



Women and Young People in Peace Processes: **Synergies and Cross-learning**

September 2019



Workshop Report

UN Women's Regional Office for the Arab States, in collaboration with UN Women Country Offices in Iraq, Libya, and Yemen, organized a two-day meeting *Women and Young People in Peace Processes: Synergies and Cross-learning*, funded by the Government of Germany. The meeting was held in Beirut, Lebanon and sought to provide a space for an inter-generational dialogue between women and young people from countries affected by conflict in the MENA region, to exchange strategies that have been utilized to mitigate conflict, to broker dialogue and influence track 1 peace processes in the region. Through this exchange and dialogue the meeting sought to identify opportunities for strategic alliances, and to define common demands. With the Youth, Peace and Security agenda building on the two decades of experiences from the Women, Peace and Security agenda, the meeting brought together experienced women's peace leaders and youth activists from Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen.

Strategies to Influence Peace: Examples and Lessons Learned



“Peace is neither a stop, nor lack of war; peace is an ongoing process. We need to know how we can transform our work to empower us for sustainable peace,” said a Syrian participant. Photo credit: UN Women

Direct Representation and Quotas

During different country sessions, women and youth activists shared successful examples in influencing national level peace processes, in particular in Yemen and Libya.

Case Study: The Yemeni Women Experience in the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) (2013-2014).

Participants outlined the process of lobbying for a 30% quota for women’s participation in the Yemeni National Dialogue Conference. Women’s groups and activists came together around this demand for a minimum of 30% in the NDC process, which was accepted by the UN who was supporting the NDC. When political groups in Yemen sent participation lists to the UN that excluded women from the

drafting committee, the UN Envoy would call for the enforcement of the quota system. It was even suggested that any party that did not abide by the quota could be excluded from the process. This led to over 30% women in the NDC, who once in the process demonstrated leadership skills, technical expertise and effective negotiation skills. Women’s engagement in the NDC resulted in the inclusion of two of the women’s gendered demands into the draft NDC document: i) a legal minimum age for marriage (18 years old), and ii) a quota of 30% women in politics. However, women were forced to accept certain articles in the constitution that are based on Shar’ia law in order for the 30% quota article to pass.

The key elements that contributed to the success of this experience was a) **access to the NDC and meaningful participation in adequate numbers (though the quota).**

Case Study: The Libyan Women Experience during the 2014 Negotiations for the Political Agreement

“We all suffer from the iceberg dilemma; we can only deal with the one part we can see,” said a Libyan participant. Women expressed that they feel as though they are not heard in Libya’s political process, and even when they are able to reach decision-making positions, they are in grave danger. During the first half of 2015, the United Nations facilitated a series of negotiations seeking to bring together the rival governments of Libya and warring militias tearing Libya apart. Only two women were part of this political dialogue, out of a total of 20 members of the negotiations. Despite this low number of women participants in the official process, women continued to be present backstage in an effort to advocate and convey simple messages between the constituencies: “Libyan women want stability,” or “The children of Libya are starving.” Ultimately, women were able to succeed in having some of their demands reflected in articles of the peace deal, such as the establishment of a national council for women. Following the signature of the Libyan Political Agreement in 2015, a Political Dialogue was formed to ensure the implementation of the agreement, which included two women. The key element to success was identified as ***finding parallel spaces for advocacy, even where the formal process stalls.***

Community Level Action

Working on the definitions of peacebuilding, diversity, and citizenship, civil society activists have been rebuilding and redefining spaces for discussions in conflict-affected countries in the region. Participants also reflected on the need to engage at the local level and on the important impact of work at the community level: “Since 2012, local level initiatives are what allowed Syrians to still have hope”, said a Syrian participant.

Case Study: Power of Mothers’ Movement in Tajoura

The trade of weapons and the spread of extremist ideas were prevalent in Tajoura, Libya. A group of Libyan women worked together to run advocacy campaigns to raise awareness amongst youth and mothers on the issue of having weapons in households and the dangers of joining extremist groups. The sensitization also targeted militias, and young militia leaders, who were encouraged to work with the women to campaign for peace. With CEDAW as a basis, the group also called for more freedom for women. There were some successes in this: the group told stories of young people turning their back on militias, and militia leaders joining specific campaigns around community security and services.

Case Study: Yemeni Women’s work at Petrol Stations

During the siege of Sana’a, Yemen, resources were scarce, and women were unable to access petrol stations and fuel, which was desperately needed to enable them to support their families. Women met with the defacto authorities and asked for safe access to petrol stations and proposed dedicated petrol stations for women – which was agreed. Women started volunteering to work at petrol stations and facilitated women and families within their communities to access fuel. Everyday responses as well as finding creative solutions is critical in times of conflict.

