

Revisualizing the Global Policy Pyramid

The Potential Impact of Transnational Coalitions and Partnerships on Women, Peace and Human Security

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Key Note Speech

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Good Morning. Before I begin, I would first like to say what an honor it is to be among you here today. I would like to thank the organizers of this important conference, the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, UNDP Pacific Sub-Regional Centre and FemLink Pacific, with particular thanks and mention to Sharon Rolls for her leadership both regionally and internationally for the promotion of women, peace and human security.

I would like to start today by emphasizing that the relationship between women, peace and human security is not an automatic equation. It is not enough to assume that peace or human security is women-friendly, or that it will necessarily guarantee the rights of women.

Often, a return to peace and re-establishment of security may only amount to a return to the status quo where women are systematically excluded from structures of power, or where abuses of women's rights, particularly gender-based violence, remain inextricably woven into the fabric of everyday life.

The reality for many women, both in the Pacific Island Region and around the world, is that they are largely excluded from the very structures that make the decisions to sustain peace or to engage in conflict. The consequences of women's exclusion and marginalization pose a significant threat to sustainable human security.

These consequences are far reaching and manifest into core security risks such as the absence of legal and human rights, lack of protection against gender-based violence and access to justice, health, education, as well as exclusion from participation in economic and political life, credit, land and natural resources.

Just as important as the equal inclusion of women's needs and priorities is the effective implementation of gender policy and analysis. Genuine gender policy and analysis takes not only women into consideration, but critically examines the different roles, needs and priorities of both men and women, girls and boys, and in this context attempts to identify policies and practices that enhance equality and just outcomes for all actors in society.

A comprehensive gender approach, therefore, takes into consideration important dynamics such as ethnicity, class and culture and recognizes that it is not enough to merely fill quotas, but to engage women from a range of backgrounds who also champion principles of human rights, peace and democracy.

Yet, despite increased understanding of what it takes to build sustainable peace and development, governments and the international community have not been very successful. This is perhaps most

evident in the fact that roughly half of all countries that emerge from conflict lapse back into violence or instability within five years.

While the reasons that a peace fails to be sustained are always complex, weaknesses in international and regional responses are clearly a contributing problem.

The idea I would like to propose for consideration at this conference is that civil society organizations, in partnership with governments and international actors can play a significant role in strengthening international and regional response and prevention at national, regional and global levels by analyzing existing gender dynamics within specific contexts and contributing to mechanisms and institutions for building change.

To do this, a shift in thinking about how global, regional and national policies can be constructed and implemented needs to occur.

TRANSNATIONAL COALITIONS & WOMEN, PEACE AND HUMAN SECURITY

Often, global policy is visualized as a pyramid - with international policy being made at the very top that will, in theory, eventually “trickle down” to the base of the pyramid: the base of the pyramid being visualized as the regional, national and local.

A critical shift, however, is vitally needed in thinking about this structure - as truly effective global policy can only be made by reversing the understanding of how this pyramid might operate most effectively. While it is true that global policy has, and can have, significant impact regionally, nationally and locally, the origins of this policy must be directly informed, envisioned, imagined, generated and structured by its base.

Effective national and global policies – the kinds of policies which can create sustainable peace, security are ones which have been developed and structured around specific recommendations and proposals locally of what is actually needed to achieve these goals.

The base’s challenge lies in how to effectively coordinate and consolidate input and how to communicate and follow up on that input to national and international structures and to policy makers in a way in which it is actually taken on board and implemented.

This brings us to the creation and critical importance of transnational civil society alliances – particularly transnational alliances working toward gender equality and human security.

Quietly and not so quietly there is a global movement growing: a movement of local, regional and international coalitions which have identified gender and security as a key component in establishing, maintaining and monitoring human security and its threats. These transnational alliances, in the form of coalitions, have slowly taken shape and grown over recent years.

Their naissance due, in part, to the impact of globalization, which has made communication between and across geographical, geo-political and multi-lingual divides possible in ways in which they have never been before – whether it be through the Internet, mobile phone technology, radio, the relative accessibility of international air travel, rapid production and access to printed material and the growth of and support for local and international non-governmental organizations.

Now, for instance, a civil society coalition working at United Nations Headquarters in New York such as the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security can, in real time, be in communication with

local activists almost anywhere in the world and can be called on by local activists to initiate immediate action or to communicate early warnings to relevant UN and government actors at UN Headquarters. This communication can also be channelled to wider networks and mediums.

The idea and establishment of transnational alliances is nothing new in our brave, new world of globalization, given its advantages and challenges.

Nation States and their governments have accurately identified the strategic importance of forming coalition structures in order to meet demands and challenges of an increasingly interconnected world. The basic idea being that often the sum of the whole is stronger than its parts. Nations States and their governments have, for instance, formed alliances such as the United Nations, the European Union, the Africa Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Pacific Island Forum.

