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WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY RESEARCH GAPS: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS AND ADVOCATES

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INTRODUCTION

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and its seven follow-up resolutions, collectively referred to as the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, represent commitments by states to increase women's participation and to incorporate gender perspectives across UN peace and security efforts, including peacekeeping operations, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 establishes a similar commitment in the realm of development programming. Despite these important policy commitments, implementation of gender policies is lagging and the global knowledge base on gender equality and security is underdeveloped.

Although there is substantial research on women's protection in conflict and post-conflict environments, evidence on the other two pillars of the WPS Agenda (participation and prevention) is scant. Similarly, definitions and counter-narratives related to women's role in peace and security processes remain unclear. Broadly speaking, existing WPS research lacks important qualitative components—offering the number of women involved in peace processes, for example, but not remarking on the extent or nature of their participation. In light of SDG 5 implementation, this brief explores the practical applications of an expanded WPS evidence base and pitfalls of past research: It then recommends next steps to effectively close WPS research gaps.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Even today, many researchers, gender equality advocates and peacebuilders are asked to justify women's increased participation in peace and security processes. Although men's participation is rarely interrogated in the same way, discomfort with the WPS Agenda may be the result of a lack of data explaining the value of women's participation. To the extent that investigating and communicating women's impact on peace and security processes can encourage higher levels of inclusion and generate political will to mainstream gender across peace and security processes, it has a practical value. However, if research cannot identify clear, positive effects of women's participation, there is a risk that the evidence could be used to further exclude them. From a rights perspective, women's participation requires no justification: Women are equal to men and thus entitled to the same level of inclusion regardless of their assessed value.

To ensure that policymakers and practitioners can design and implement policies that best suit their respective needs, efforts to bridge WPS research gaps should focus on developing the international community's understanding of how conflict and insecurity affect men and women differently. How gender interacts with other factors, such as race, class, religion, age and geography, is also important to understand in the context of peacebuilding, when social cohesion, or the lack thereof, can heavily influence conflict dynamics.

WPS research is often relegated to a separate category ('women's issues' or 'gender'), rather than being positioned within mainstream fields such as peace and conflict studies or security studies. Similarly, because some of the research fields that were instrumental in the formulation of the WPS Agenda ascribe to alternative conceptual frameworks and use technical jargon, mainstream security researchers often find their research inaccessible. To encourage the integration of WPS research into mainstream policy and academic discourses, topics should under-

score men and women's equal responsibility to build and sustain peace and security using common terminology whenever possible.

Despite the many arguments for women's participation and equally varied theories of change supporting them, resistance to implementing WPS research findings persists. When academics and practitioners (e.g. civil society organizations and implementing agencies) work together to align WPS research with information needs and policy performance on the ground, it is easier to hold leaders accountable to their commitments. Researchers' ability to identify politically savvy ways to incorporate WPS findings into peace and security operations will be essential to achieving SDG 5 and advancing the WPS Agenda within other policy frameworks. The exchange of best practices among influential stakeholders in conflict-affected communities, such as politicians and religious and cultural leaders, is one such approach.

Some local peacebuilders have criticised WPS research topics for reflecting the assumptions and policy interests of the Global North. Similar critiques have been made of WPS research methodologies, which are not always compatible with the dynamics of conflict-affected environments. When implementing and monitoring the progress of SDG 5, researchers and practitioners could avoid this pitfall by using locally-viable data collection tools and incorporating local perspectives into their research questions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Academics should collaborate with advocates and practitioners to ensure that WPS research is demand-driven.

- Greater collaboration also stands to reduce competition for funding and increase alignment between policy goals and implementation timeframes.

2. WPS research should not reproduce negative stereotypes.

- That existing WPS research focuses on women's vulnerabilities and need for special protection during conflict perpetuates the view that women are victims. New research should aim to disprove myths and explore the positive and negative effects of women's agency, for example as peacebuilders or perpetrators of violence.

3. The means of communicating WPS findings should be tailored to different audiences.

- Messaging and formatting must be flexible to increase the accessibility of WPS research and increase the likelihood that it will be used constructively among diverse groups.
- Researchers should work to ensure that WPS research designs and methodologies do not impose a cultural bias.
- Greater focus should be given to the local context and actors.

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