and adequate dedicated funding. It is vital to clearly define the implementation roles of each ministry and individual government official in their terms of reference or role profiles.

    b) **The UN, Member States and other international development partners** should invest in the localization of the WPS agenda. Awareness of the WPS agenda can be nurtured through the translation of WPS resolutions, peace agreements and other relevant national laws, legal frameworks, processes and policies into local languages and by investing in accessible communication methods and outreach to local communities. Additionally, local laws, policies and plans need to be adopted to ensure effective implementation.

    c) **The UN, Member States and other international development partners** should support women's networks and coalitions with dedicated funding and technical assistance for improving coordination among civil society, establishing and strengthening women's networks and movements, and documentation and dissemination of the impacts of the work of local women peacebuilders.

    d) **International humanitarian and**

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[20] Agnieszka Fal-Dutra Santos (2019), "Building and Sustaining Peace from the Ground Up: A global study of civil society and local women's perception of sustaining peace," GNWP. Available at: https://gnwp.org/wp-content/uploads/GNWPReport_24october_4web-1.pdf.

development actors, including UN Resident Coordinators and their Thematic Advisers should more proactively engage women peacebuilders in their planning and conflict analysis, as well as in the planning an implementation of COVID-19 response and recovery. This will help ensure that humanitarian response is gender-sensitive and reflects local women's realities. Humanitarian and development actors should also work closely with UN Women Country Offices, Ministries of Gender and relevant government entities to support the advancement of the WPS agenda.

e) **The UN and Member States should continue to make use of the existing mechanisms**, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), to ensure accountability for the implementation of peace agreements and the WPS agenda.

2. **Ensure that women from different backgrounds participate in all tracks of peace processes and decision-making more broadly – from official peace negotiations, to constitution-making and decisions about economic recovery – by creating diverse, flexible and formalized participation channels.**

   a) **National and local authorities** ensure that at least half the members of COVID-19 response and recovery task forces are women, including young women, indigenous and ethnic minority women, and women with disabilities.

   b) **The UN** should intensify its efforts to include women in Track I peace negotiations, including by refusing to support processes that do not include women in negotiation teams, or include them solely as observers or advisors. **The Peacebuilding Commission** should use its strategic advisory position to strongly demand women's meaningful

participation, beyond observer or advisory roles, in all peace processes.

c) **The UN and Member States** should scale up training of local women leaders as mediators, and ensure their deployment post-training by creating national pools of women mediators to react to outbreaks of violence and by including women in local peace committees.

d) **The UN, Member States and other international development partners** should provide easily accessible funding for women peacebuilders and local women mediators to be able to travel and participate in national, regional and global level mediation, and to facilitate exchanges between local women mediators and negotiators in official peace processes and thereby strengthen the linkages between Track I, II and III peace processes.

e) **The UN, Member States and other international development partners** should increase the financial oversight of donor funding for the implementation of peace agreements, to ensure that it is used efficiently and that implementation of gender-sensitive provisions is prioritized.

3. **Increase investment in mechanisms to effectively protect women peacebuilders and human rights defenders from violence, and to address its impacts.**

   a) **The UN, Member States, and other international development partners** should guarantee that basic services to women, in particular survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, are available, and that these are not defunded in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. This should include access to safe spaces, shelters, trauma counselling as well as sexual and reproductive health services and trauma counselling. They should also ensure that these services are accessible to all women including those living with disabilities.

   b) **The UN, Member States, and other international development partners**

should encourage and support the establishment of rapid response funds for women activists, peacebuilders and human rights defenders who face threats and provide them with quickly accessible funding for relocation of themselves and their families and to access other forms of protection.

c) **The UN** should encourage and support the establishment of civil society-driven early warning and response mechanisms to address violence against women, especially women activists, peacebuilders and human rights defenders.

d) **The UN and other international actors operating in conflict-affected contexts** should put in place strict zero tolerance policies and budgeted action plans for addressing sexual exploitation, harassment and abuse and ensure that there are clear, accessible and safe reporting pathways, and that perpetrators are prosecuted and punished.

e) **The UN, Member States and other international development partners** should ensure a survivor-centred approach that supports women's access to justice and works with local women's organizations to make sure that cases of sexual and gender-based violence are recognized and prosecuted.

4. **To create an environment conducive to increasing the number and influence of women in uniforms, ensure that the culture within peacekeeping missions and security forces is based on respect for human rights, and an understanding of gendered power imbalances.**

a) **Member States** should review their security sector policies to ensure that they are gender-sensitive and adopt comprehensive policy frameworks on gender parity in the deployment of women in security sector and peacekeeping operations, including affirmative action measures to encourage and facilitate women's joining and promotion within

military and police.

b) **Member States and the UN** should invest in capacity-building as well as the establishment and enforcement of transparent accountability mechanisms with the participation of civil society to ensure respect for human rights, prevent the abuse of power by security forces, and create a more inclusive culture within the security sector.

c) **The UN** should continue to support the provision of pre-deployment gender-sensitivity trainings for peacekeepers at all levels, and make such training compulsory. This training should be expanded and conducted mid-deployment and post-deployment.

d) **The UN Security Council** should ensure that there is a full-time, dedicated gender adviser in every peacekeeping operation throughout the mission, not just on a rotational basis, and ensure that the adviser has the mandate and capacity to conduct community engagement.