A pivotal moment in time is now upon us where the conditions are ripe for the same kind of local and transnational alliances to take shape among civil society. These coalitions and alliances can be a major force in making a significant and positive impact on global, regional and national policy – particularly on human security.

Transnational civil society alliances can and must become global actors on the same scale as the alliances of Nation States.

Transnational civil society coalitions and alliances have the potential of creating a paradigm in the way we think about the global policy pyramid and the ways in which that pyramid operates. Not surprisingly, it is women and women's organizations across the world that have taken a lead in establishing local, regional and international civil society alliances – particularly in the area of peace and security.

In the realm of what is imagined, in our global collective consciousness, as the territory of men in suits and cigars, human security has been taken up by women around the globe as a key, overarching priority and one in which their participation and input has been historically and systematically left out.

Any holistic approach to human security that attempts to maintain peace and prevent conflict must include the participation of women – women who champion human rights, democracy and peace - and a comprehensive mainstreaming of gender perspectives within the context of broader peacebuilding and development priority areas.

So....So what??

So, what is the significance of transnational coalitions to gender and human security? What have they done? What can they do? What are their relationships to each other? How can they affect the global policy pyramid? Can they really be actors on the same scale as the alliances of nation states?

Today there exists a handful of national and regional coalitions operating within the transnational context such as the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (NGOWG) based in New York at United Nations Headquarters, Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) in the United Kingdom, Dushirehamwe a network of women's organizations in Burundi, and WIPNET a network of women's organizations West Africa.

The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security operates transnationally using its strategic position across the street from United Nations Headquarters in New York. The NGO Working Group monitors the work of the Security Council, the United Nations and its Member States. The NGOWG acts as eyes, ears and connectors at UNHQ. Through its contact and work with UN desk officers and Member

States, the coalition aims to impact global policy being made at the top of the pyramid in regard to women, peace and security.

The coalition does this through its strategic positioning as connectors at the international level. The NGOWG aims to bridge what is, often, a large gulf that divides a lot of work being done, on the one hand, by United Nations officials and its Member States at headquarters and a lot of work being done, on the other, at the national and local levels by non-governmental actors.

Quite often, there is little or no communication between the two.

The absence of communication needed to bridge the divide has less to do with good will on the side of one or both, as it does with the logistics and coordination of communication. In other words, the mechanisms which would facilitate the flow of information and recommendations are virtually absent and sometimes beyond the capacity of either. In many instances, the United Nations and Member States are open and seek input from the local and national civil society, but are often lacking the means and capacity to conduct efficient outreach.

A great deal of work is being done at the local and national levels which the UN and its Member States would greatly benefit from in the form of recommendations, suggested directives, personnel, and more. However, these voices remain on the either side of the gulf, without the necessary channels to communicate in order to build better global policy.

When such communication has existed there has been some measure of success in bridging the divide and making an impact. I will give a recent example of partnership between the NGO Working Group in New York and Dushirehamwe a network of women's organizations in Burundi with the support of a few key member states at UNHQ.

Following the NGOWG's report on SCR 1325 and the Peacebuilding Commission, the coalition has kept abreast of the development and implementation of the Peacebuilding Commission and national governments' activities in the two countries which are currently on the Commission's agenda: Burundi and Sierra Leone.

As national strategies began to take shape, along with allocation strategies for millions and millions of dollars from the Peacebuilding Commission Fund, it became apparent that women in Burundi were being almost entirely left behind in regard to the Commission's work.

So, at this point the NGOWG tapped into the potential of these transnational coalitions. From UN Headquarters the NGOWG invited a representative from Dushirehamwe, in Burundi to come to New York for advocacy in relation to the Peacebuilding Commission during the 51st Session on the Commission on the Status of Women this past March.

And, following the advocacy week the NGOWG sent a letter to the Ambassador of the Permanent Mission of Norway to the United Nations who chairs the PBC country-specific committee on Burundi who was leading the April 2007 Peacebuilding Commission Mission to Burundi.

In the letter, the NGOWG commended Norway's continued leadership on women, peace and security issues and urged the Norwegian government to use its position as chair of the country-specific committee on Burundi to ensure that gender issues and women's participation are fully addressed by the PBC. As up until that point, regrettably, women's representatives in Burundi had been categorically left out of the consultative and informative processes occurring at the national level in relation to the Commission's work.

By comparison, in Sierra Leone, the PBC National Steering Committee, for instance, comprised both male and female governmental and non-governmental actors, all of whom are participating members not just observers. However, in Burundi, at that point the current composition of the PBC National Steering Committee was comprised entirely of men, and included just one representative from civil society, who had only observer status.

