

 **WOMEN DELIVER**



 **WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR
PEACE & FREEDOM**



Increasing synergies to deliver the SDGs for women and girls in conflict and fragile settings

Side Event – 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly

Wednesday, 25 September 2019, 5:00pm-6.30pm

The United Kingdom's Mission to the United Nations

One Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza, New York, NY 10017

Event background

On Wednesday 25th September at 5pm, an event was held in the margins of the 2019 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Summit with over 55 people to discuss actions that could increase synergies to really deliver the SDGs for women and girls in fragile and conflict settings.

The event was co-hosted by the United Kingdom's Mission to the United Nations, with opening remarks given by Joanna Roper CMG, the UK's Special Envoy for Gender Equality. The discussion was facilitated by Brita Fernandez Schmidt, Senior Vice President for Europe and External Affairs for Women for Women International.

Speakers included Marcy Hersh, Senior Manager for Humanitarian Advocacy for Women Deliver; Aisha Dennis, Program Director for Women Now for Development; Abigail Ruane, Women, Peace and Security Programme Director for the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF); and Nicole Behnam, Senior Director for Violence Prevention & Response for the International Rescue Committee.

Key recommendations for action

- **Include stronger gender analysis across all policy and practice:**
 - o Member states should first and foremost be applying a gender, peace, and environment impact assessment of everything they do, and then taking action for people and planet. Governments and the international community should undertake participatory, intersectional gender-conflict analysis systematically across all policy and practice. This includes taking action to address 'spill-over effects' by taking holistic and coordinated actions both within and across borders, for example by avoiding actions that can undermine gender equality and peace.
 - o Other tools include: preventing arms transfers that risk violence against women in line with the Arms Trade Treaty, refraining from militarizing development aid, reporting on military versus social spending in line with Beijing and Agenda 21, and accelerating action on disarmament.
- **Commit to focusing on implementation:**
 - o Governments have already made numerous commitments to deliver for women and girls in conflict and crisis. The focus should now be on accelerating implementation of existing WPS and women's human rights commitments as part of action on the SDGs especially SDG5 on gender equality and SDG16 on peace. For example, at the July High Level Political Forum ECOSOC segment, Canada, Finland,

and Spain all affirmed commitments to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda under the discussion on SDG16.

- Other approaches include: accelerating action on UNSCR 1325 NAPs as part of commitments on SDG 5 and 16, institutionalising leadership for gender equality and peace, preventing austerity, strengthening social protection, and championing country specific Women, Peace and Security such as around women's participation in peace processes from Afghanistan to Korea.

- **Improve coordination efforts:**

- Governments should strengthen coordination mechanisms that link up sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, humanitarian response and peace and security. For example, countries such as Germany, Sweden, Netherlands and South Korea have high level coordination bodies that oversee planning and implementation of the SDGs.
- Other tools include: including WPS, SDG and humanitarian focal points in any relevant coordination mechanisms, cross linking NAPs on 1325, small arms, humanitarian action and SDGs, strengthening gender and peace budgeting, and using post-conflict reconstruction to redress inequalities and promote social protections.
- Specifically, the 'Friends of SDG16+' and 'Friends of 1325' could work together more closely on synergies between WPS and the SDGs, with a first step being holding a meeting in the next year to reflect on progress and actions to increase coherence across the two agendas.

- **Increase funding for women led organisations:**

- Civil society organisations, particularly women's rights organisations who specialise in services for women, are best placed to meet the needs of women and girls affected by conflict and crisis. Donors should commit to prioritise funding for women's rights organisations which includes flexible, accessible, long-term funding to improve the sustainability of these organisations and allow them to implement their self-defined priorities, rather than what fits in with the set funding framework.

- **Facilitate women's meaningful participation:**

- Women and girls in conflict are first responders, service providers, community leaders, advocates and resilience builders. Governments and the wider international community must therefore prioritise their meaningful leadership, empowerment and participation at all levels of socio-economic and political life, including: grassroots peacebuilding; local, regional and national politics; economic empowerment; security and justice; and peace processes.
- Approaches include: better engaging with women and girls at a grassroots level (including those who do not speak English and cannot travel); granting visas to enable their access to decision-making spaces or work with local women's organisations to facilitate remote, online engagement; ongoing consultation and engagement should be funded and designed to be inclusive and intersectional.

- **Holistic, gender-sensitive programming that also tackles root causes of gender inequality, conflict and crisis:**

- Gender-specific programming is consistently seen as a second-tier priority. This means that, more often than not, interventions designed to focus on livelihoods, health, protection, education, nutrition, water and sanitation is carried out in a gender-blind manner. This work risks undermining women's human rights and is less effective when we fail to include girls and women.
- Programming across the triple-nexus and beyond should focus on gender transformative approaches, whether the primary aim of the intervention is to tackle gender inequality or not.

