Enhancing Regional Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

Memorandum No. 35

Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP)

Study Group on Women, Peace and Security

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I.   Introduction

The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in October 2000. The resolution acknowledges the role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction. Indeed, it underscores the importance of women's involvement in all peace and security initiatives. UNSCR 1325 therefore urges all actors to increase the participation of women, eliminate sexual- and gender-based violence (SGBV), and to incorporate gender perspectives in all peace and security efforts. Over two decades later, Women, Peace and Security (WPS) has developed into a major global security agenda encompassing 9 additional resolutions that have expanded the promotion of gender equality along the conflict continuum.[1] As of September 2023, 107 countries–roughly 55 percent of UN member states–have adopted a WPS National Action Plan (NAP). Additionally, regional organizations have begun to develop action plans for implementation; the European Union, the Pacific Island Forum, and on November 16, 2022, ASEAN launched its first Regional Plan of Action (RPA) on Women, Peace and Security.[2] However, many of these NAPs and RAPs still require full ratification or need to be updated.

In 2020, USCSCAP, CSCAP Indonesia, and CSCAP New Zealand launched the CSCAP Study Group on Women, Peace, and Security. The WPS Study Group has focused on the advancement of the WPS agenda in the Asia Pacific, and has aimed to augment the progress already being made on implementing the WPS agenda in the region at the Track-1 level, as well as within CSCAP.

Four Study Group meetings were held to discuss regional approaches and attitudes toward WPS throughout the region. The CSCAP WPS Study Group convened in June 2021, September 2021, September 2022, and March 2023 to encourage CSCAP member committees and supporting experts, researchers, and policymakers to identify challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the WPS Agenda within the Asia-Pacific region. The following are the group's findings and recommendations on furthering the development of the WPS agenda within the Asia-Pacific.

II.   Variations of WPS Implementation

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[1] UN Security Council Resolution 1820 (2008), Resolution 1888 (2009), Resolution 1889 (2009), Resolution 1960 (2010), Resolution 2106 (2013), Resolution 2122 (2013), Resolution 2242 (2015), Resolution 2467 (2019), and Resolution 2493 (2019)

[2] The ASEAN RPA on WPS builds on the region's earlier commitments to further the rights of women including: Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in the ASEAN Region (2004), the Ha Noi Declaration on the Enhancement of the Welfare and Development of ASEAN Women and Children (2010), the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Elimination of Violence Against Children (2013), the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 including the ASEAN Political-Security (APSC) Blueprint 2025 (2015), the Joint Statement on Promoting Women, Peace and Security (WPS) in ASEAN (2017), and the establishment of the ASEAN Women for Peace Registry (AWPR) (2018).

The WPS agenda consists of four pillars: Participation, Protection, Prevention, and Relief and Recovery with NAPs as the instruments of implementation at the national level. In the Asia Pacific, only 12 countries have adopted NAPs, while others either still aspire to develop one or have actively chosen not to do so.[3] The presence or absence of a NAP does not guarantee meaningful progress on WPS, as both approaches have strengths and limitations. All countries have faced challenges in efforts to support WPS objectives.

Many countries with a NAP (including Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Indonesia, Japan, Nepal, New Zealand, Philippines, South Korea, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, and Timor-Leste[4]) argue that NAPs provide legal instruments as policy foundations for both national and foreign policies. Nevertheless, their success depends on champions from all sectors, clear accountability, and dedicated funding. The ownership of a NAP among a broad cross-section of society is seen as critical for capturing issues that matter to everyday peace and security but have yet to be included in state agendas. Countries have employed different mechanisms to help ensure participation and representation, including collecting sex-disaggregated[5] and gender-sensitive data, and through localization processes that enable governments to implement WPS differently in response to communities' distinct needs. Still, there is a great variety in the metrics employed for success and levels of awareness within and across state bureaucracies, which hampers effective NAP implementation. Moreover, WPS NAPs often overlook demilitarization and scaling down the global arms trade.

