



Civil Society Recommendations for the Women, Peace and Security Focal Points Network

In August 2020, the Women, Peace and Security Network-Canada (WPSN-C) hosted consultations to develop recommendations for the WPS Focal Points Network to accelerate implementation of the global WPS agenda. Held in Arabic, French, Spanish and English, the consultations brought together 50 feminist voices from around the world.

This document provides an initial summary for feedback from consultation participants and others. A full report will be available at the end of September.

1. BRING THE WPS AGENDA INTO COVID-19 RESPONSE: The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new challenges to the WPS agenda. COVID-19 is prompting us to think what the WPS agenda means in different contexts, including challenging our definitions of security. Recommendations include:

- *Challenge a militarized response to COVID-19.* The pandemic has prompted a debate on what makes us ‘secure.’ Investments in tanks and fighter jets has not stopped the spread of the pandemic. Now is the time for important discussions on the disproportionate state investments in the military versus health care and social programmes.
- *Strengthen gender analysis of COVID-19 responses.* It is particularly important that this analysis be intersectional, recognizing the full diversities of the lives of women, girls and non-binary people. For civil society organizations, our advocacy should include attention to this diversity and we should push to ensure that it is part of COVID-19 recovery plans. One of the key issues highlighted by feminist activists is the importance of the ‘care economy.’ Care responsibilities – in the home, in the healthcare sector, and elsewhere – should be recognized and supported in COVID-19 responses.
- *Increase protection and support for Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD) and for LGBTIQ+ rights defenders.* Many governments have used the pandemic to crackdown on rights and civil society organizations. In this context, support for WHRD and other human rights defenders is critical.
- *Ensure the meaningful participation of diverse women in COVID-19 response planning.* ‘Participation’ is one of the four pillars of the WPS Agenda and it is crucial here. Diverse voices should be part of the COVID-19 response, from the local to the global.
- *Address the growing incidents of gender-based violence.* ‘Protection’ is a long-standing pillar of the WPS agenda. With the pandemic it is important that gender-based violence – in all its dimensions (from domestic violence, to conflict related sexual violence and more) be addressed along multiple lines. This includes services for victims/survivors, improved access to justice, addressing the ongoing challenge of impunity, and taking action to stop cyber violence.

“We face a triple pandemic: COVID-19, exclusion and violence against women.”

2. ENSURE THAT WPS WORK CONTINUES EVEN DURING THE PANDEMIC: It is vital that WPS and COVID-19 not be seen as competing priorities for resources, political attention and global efforts. Many of the women’s organizations dedicated to building peace are now also focusing on COVID-19 response, yet at the same time they are striving to continue to advance their previous agendas.

- *Support peace processes and the implementation of peace agreements even during the pandemic.* Efforts are still needed to ensure the participation of women (especially diverse women) and to include and address gender provisions in agreements.
- *Support dialogue, analysis and research on the importance of bringing both WPS issues and pandemic responses together.*
- *Recommit to new action and investment in the WPS agenda globally, nationally and locally.* The momentum of the twentieth anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 this October should not be lost.
- *Ensure that COVID-19 responses incorporate the lessons of the WPS agenda and bring women’s perspectives clearly into the planning and implementation.*
- *Bring WPS issues into other global discussions.* WPS advocates and lessons have much to contribute to global dialogues including ‘the grand bargain,’ building back better, disaster risk reduction.
- *Increase diverse women’s participation in virtual discussions.* The pandemic has forced many meetings into virtual spaces. This is an opportunity to increase the quantity and diversity of women’s voices in these discussions. However, in order to take advantage of this opportunity, there must be increased attention to the global digital gender divide.
- *Take action to protect political prisoners, with a focus on detained women.* In many countries, political prisoners face increasing danger with the pandemic and international access is often restricted.

“Peace cannot be a casualty of COVID, the work of women’s rights defenders is so important it cannot be stopped, even during the pandemic.”

3. BUILD/CREATE/WORK TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE WPS AGENDA: COVID-19 and powerful anti-racist movements have reinforced the importance of a truly intersectional approach to WPS issues and actions. The pandemic has hit groups on the margins particularly hard.

