

# **Empowering Women in WPS Agenda: Challenges, Recommendations and The Way Forward**

Southeast Asian Women Peacebuilders Network



# Introduction

**T**he Southeast Asian Women Peacebuilders Network (SEAWP) made its debut with a regional summit in May 2020. A platform for women in civil society organisations around the region, acting as activists, negotiators, lawyers and peacebuilders, the network was created to showcase the work these peacebuilding experts and practitioners do, as well as forwarding the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

SEAWP's first seven months beginning May 2020 has been impressive: its webinars have reached a wide set of audience and the speakers have been a good mix of well-known experts and lesser known ones, with a breadth of experiences among them. These webinars have also featured young women working within the security and conflict areas as researchers and other significant roles.

In September 2020, SEAWP began its second series of webinars and come to the realisation that it has been challenging during these unprecedented times. In embracing the new normal, the increasing number of webinars have taken over the lives of many, and people, including peacebuilding experts, are either too busy or have over committed themselves to other panels, hence the limited number of webinars as was originally planned. The second series of activities was supported by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, Japan.

The regional webinar in February 2021 saw the actors in Women, Peace and Security discussing the next steps for Southeast Asia, aligned with the following criteria:

- The Joint Statement on Women, Peace and Security in ASEAN adopted at the 31st ASEAN Summit in Manila in November 2017, recognizes that peace and security are essential to the achievement of sustainable development and are interconnected and vital to the future of ASEAN, emphasizing women's equal, full, and effective participation at all stages of peace processes given their indispensable roles in the prevention and resolution of conflict, peacebuilding and peacekeeping.
- Recognising the CEDAW GR 30's agenda on the importance of conflict prevention for women's rights notwithstanding, conflict prevention efforts often exclude women's experiences as not relevant for predicting conflict, and women's participation in conflict prevention is low. The Committee has previously noted the low participation of women in institutions working on preventive diplomacy and on global issues such

as military expenditure and nuclear disarmament. In addition to falling short of the Convention, such gender-blind conflict prevention measures cannot adequately predict and prevent conflict. It is only by including female stakeholders and using a gendered analysis of conflict that States parties can design appropriate responses.

- That women's participation in the peace process is crucial: addressing Gender Based Violence (GBV) in a conflict setting, recognizing the leadership of, and supporting women's organizations at the grass-root level.

SEAWP aims to be a leading regional network and collective of women peacebuilders in Southeast Asia.

**Today, you can find SEAWP at the following channels:**

**Website:** [www.seawomenpeacebuilders.com](http://www.seawomenpeacebuilders.com)

**Instagram:** <https://www.instagram.com/seawomenpeacebuilders/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/seawomenpeacebuilders>

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FROM ZERO TO SERIOUS PLAYER AND ACTOR IN REGIONAL PEACEBUILDING

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# Executive Summary

**T**his policy paper will explore the methods of empowerment to achieve women's meaningful participation in the Women, Peace and Security agenda by analysing WPS actors and their roles in issues that are pertinent to WPS, and how it empowers women's involvement. The paper is composed of detailed research findings and discussions output from the webinar series and conference on Women Inclusion and Leadership in Peacebuilding by the Southeast Asian Women Peacebuilders Network (SEAWPN), and its constituent organisations, IMAN Research, Aman Indonesia, Walailak University, Thailand, in partnership with the Sasakawa Peace Foundation. The paper will address the methods for mainstreaming the WPS agenda to generate support from every relevant stakeholder, including the public and a state institution, in realising the WPS agenda.

## Summary of Research Findings

1. Women's participation and influence in peace and security matters are meaningful, not only to ensure respect for women's rights, but also to build a solid foundation for peaceful and just societies.

2. The rising threat to regional stability posed by armed conflicts, the increasing numbers of refugees and other displaced persons, create new challenges that ASEAN member states must face.
3. Women's participation in peace and security decision-making leads to resilience against violence, and creates more sustainable peace and security outcomes. Therefore, women empowerment is important to increase and promote their representation and meaningful participation in peace operations, peace processes, post-conflict reconstruction, civilian protection, and military deployments.
4. Women are still limited in Track One negotiation process, and yet, are often undermined for their roles. Civil society and women's organisations, and also gender experts need to be involved in formal peace processes to create a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to peacebuilding.
5. Intra and interfaith dialogues are instrumental tools in promoting tolerance, harmony and peace in diverse communities. These platforms can open new opportunities for women's voices and roles to be heard and recognised.
6. The increasing numbers of refugees and other displaced persons, and the recent rise in xenophobia that have contributed to the increase of hate-speech, regressive narratives, and extremism that target vulnerable groups, have created new challenges for the nation-state.
7. A majority of refugees are primarily composed of women and children; therefore, tackling this unprecedented scale and complexity must be approached with recognition and support of women's equal participation in decision-making roles and in crisis preparedness, response, and recovery.
8. Communal healing focuses on mental and emotional healing by building sustainable and revolutionary ways to support one another within the community.
9. Women can help to navigate a society in conflict to heal mentally and emotionally from the wounds of the past, and to heal and reconcile the community to ensure the region's sustainability.