Other countries, including Malaysia, India, Singapore, China, Lao PDR, and Russia, have made the case that *not* having a NAP can allow for a broader understanding of security and address inter-sectoral concerns, such as economic development. Participants suggested that the absence of a NAP does not indicate a lack of support for WPS, but rather a different interpretation of how to ensure that the goals and visions embedded within WPS pillars are successfully integrated in all areas of life. States, for example, may not want to engage with the language and specific mechanisms entailed in implementing a WPS NAP due to concerns of scrutiny into domestic affairs, or they may find particular issue areas too politically sensitive. Importantly, many argue that not having a NAP may allow for a more holistic approach to security, such as including gender within development spheres, or when it is easier to integrate WPS agenda goals into existing laws, politics, and frameworks, than it is to create a separate NAP on WPS. On the other hand, some felt without a NAP, governments may lack accountability, resourcing, and advocacy for WPS issues.

With or without a NAP, common limitations in WPS implementation include inadequate and unsustained resourcing and a lack of gender-responsive budgeting. Furthermore, there is often a problematic gap between how WPS is implemented at home and abroad, with virtually all states struggling to address domestic SGBV issues alongside international security concerns. Implementation approaches vary, with some countries primarily focusing on the security sector while others prioritize broader ownership and civil-society-led efforts. Thus, WPS can be implemented inwardly or outwardly, in domestic laws, as foreign policy, or both.

Study group discussions highlighted the importance of contextualisation and acknowledgement of intersectional concerns in WPS implementation. Adapting to emerging needs and pressures is crucial, and WPS should not be seen as "fixed" or "static." The intersectionalities[6] of gender,

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[3] UN Women Asia Pacific, *National Action Plan*, February 2023, https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/peace-and-security/national-action-plans

[4] PeaceWomen: National Action Plans by Region: https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/index.php/nap-overview/ as of September 4, 2023.

[5] Sex-disaggregated and gender-sensitive data are produced when gender is systematically included as a variable at the moment of individual-level data collection and tabulation.

[6] [6]Associated with the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, the concept accounts for the ways in which multiple forms of inequality compound one another, leading to complex experiences of discrimination.

racial, class, and religious inequalities were emphasized, along with the need to represent women as active participants in problem-solving and decision-making rather than as victims or clustered as "vulnerable groups." As such, just as there is no single homogenous 'women and girls' category that describes all women or all women's experiences, rather than referring to a homogenous WPS agenda, it is more accurate to consider the localization of WPS *agendas*. WPS implementation–both globally and domestically–has been successful when it is responsive to different security issues and adapted to national or local dynamics. This is true for subnational, national, and transnational WPS implementation, including through regional bodies such as ASEAN, NATO, and the Pacific Island Forum.

III.   WPS Issues of Concern

Despite the evolution of a variety of WPS agendas in the region, all CSCAP members face common problems. Regional experts and policymakers engaged in this Study Group raised a number of key concerns, including:

A.   Backsliding on Sexual- and Gender-Based Violence

Although perennial, rates of sexual- and gender-based violence have significantly increased in recent years due to pandemic-related lockdowns, increased financial volatility, natural disasters, and job losses. Important progress had been made in recent decades, but data from the global WPS Index[7] has shown that progress has since slowed and in some cases lost ground, with many countries facing increasing resistance to eliminating violence against women.

B.   Gendered Economic Inequalities

The COVID-19 pandemic has also widened structural gender inequalities as governments have prioritized economic recovery, focusing on physical infrastructure rather than social or care economy infrastructure, with women predominantly picking up *both* the burden of care and unpaid labor *and* being disproportionately impacted by job losses.

C.   Gendered Post-Conflict and Disaster Relief and Recovery

Conflicts and natural disasters result in genderedsuffering, which frequently affects women disproportionately. In post-disaster relief and recovery, there is limited attention to women's resilience or agency; similarly, men's insecurities are often ignored or downplayed due to gender roles and norms. Most planning for disaster relief and recovery is rooted in militarized (masculine) decision-making, focusing primarily on technical knowledge and logistics, while simultaneously lacking a focus on social welfare concerns, such as health and education conditions; access to bank services (saving accounts, credit cards, loans, electronic transfers, digital/mobile money, etc.); access to crime reporting services and judicial processes; mental health support; environmental recovery; provision of community and political services; and so on.