5. **Ensure that women are meaningfully included in decision-making about economic recovery, and that economic recovery strategies are based on feminist principles and an appreciation of the burden of unpaid care work.**

a) **Member States** should ensure a minimum of 50 per cent women's representation in public financial institutions, and at all decision-making levels, as well as on task forces dedicated to COVID-19 economic recovery.

b) **Member States** should commit to a feminist economic recovery from COVID-19 – one that is designed with the meaningful participation of women and other marginalized groups, recognizes the value of unpaid work, and is based on an in-depth gender and conflict analysis.

c) **The UN and international development partners** should invest in better understanding and addressing the specific economic barriers faced by

different marginalized groups, including women refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons, indigenous women, women veterans, women with disabilities and LGBTQI persons.

d) **The UN and international development partners** should design interventions that intentionally address barriers to women's ownership and control over economic resources, including land.

6. Boost financing for peacebuilding led by women.

a) **The UN, Member States and international development partners** must ensure that funding for the implementation of the WPS agenda and peace agreements, including in particular their gender provisions, is not reduced in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

b) **The UN and international development partners** must ensure that their programmes, including those aimed at COVID-19 response and recovery, are aligned with grassroots needs and realities, and include women peacebuilders in priority-setting and programme design from the early stages – for example, by inviting them to donor conferences. **The Peacebuilding Commission** can play a supportive role, through its convening function, in bringing together key donors, international financial institutions, and women peacebuilders from global, regional, national and local levels.

c) **Member States** should ensure their National Actions Plans (NAPs) have budgets and pooled funds for their implementation. They need to mobilize national funds and attract donors to guarantee financing for full and effective implementation of WPS.

d) **The UN and international development partners** should increase the amount of core funding available and disbursed to grassroots women- and youth-led organizations – as well as regional, national and global women-led civil society

networks – to ensure that good practices at the local level influence higher-level policy-making and implementation.

e) **UN agencies** must reach and exceed the UN Secretary-General's target of allocating a minimum of 15 per cent of peacebuilding funding to gender-equality. Agencies should also accompany this target with specific indicators on the accessibility of the funding to peacebuilding organizations led by women and youth, and the extent to which women peacebuilders have been included in priority and programme design.

f) **The UN and international development partners** should simplify their requirements and application processes to make the funds more accessible to grassroots organizations. **The Peacebuilding Fund** should ensure that its Gender and Youth Peacebuilding Initiative (G/YPI) is disseminated widely and made more accessible to grassroots women.

g) **The UN, Member States, international development partners and civil society** should explore and strengthen partnerships with non-traditional donors, including the private sector. The Peacebuilding Commission should use its convening role to support exchanges and partnerships between the private sector, the UN, and local women- and youth-led organizations.

Conclusion

The 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 is a key moment to galvanize action on WPS implementation. As Tintswalo Makhubele, a South African peace activist, noted in her briefing to the Peacebuilding Commission in April 2020, "The year 2020 is an opportunity to reflect on what works and what does not work in peacebuilding, and how local women and their perspectives can be better included."[21]

[21] United Nations Peacebuilding Commission, "2020 Review: PBC Consultation on Women, Peace and Security. Available at https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/pbc-meetings-2020-review-0/wps-consultation.

"The year 2020 is an opportunity to reflect on what works and what does not work in peacebuilding, and how local women and their perspectives can be better included." - Tintswalo Makhubele, South African Congress of Non-Profit Organizations

Significantly, the resolution's anniversary coincides with the 2020 Peacebuilding Architecture Review, the five-year review of Agenda 2030, and the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. Now is the time, therefore, to address persistent implementation gaps and develop concrete strategies for more integrative, inclusive, and cross-sectoral implementation of WPS resolutions.

The four contexts examined through the series of consultations and follow-up research represent disparate histories, stages of conflict, and geographical regions. The women interviewed came from diverse backgrounds and had varied experiences. Yet, many of the report's key findings and recommendations resonated across all consultations.

All of the women with whom we spoke agreed that, to ensure full and effective implementation of the WPS resolutions, **there is a need for deep, structural changes to create a culture more conducive to women's meaningful participation and, ultimately, peace.**

Interviewees agreed that the **work done by women peacebuilders – both at home, as primary caregivers, and in their communities, as advocates for inclusive peace – is undervalued and under-resourced.** They argued for seizing the opportunity created by COVID-19 to create more equal, feminist economies that value the unpaid care work of women and called for concrete measures to address pre-existing inequalities.

Research participants agreed that **institutionalizing global commitments by translating them into national laws is a critical step towards gender equality.** Women also emphasized that translating global laws and norms into national laws and policies is not enough. Indeed, national laws need to be further

translated – into local languages, and into local plans, policies and strategies.

Interviewees further agreed that both **systemic and cultural changes will not be possible without the meaningful inclusion of women from all walks of life.** This requires addressing the persistent barriers to participation, including violence and the threat of violence, lack of financial independence, and restrictive societal norms.

The work done by women – at home, as primary caregivers, and in their communities, as peacebuilders – is undervalued and under-resourced

Finally, the women peacebuilders with whom we met agreed that, **twenty years after the adoption of UNSCR 1325, we still have far to go towards full implementation.** They observed that some of the challenges – such as the current scale of political violence against women peacebuilders and human rights defenders – are more severe today than two decades ago.

Looking ahead, the international community—Member States, regional and international organizations, the UN, the private sector and civil society—have much to do to ensure better implementation of the commitments they have made to the WPS agenda over the last 20 years. The COVID-19 pandemic has made it abundantly clear how precarious and easily reversible the gains of the previous decades are, and just how much is at stake if we fail to achieve the aspirations of gender equality and sustainable peace. At the same time, the pandemic has also brought to light the resilience and resourcefulness of women peacebuilders, including those who participated in the consultations in Colombia, Northern Ireland, South Africa and Uganda. As we move beyond the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325, the international community must listen to them, meaningfully include them in decision-making, and follow their lead to achieve peaceful and resilient societies.