The NGOWG, in advance of the April 2007 Mission to Burundi, urged that, without the immediate inclusion of women's representatives and gender expertise in the work of the PBC in Burundi, the Commission, in their coordinating role, risked overlooking the need for gender perspectives to be incorporated into national level activities and programmes in the effort to build a truly effective, integrated peacebuilding strategy.

The NGOWG pointed out that women's achievements in peace consolidation and the extensive existing mechanisms established by women's organisations at the community level in Burundi are key structures through which to advance peacebuilding.

At the roundtable panel organized by the NGOWG during the CSW Ms. Ndcayisaba made a point to note that in Burundi, *"The Commission and the government have, already in place, an effective, established base to start from. It is, therefore, imperative that women be involved in the process of reflection, planning and execution of the work of the Commission in Burundi –and should be viewed and integrated as central stakeholders, not just as beneficiaries. "*

The NGOWG then included a list of recommended leading women peacebuilders with strong networks throughout the country that we encouraged the Mission to meet with during their time in Burundi. Making the case that these representatives could provide first-hand, field level expertise and recommendations that we believed would greatly benefit the Commission and help to advance its work.

The transnational partnership that included Dushirehamwe's advocacy work in New York and in Burundi and the follow-up strategy by the NGO Working Group resulted in the following impact. I would like to read an excerpt from a letter to the NGO Working Group from Dushirehamwe:

"Dushirehamwe and other women organisations are happy to share with you the impact of the advocacy program on the PBC held last march in NY. We are grateful to the initiatives taken to push the integration of Burundian women in the PBC and for the follow-up you will be doing day to day within Missions at UN in NY.

Your message addressed to the chairperson for the PBC in Burundi has brought Burundian actors and BINUB (United Nations Integrated Mission in Burundi) to react and to act. UNIFEM Bujumbura has been invited by BINUB to organise a meeting with women organisations listed in your message (5) in order to choose one association which will be representing women in the pilot committee at national level. Dushirehamwe has been chosen by CAFOB, Women Association for peace and Women centre for peace (3/4).

Now, the fact is that DUSHIREHAMWE is an observer member of the committee in addition to two representatives of the civil society organisations. "

This international partnership between national and transnational coalitions with the critical help of Member States is just one example of the possibilities this kind of alliance can achieve.

In our global world, we are all inter-connected, and in order to achieve impacts like this, there is a critical need for networks of transnational civil society alliances working on gender and human security that function and communicate nationally, regionally and globally.

The NGO Working Group's work at UN Headquarters is quite literally impossible without these partnerships. Conversely, the NGO Working Group's work would be significantly strengthened by the presence and partnership of more national and regional civil society coalitions.

Civil society demands a lot from government, intergovernmental organizations and the United Nations and we should consider our selves as key catalysts in implementation of our recommendations and demands. But, in order to do so we need to work together.

At this point, I would like to share a quote with you from Sharon Rolls that appears in the NGO Working's 5 Years On Report called "Making Peace Work for Women".. Speaking about the empowerment and importance of local women and their input to peace and security, she says

"Local women's knowledge and their strategies are just as important as someone who wears a tailored suit and speaks the language of the policy makers."

As collective entities, representing a range of locally led national and regional interests and priorities, national and regional coalitions working toward gender justice, peace and human security can work transnationally to strengthen weaknesses in current human security framework.

Governments and the United Nations cannot go it alone.

Transnational alliances in the form of regional and national civil society coalitions promoting women, peace and security can work with states and government actors to improve human security.

Engendering the Pacific Human Security Framework

Building on existing work and commitments, a regional coalition of women and gender experts promoting crisis prevention, human security, and peacebuilding should be established in order to strengthen Pacific regional and national human security frameworks, and to ensure effective partnerships between governments, CROP agencies, civil society organisations and development actors.

The coalition could comprise regional non-governmental organizations, such as femLINKPACIFIC and others. The establishment and funding of such a regional coalition would play an important role in partnering with others efforts in mainstreaming gender and in identifying, analysing and responding to threats to human security in the Pacific.

A Pacific Regional Committee on Women, Peace and Security, promoting crisis prevention, human security, and peacebuilding, could provide critical ongoing support the development and strengthening of a Pacific regional responsive human security framework, by continuing to advance implementation of the agreed recommendations of the Regional Workshop on Gender, Conflict, Peace and Security. And in so doing could also partner with other such coalitions around the world/

The potential for these kinds of alliances are vast, and as some of Femlink Pacific materials say “My life, my issues, my peace – from my community to the world. And so I leave it here for now, and I thank you and look forward to joining you the next few days.

ⁱ The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security is a coalition of 12 organizations, based at United Nations Headquarters in New York, working on issues relating to women, peace and security and the full and effective implementation of SCR 1325.