D.   Gender and Climate Security

Similarly, climate security concerns are increasing in frequency and severity, exacerbating gendered insecurities in both development and natural disaster contexts. Lack of access to food and water, failing economies and governments, or migration and asylum-seeking due to climate change, for example, all have gendered implications. At the national level, few, if any, countries in the Asia-Pacific are adequately prepared for climate-related crises. Nevertheless, at the scale of communities, where the disasters impacting villages and towns are often extreme, recurrent and intersecting, local knowledge is often far more advanced in terms of

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[7] https://giwps.georgetown.edu/the-index/

crisis preparedness and response.[8] Without strategies for addressing the ways such disasters will impact genders differently, these crises are likely to intensify gender inequalities.

E. Gendered Tech-Enabled Cyber Crime

The gendered nature of tech-enabled harms has become an increasing concern. Within the cyber realm, women often experience misogynistic hate speech; online / tech-facilitated violence spreading to real-life violence; data breaches that impact privacy (on sexual and reproductive health, human rights, dignity, and self-development); and sexual and gender discrimination.

F. Gender and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism

There is a need to adopt an intersectional lens in understanding gender issues in preventing and countering violent extremism, remembering each woman is a unique single entity, and that there is great diversity among women exposed to and involved in violent extremism. If the security sector ignores gender, women's unique roles in facilitating and countering terrorist acts may be overlooked.

G. Women in Leadership at All Levels, In All Sectors

Throughout the region, more should be done to encourage women to meaningfully inhabit leadership roles at all levels of government and society. Women's representation must increase in political, media, academic, and think tank spheres, including CSCAP.

H. Women in Security Forces

Including women in security forces has the potential to dismantle patriarchal norms, stimulate positive attitudes toward women, create inclusive security and influence other sectors, particularly with an awareness of intersectional concerns and the need for implementation of institutional culture change. Participants further emphasized the need for women to be at all 'security tables' - in diplomacy, in intelligence gathering and analysis, in policy development, and in decision making.

I. Gender Norms and Equality, Foreign and Domestic

Gender norms that continue to underpin power imbalances between women and men inevitably result in a vicious interplay between structural and institutional inequalities, gendered unequal care burdens, and SGBV, manifesting as community fragility. Traditional gender norms exist within the transnational domain and domestic government and security structures, which reinforce gender inequalities at the household, community, national, and international levels, resulting in unstable societies. Foundationally, effective advancement of the WPS agenda within the Asia-Pacific must include challenges and alternatives to prescribed norms for women and men at all levels of society, both at home and abroad, in order to build gender equality and achieve more just, secure communities.

J. Gender-Sensitive Data and Funding

The region cannot achieve progress on the above issues without consistent tracking, measurement, and reporting of sex-disaggregated and gender-sensitive data, nor without adequate and sustainable gender-sensitive funding.

IV. Recommendations

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[8] See for instance Rachel Clissold, Karen E. McNamara, Ross Westoby & Vaine Wichman (2023) Experiencing and responding to extreme weather: lessons from the Cook Islands, Local Environment, 28:5, 645-661, DOI: 10.1080/13549839.2023.2169912

Based on the foregoing WPS Issues of Concern (which are noted in brackets for each recommendation below), the following recommendations are made to:

The CSCAP Secretariat and CSCAP Member Committees

1. Commit to measuring and reporting sex-disaggregated and gender-sensitive data, including that for CSCAP member committees, CSCAP leadership, event participation, subject matter experts and speakers, and other contributors, and use this data to create baselines and goals for increasing women's participation at all levels of CSCAP. [WPS Issue G, H, I]
2. Create a plan for reaching gender parity on all speaker panels and committees. This could be supported by using the Pacific Forums roster of expert female speakers. [WPS Issue I]
3. Ensure CSCAP members have a basic working knowledge of the WPS agenda by providing regular training at the General Conference. [WPS Issue I]
4. Encourage the application of a gender perspective on all panels and in all CSCAP Study Groups. [Especially important for panels and Study Groups related to Issues A-I]
5. Provide an option for hybrid attendance at events where feasible to make meetings more accessible to those with heavy care burdens. [WPS Issue B, I]
6. Develop a plan to actively recruit women (and youth) to participate as CSCAP member committee representatives. [WPS Issues G, H, and I]
7. Provide supplemental financial resources for women (and young people) to fully participate in CSCAP activities and seek their input in agenda creation and direction of the organization. [WPS Issues G, H, and I]

ASEAN Regional Forum

The Study Group would like to commend the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) on developing their RPA to support the WPS agenda in the region. To strengthen WPS efforts, the Study Group recommends the following to:

The ASEAN Regional Forum Experts and Eminent Persons

1. Devote a session to the WPS agenda at all annual meetings, and add a gender perspective to all or most other sessions going forward. [WPS Issues G and I]
2. Devote discussion at the next meeting to considering how the EEP can practically contribute to moving the WPS agenda forward in the region. [WPS Issues G and I]

The ASEAN Regional Plan of Action (RPA) on WPS Committee

8. Mainstream climate security within the ASEAN WPS RPA. [WPS Issue D]
9. Encourage all ASEAN countries to track, measure, and publish progress on a common set of WPS goals. Countries with WPS NAPs should include such metrics in future NAP documents. Non-NAP ASEAN countries that support WPS should define, adopt, and track a set of parameters aligned with RPA data goals, and create a plan to enhance the scope of such progress. [WPS Issue J]
10. Develop formal mechanisms whereby ASEAN countries (with and without NAPs) can continue to share experiences and best practices on implementation of WPS issue-areas addressed in/related to the RPA. [WPS Issue J]
11. Ensure subsequent ASEAN RPA discussions robustly address the need to bridge the gaps in the domestic and international implementation of WPS. [WPS Issue I]
12. Encourage all countries to commit to a minimum investment percentage in WPS implementation, from both defense and domestic development agencies. [WPS Issue J]

13. Amplify support for women's leadership in the security sector and peace processes by using the ASEAN media platform(s) to highlight women's impact through security-related success stories from the region. [WPS Issues G, H]
14. Stress the importance of understanding women as having complex identities: encourage understanding of the intersection of multiple inequalities with gender (including race, ethnicity, age, class, socioeconomic, and religion) and the need for contextualization of WPS principles. [WPS Issue B, I]
15. Be more deliberate and explicit about applying WPS principles to the RPA on the following issues: [WPS Issues A, C, D, E]
    - Sexual- and gender-based violence
    - Gender-transformative distribution of development, disaster relief, and humanitarian assistance
    - Gender-inclusive peacebuilding and conflict responses
    - Tech-enabled cyber-crime
16. Encourage alignment of WPS relief and recovery pillar language with disaster preparedness and response in both domestic and regional contexts. [WPS Issues C, D]

The ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW)

17. Mainstream climate security, digital security, and women in security forces within the ACW. [WPS Issues D, E, H]

The ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC)

18. Mainstream climate security, digital security, and women in security forces within the ACWC. [WPS Issue D, E. H]

The ASEAN-USAID Partnership for Regional Optimization with the Political-Security and Socio-Cultural Communities (PROSPECT)

19. Develop a deliberate approach to increasing women's participation by emphasizing women's 'meaningful participation' in ASEAN's male-dominated Political and Security Pillar. [WPS Issues G, I]
20. Expand the definition of "security" within the "Political and Security Pillar" to include "human security" through practical changes such as more emphasis on the lived experiences of insecurity by vulnerable groups. [WPS Issues A, B, C, D, G, H, I]