Recommendations include:

- *Go beyond rhetoric to ensure that diverse women, girls, non-binary people are truly included and listened to when crafting policies and building programmes and initiatives.* This is also a recommendation for civil society movements. Listening is an important first step. Then specific actions are needed to ensure that indigenous women, women with disabilities, and young women are part of the process.
- *Examine the language we use.* We keep using patriarchal and racist language. We need to work towards changing the language as the power is in naming. If we keep insisting on fitting to patriarchal language we are always going to struggle to keep up.

- *Address both conscious and unconscious bias.* When it comes to security there is unconscious bias that men should speak. Women should be taken seriously, but there is no time and space for inclusion. Women aren't seen as experts when it comes to security.
- *Work to bring the Youth, Peace and Security agenda together with the WPS agenda.* Do not set these up as competing agendas. There is a great need and importance to include young women in WPS discussions, they may not get the same level of support as other women peacebuilders, yet they are also doing important good work.
- *Explore when and how WPS issues are relevant.* It is important to reframe what is defined as a conflict and where the WPS agenda applies. Start putting "non-traditional conflict" themes in the agenda. As long as the agenda does not recognize undeclared armed conflicts and their impacts on women (as well as their agency) it will remain as an "external" agenda for many countries. It is time to address 'peace' and 'security' issues from women's perspectives even in countries that are not officially engaged in armed conflict.
- *WPS Focal Points could facilitate the formation of focal points networks in specific countries.* National level focal points networks could ensure more diverse participation in WPS discussions and help to move these dialogues out of national capitals.

In Lebanon and Syria women who are physically disabled are particularly vulnerable. Women and transgender women may be attacked severely. LBGTQ rights should be protected.

4. IMPROVE DATA AND INFORMATION ON WPS ISSUES: Despite decades of work on WPS issues, good data often remains an issue.

- Support the tracking of more and better data on how armed conflict affects diverse populations differently and what types of initiatives and programs actually advance the WPS agenda.
- *Support research on how women are impacted by COVID-19 and include this information in national WPS updates and reports.*
- *Support participatory evaluations of humanitarian initiatives* that include the voices and perspectives of diverse women and girls and incorporate the lessons and findings into the design of new initiatives.
- *Review the indicators in WPS national action plans* with the goal of assessing which ones are actually useful and work to advance the implementation of key WPS goals.
- *Support networking among organizations working on WPS issues* so they can share experiences and learn from each other.

"We need to have more of an awareness of how we're collecting data. Is it a colonized or decolonized approach? We need to collect the information that is actually important. We need to listen to grassroots community members to better understand what kind of data/information we need to collect to get to the root of the problem."

5. ADDRESS THE ONGOING RESOURCING DEFICIT FOR WPS WORK: It is painfully clear that global resources invested in WPS have not kept pace with global rhetoric. It is now time to right this imbalance at multiple levels. The COVID-19 crisis has heightened concerns as there are many examples of WPS funding being rerouted to pandemic response. Participants reported being told by funders that they would have to pivot to COVID-19 response work in order to secure funding.

- *Invest more funding in women-led, peacebuilding CSOs.* Ensure that this is core funding with built in flexibility. These organizations continue to be dramatically underfunded. These organizations are working to be more resilient and effective, yet face severe resource shortages.
- *Launch national discussions on shifting state resources from militarized solutions to investments in human security.*
- *Ensure that the upcoming Generation Equality process and the Compact on WPS and Humanitarian Action is well funded,* including ensuring meaningful participation by diverse women, girls and non-binary people.
- *Include investments in technology as part of WPS funding.* The pandemic has highlighted the importance of digital connections. Financial support should include access to networks and hardware (as well as digital security) and efforts to narrow the global digital divide along gender lines.

Support women's peacebuilding organizations. They are the first to issue a call for ceasefire, and they are now responding to COVID-19. These women are risking their lives and need to be supported.

6. CONTEXT IS ALWAYS IMPORTANT: Policies and actions should always be based on analysis and knowledge of local contexts. Although there were many common themes throughout the consultations, it was clear that general recommendations must be adapted to local situations.

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