## **Webinar Recommendations**

1. By becoming subject specialists of non-traditional areas such as decentralisation, economic reform and infrastructure, women can have an edge over male peacebuilders whom are often less qualified for these roles.
2. Women in Track One peace negotiations should advocate for an increase in quota for women in several specialist positions or even the establishment of a gender perspective



commission that function to assess peace negotiations under a gendered lens.

3. Adopting the feminist model in peacebuilding can increase women's participation in peace processes and enhance collaboration to explore peacebuilding solutions.
4. Engage with men to support women's empowerment within the broader Women, Peace and Security agenda.
5. Support women's role in promoting a culture of peace that educates and empowers all people.
6. Provide support to help women and girls to meet their specific needs in humanitarian settings.

## **Background of the Policy Paper**

Over the past two decades, the international community has increasingly recognised that inclusive peace processes are more likely to lead to lasting peace. Women's participation and influence in peace and security matters are meaningful not only to ensure respect for women's rights, but also to build a solid foundation for peaceful and just societies. Women's involvement in peace efforts, although still limited, has shown progress over the years.

During the signing process in the Helsinki peace agreement that ended the thirty years of conflict in Aceh in 2005, only one woman, Shadia Marhaban, participated as an advisor to the Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*) delegation, and was involved in the peace negotiations.

Although the Colombia-FARC talks did not include women at the negotiation tables, they took a different approach by providing time and opportunity for women to meet and discuss with the negotiators. This was in addition to establishing a special Subcommittee to assess the peace agreement from a gendered perspective.

In the Philippines, three from a total of five signatories, representing the Government of the Republic of the Philippines at the signing of the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, were women.

However, there are still some challenges, as seen from the most recent and on-going peace talks: only 10 percent of women negotiators were involved in the Afghan peace talks; 20 percent in Libya's political discussions; and almost none in Yemen's current on-going

peace processes<sup>1</sup>. Based on the UN Women's database between 1992 and 2019, women constituted, on average, 13 percent of negotiators, 6 percent of mediators, and 6 percent of signatories, in significant peace processes worldwide. Although the proportion of peace agreements with gender equality provisions increased from 14 to 22 per cent, about seven out of every ten peace processes did not include women mediators or women signatories<sup>2</sup>. There is still a lot to be done to close the global gender disparity index in peace and security.

In Southeast Asia, the WPS agenda's mainstreaming has begun at the national level by transforming the agenda into a National Action Plan (NAP) that aims to empower and protect women in social conflicts. However, increasing threats to regional stability and prosperity posed by armed conflicts, and the increasing numbers of refugees and other displaced persons, particularly women and children, as well as other emerging transnational issues such as climate change, food and water security, have created new challenges that the ASEAN member states must face.

Related stakeholders must approach this unprecedented scale and complexity to recognise and support women's equal participation in decision-making roles and crisis preparedness, response, and recovery. These aspects are crucial to ensure safe and peaceful communities in the region, because women's participation in peace and security decision-making leads to resilience against violence, and more sustainable peace and security outcomes. Therefore, women empowerment is vital to increasing and promoting their representation, and meaningful participation in peace operations, peace processes, post-conflict reconstruction, civilian protection, and military deployments. By integrating a gender perspective, the capability and outcome of missions and processes will be augmented.

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1 ASEAN. 2021. ASEAN Regional Study on Women, Peace and Security. 5-6.

2 Ibid.



# Findings and Discussions

## Peace Processes

In Southeast Asia, women are still largely excluded from official peace processes in conflict areas, and are often underestimated for their skills and experiences in handling crises and conflicts. However, in practice, women have the expertise and have brought many successes to informal peace efforts. The perception that women are victims of conflict must be transformed as women are powerful agents of change and are critical stakeholders in peace processes.

As is evident from the case in Aceh, Indonesia, despite women's prominent role as key actors during crises, and even initiators of the peace negotiation, women's abilities are still underestimated, and they are excluded from official peace negotiation processes. Even before the Tsunami and the commencement of official peace negotiations, female activists from Aceh had already begun actively campaigning for peace in the province following their husbands' deaths in the conflict. These female activists and other female-led organisations, such as Flower Aceh, advocated peacebuilding, and called for an end to intimidation and campaigned for the children's right to go back to school.<sup>3</sup> Women activists also campaigned to carry out everyday activities safely while remaining neutral on the conflict between Acehese separatists and the central government.

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<sup>3</sup> Suraya Kamaruzzaman. 2021. Institutionalisation of Women's Voices and Reconfiguring the Politics of Peace – Aceh. Community-Driven Peace Processes and the Role of Women, 19 February 2021.