Event summary

Joanna Roper CMG (UK's Special Envoy for Gender Equality) opened by welcoming the event from all partners, and emphasising how keen the UK Government is to be supporting this important initiative. She referred to the event concept note, which she felt articulated the challenges upon us all and looks for ways that we can ensure we are all working better together to give us the best possible chance of meeting the needs of women and girls affected by conflict.

Brita Fernandez Schmidt (Women for Women International) started the conversation by thanking the United Kingdom's Mission to the United Nations for the support in hosting this event, and to Joanna Roper CMG for attending to give opening remarks. She introduced attendees to Women for Women International and gave a brief overview of its year-long holistic programme for marginalised women survivors of war in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. By reflecting on a recent visit to Nigeria, she highlighted that this work really highlights the interlinkages across the humanitarian, development and peace spheres – or 'triple nexus' – but that despite this, we unfortunately continue to see chronic silo working across these agendas. This is further compounded by the absence of a gender lens and has a genuine impact on women and girls affected by conflict and crisis. Women and girls in fragile and conflict-affected countries experience a triple burden of extreme poverty, violence and discrimination which is deeply rooted in patriarchal social norms and conservative political systems – their lives and experiences are not dictated by a superficial compartmentalisation of the "humanitarian, development and peace" spheres.

Brita also explained that, from this work, it is clear that women and girls in conflict and fragile settings are among the least visible – and that their reality is often not reflected in SDG progress reports or data collection efforts. She referenced Women for Women International's annual report cards, which situate programmatic monitoring and evaluation data within the framework of the goals. However, the recently published 2019 SDG Gender Index found that, with just 11 years to go until 2030, nearly 40% of the world's girls and women – 1.4 billion – live in countries failing on gender equality. Urgent action clearly needs to be taken to meet the needs of women and girls in fragile and conflict settings, and that will require better integration across multiple agendas. Brita welcomed the highly-experienced panel, and encouraged them to consider the tangible actions that could be taken by all of us – whether that's member states, UN agencies or civil society – to improve the integration across these agendas and ultimately deliver a more coordinated, mutually benefitting and coherent approach.

Marcy Hersh (Women Deliver) opened the panel by setting the scene – put simply, we know that humanitarian crises are not gender-neutral. This year, 131.7 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, and more than half of them are women and girls. These emergencies occur against a backdrop of pre-existing gender inequality, which is exacerbated when systems and structures aimed at protecting girls and women are weakened or destroyed due to conflicts or disasters. However, despite being the most impacted by conflict and crisis, the needs of women and girls are consistently side-lined. As Marcy said, *"The goals we set for humanitarian aid are not nearly as ambitious as the dreams girls and women have in crisis settings. While we strive – and often fall short – to meet basic needs in the present, they demand the rights to a better future."*

Marcy outlined the norms, standards and commitments that we have in place that demonstrate widespread agreement on the central role girls and women must play, including the Sustainable Development Goals, the Sendai Framework, the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, the Global Compact on Refugees, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 to name only a few. She also pointed out that despite these normative improvements, translation on the ground is limited, manifested in the chronic under-funding of gender equality efforts and barriers to women's participation. For example, less than 1% of all humanitarian aid goes to women-focused CSOs, only 0.1% of the global \$41.5 billion of humanitarian aid between 2016-2018 went to GBV prevention and/or response; and only 2% of peace mediators around the world are women.

Marcy argued that countering these challenges requires all hands on deck. She called for better coordination across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, where silo working is chronic. Humanitarian, peace and security, and development assistance each have different aims, follow different principles, are managed by different actors, under different complex architectures, operate over different temporal scales, and are aligned with different budget lines. On the ground, however, the distinction between these agendas is not seen as clearly. The constant line across these disparate agendas is the consensus, already held by all three communities and endorsed in the norms, standards and commitments she noted, that our efforts will only be successful when girls and women are empowered to participate as leaders.

Aisha Dennis (Women Now for Development) gave some background on her organisation, the largest Syrian feminist organisation operating in Syria reaching thousands of women and adolescent girls annually. She outlined how they work across the 'triple nexus', as a result of operating in humanitarian contexts – under continuous bombardment and siege - but being focused on holistically supporting the longer-term growth and independence of women and girls. She then gave some inspiring accounts from the field of how this is impacting on women's lives and how they are driving forward change and development. Aisha noted, *"leadership efforts start from the ground up – people affected by conflict and crisis do not wait for anything, they just need the support."* She went on to quote a colleague, Oula al Jundi, who recently wrote in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) magazine, *"we have learnt at Women Now for Development that peacebuilding begins in the streets, in narrow alleys, in homes..."*.