Case Study: Letters Writing in Syria

The importance of having a collective strategic perspective and providing a space where people of different origins and meet and exchange points of view was emphasised. For example, clubs were created for children at war-stricken areas in Syria, such as Aleppo, to write letters to each other, which ultimately helped the parents connect with individuals in other parts of the country: ***“We (civil society) need to be more than just observers – we need to be actors”.***



"This meeting has taught me a lot through the questions it raised in my head." Photo credit: UN Women

Advisory Boards and Alliances

The importance of network-building and in forming alliances to work at both the community and policy level was underlined. Examples from Syria and Yemen were shared to illustrate how women and youth can come together to strengthen their influence in peace and political processes.

Case study: the Women Advisory Board (WAB), Syria

The WAB was established by the UN Office of the Special Envoy for Syria with support from UN Women, as a board to advisor the Special Envoy. It was created not to replace direct representation in the talks, but to complement direct representation with an additional advisory and engagement mechanism.

In order to include women's rights in the political process, WAB members have presented recommendations based on the thematic issued under discussion in the political process, and have lobbied for women's direct representation in the political process. They have also sought to link community level peacebuilding work in Syria and in neighbouring countries to the political process. Member of the WAB sit on the Syria Constitutional Committee (CC), established in October 2019

and the CC has close to 30% women represented amongst its 150 members.

Participants elaborated on the role and important of international lobbying from women's rights allies in supporting the work of women peacebuilders, and to secure spaces for women's engagement in political dialogues. They also stressed the importance of international organizations putting pressure on conflict parties to ensure more diverse and inclusive representation.

Case study: Tawafuq in Yemen

Participants highlighted the importance of expanding networks to include women of diverse backgrounds who are actors and leaders in their own communities, in order to have a stronger influence in peace processes. At the request of Yemeni women's rights actors, UN Women in Yemen worked with the UN Office of the Special Envoy for Yemen to support the creation of the Yemeni Women Pact for Peace and Security, 'Tawafuq'. The network become an advisor body to the Special Envoy and a space for debate and dialogue amongst Yemeni women's rights and peace actors. The network was worked on the margins of track 1 negotiations and formed coalitions to advocate for sustainable peace, refugee rights, and ending the practice of children associated with armed groups.

Summary of recommendations from the Case Studies and Discussions

DIRECT REPRESENTATION AND QUOTA

- When setting quotas, aim high to ultimately get the desired percentage
- Need for women to prepare ahead, to be ready for the negotiations when they happen and push to be on the table (Not waiting to be invited);
- Identifying and mapping the risks before taking action (strategic scenario planning and mapping of influence)
- Partner with male champions and connect with men on women's participation in peace processes and its benefits;
- the importance of building local solidarity networks and lobbying the international community for women's inclusion;
- Not losing connection with the local community after being granted access to the table - and ensuring to feed back what is happening at the political level; and,
- Using national frameworks that protect women's rights when negotiating for gender-responsive recommendations

COMMUNITY LEVEL ACTION

- In situations of stalled or blocked peace processes, actions can still be undertaken at the grassroots level and on different tracks.
- Importance of mothers' movements that can be seen as more neutral;
- Realizing that small actions can go a long way.
- Mastering the use of countercampaigns i.e. countering an extremist campaign with a more positive narrative;
- Conducting opportunity mapping exercises; and,
- Carefully choosing terminology to ensure that the message is properly conveyed (Gender sensitive language can change mentalities);

NETWORKS AND ALLIANCES

- Building formal or informal networks;
- Learning from and sharing lessons with other countries;
- Build inclusive networks with women and youth from different regions and parts of the society; and,
- Collaboration between women and youth for both agendas to be included in peace agreements and negotiations;



Conclusion and Recommendations



Photo credit: UN Women

The meeting, *Women and Young People in Peace Processes: Synergies and Cross-learning* provided a unique space for women and young people to discuss and debate strategies to influence peace processes. It served as a platform in which participants could share the lessons learned of previous peace-building initiatives in their home-countries and reflect on their own experiences. As a way forward, the participants have agreed on the below action steps and recommendations to be taken into consideration:

- Creating a Whatsapp group and use other social media to share ideas and experiences beyond the meeting and having allies in other countries;
- Continuing cross country and intergenerational exchanges, and increasing the number of countries engaged;
- Exploring opportunities to deepen the role of international organisations in maximizing the voice of CSOs in Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen;
- Highlighting the need for a greater focus on protection and personal safety issues when undertaking conflict mitigation and peacebuilding work.