In her remarks, Aisha also articulated the inherent tension within the 'triple nexus', and recommended that we must acknowledge this in order to overcome the challenges we have in working coherently across these agendas. For instance:

- humanitarian logic says: reach the maximum number of the most vulnerable beneficiaries, in the shortest time possible, for immediate results;
- development logic says: work with communities over a longer period on multiple levels to create long term, sustainable impact; and
- peace-building logic says: work with individuals who are already skilled, and literate and focus on accessing/establishing formal security, governance peace and justice mechanisms.

Abigail Ruane (WILPF) reflected that, while it is important to be discussing how to increase synergies to really deliver for women and girls in conflict and fragile settings, almost five years into a fifteen-year Sustainable Development agenda we should be much further. Her remarks focused particularly on the need to take an integrated approach to both the Women, Peace and Security and Sustainable Development Agendas, and to link up cross-sectoral frameworks relating to inequalities, participation, protection, justice, and peace.

Abigail outlined that the Women, Peace and Security Agenda is a foundational commitment aimed at strengthening women's participation, protection, and rights across the conflict spectrum. It was created due to pressure from the women's movement demanding action to end war and build systems of human security based on women's meaningful participation and gender justice. As an agenda, it already embodies a cross-sectoral approach in line with SDG 5 on gender equality and 16 on peace, so it is critical for the SDGs to accelerate action on the WPS Agenda.

Abigail also argued that the SDGs can be seen as a feminist vision of peace and development: It is the intersection of three dimensions: economic development that protects the environment and supports social development, including women's human rights. It includes targets around participation, (SDG 16.7, SDG 5.5), protection and elimination of violence (SDG 5.2, 5.4, 16.1), prevention (i.e., non-discrimination, freedom and equality, arms flows - SDG 5.1, 5.C, 16.10, 16.4, 16.B), and relief and recovery (i.e, access to justice, social protection - SDG 16.3, 5.4) across goals 5 and 16, among others.

Both agendas are based on a foundation of human rights, including women's rights, and international and humanitarian law, and are universal in nature.

Abigail ended her initial remarks by echoing the consistent messaging from women peacebuilders: *"that peace is not a project."* It requires listening to women around the world, and taking action to realise their visions for systems change. She called on member states to take concrete and tangible action to strengthen linkages between these agendas.

Nicole Dehnam (The International Rescue Committee) added to this by reflecting that the 'triple nexus' is a phrase that acknowledges that the contexts we work in are messy – they do not fit into the categories of 'humanitarian', 'development' and 'peacebuilding' that we speak of from a policy perspective. She did want to recognise, however, that all of those spheres have displacement in common. Similarly to lack of visibility for marginalised women living in conflict that Brita had reflected on earlier, there is also refugee gap. It is unclear where displaced women fit into the SDGs – refugees are invisible in progress reports, with only 13 Voluntary National Reviews mentioning refugees. Nicole also reflected on violence against women, describing it as one of the biggest challenges we face – no matter how you look at the world.

Nicole recommended that concrete action needs to be taken, particularly with regards to funding. There has been lots of rhetoric around what can be done and how we can ensure that women and girls are being heard – but we have been talking about this for decades.

During the **Q&A portion** of the event, participants highlighted: the need to engage men and boys and addressing negative masculinities and stereotypes in efforts to meet the needs of women and girls; the role of financial services (e.g. micro businesses and financing) for women in conflict settings; the need to address the root causes of conflict in different contexts (and not using a 'cookie cutter' approach). There were discussions around the need for a fundamental power shift, as well as the need to focus more on prevention and engaging earlier (before a crisis breaks out). Others raised concerns around the violation of sexual and reproductive health rights, and the need to combine emergency and humanitarian service provision with longer term rights and gender awareness. Some reemphasised points made around invisibility, particularly of marginalised groups including displaced persons, who can often be forgotten. Others asked about how we can be holding decision-makers accountable, and going beyond consultations towards regular, genuine engagement at a grassroots level and inclusion of women and girls in the decisions that affect their lives. Lack of funding was an issue that was consistently raised.

In her closing comments, Brita Fernandez Schmidt reflected on an earlier question asked by Aisha that had really resonated with her: *"why is the burden on us – the women at the forefront of these challenging situations?"* Brita agreed that this is the question that we need to be asking, so that we are led by focusing on what women want and need, ensuring it is this which governs the implementation of various policy frameworks discussed during the event - rather than the other way around.

Brita thanked everyone again for attending the event, and expressed particular gratitude to the event partners, panellists and the UK Mission for hosting. She ended by emphasising the fact that this event was very much the beginning of a conversation. Currently, the world is failing women and girls who live in fragile and conflict-affected countries and only with a concerted effort – through partnership working – that we will be able to make sure that they are not left behind. We need to transform the way we have been working as a so-called "international community", and to start bringing the system together as a whole. Women - the drivers of development and agents of change in their communities and countries - must be given the opportunity to lead the way.