Unfortunately, these early public campaigns were not enough to maintain peace in the province. As a result, the female-led organisations and female activists have banded together to form a women's congress to consolidate peace efforts in the province, thus enabling women to have their voices heard. Eventually, the women's congress helped to provide a platform for women and organisations of varying backgrounds, ethnicities, and social status to convene and work together. The first session of the congress, held in 2000, brought together 437 women from the different districts in the province, and saw the creation of 22 points, with the most critical point being the resolution of the conflict through peaceful dialogue.<sup>4</sup> These points were then shared with many important stakeholders, including President Abdurrahman Wahid.

Despite these women's significant role in Aceh's early peace process, no woman was part of the official Indonesian or Free Aceh Movement delegation during the official peace negotiations in Helsinki. Nor did women participate in the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Republic of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement. Following the MoU's signing in Helsinki and despite not being involved in formal peace negotiations, women continued to play an integral role in monitoring and the maintenance of peace in the province. Among the most prominent organisations active at the time include the Women's Network for Policy (*Jaringan Perempuan Untuk Kebijakan*), Women's Network for Peace (*Jaringan Perempuan Untuk Perdamaian*), and the Gender Working Group.

The Women's Network for Policy was involved in the drafting of the Law of Governance of Aceh, successfully lobbying for the allocation of 30 percent of political party memberships to women, the appointment of a female member on the Aceh Ulama Council, and a Bill to issue *Qanun* – a type of local regulation – on female empowerment and protection.<sup>5</sup> These efforts would help to ensure female participation in education, the local economy, capital allocation, and women's health. In terms of policy advocacy, women's organisations drafted and passed the *Qanun* on the Aceh Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the *Qanun* for the Empowerment and Protection of Women, the *Qanun* for the Protection of Children, and the *Qanun* to provide justice to female victims of rape, in addition to contributing to the ratification of the Women Rights Charter.

In terms of capacity building, women's organisations have assisted the new local government with budgeting, policy-making, and the facilitation of various training programmes and workshops to improve the government's ability to better serve the people. Additionally, capacity-building programmes for local leaders (be they male or female), the development of alternative education models centred around promoting human rights, and follow-up investigations of human rights violations were conducted by the CSOs. Women movements in Aceh also worked hand in hand with national and international CSOs in

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

promoting peace through five major approaches: 1) policy advocacy on issues such as women and the environment, fundamental rights services, gender-based violence, women and leadership, and discrimination under Sharia Law; 2) capacity-building; 3) mentoring and assistance; 4) peace campaigns; as well as, 5) development programmes and budget advocacy.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, in Thailand, women have also been involved in the local peace process, taking up a variety of formal and informal roles. Women have worked as healers and human rights protectors, trust builders, facilitators in sub-national conflicts, and recently, as representatives in Track One negotiations. A survey conducted amongst the population of Southern Thailand emphasises women's opinions and status in the region. The survey showed that 84 percent of women stated they had never been directly affected by the conflict since 2004; while 15 percent said they had been directly affected, and the remaining 1 percent refused to answer.<sup>7</sup> Of the women surveyed, 78.8 percent believed that women's role in the peace process is to support social development; 74 percent thought that their role is to protect civil rights and children from violence; 66.7 percent believed that women had a role in facilitating rehabilitation, and helping those affected by violence.<sup>8</sup> In comparison, 65.3 percent thought that their role is to protect the natural environment; and 64.7 percent believed their part was in educating peace. Therefore, although most of the women indicated they had never been affected by the conflict, they thought it was their responsibility to help those in need, and to protect the community from violence.

The survey also touched on women's knowledge of the peace talks. Surprisingly, only 48.5 percent of women have heard of the peace talks. Only 35.8 percent of the women who have heard of the peace talks are interested in following the progress of the peace talks. While 48.1 percent of women believe that the talks have become stagnant; 26.7 percent believe the talks have deteriorated, and 17.3 percent believe the talks have improved. Of the women surveyed, 39.8 percent believe that current peace talks will not solve the problem; 32.2 percent of women surveyed refuse to answer, and only 27.9 percent have confidence in the recent peace talks.<sup>9</sup> Lack of confidence in, and lack of knowledge of the ongoing peace talks indicate the talks' lack of inclusivity, as women were not invited for their meaningful participation, nor accounted for their valuable insights.

However, several women and women-oriented organisations such as Civic Women, Thai PBS, and PAOW have called on all relevant stakeholders to promote safety in their communities. These organisations have also asked stakeholders to refrain from inciting violence, to protect human rights, to appoint committees to undertake fact-finding missions

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Fareeda Panjor. 2021. Is the Peace Process in Thailand Inclusive? Muslim Women in Patani. Community-Driven Peace Processes and the Role of Women, 19 February 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

following incidents of violence, and to guarantee the security of all those involved in the peace talks. However, there has been very little direct involvement of women in the formal processes of the peace talks. Despite their direct experience with the conflict and extensive knowledge of government policies and the peace talks' current development, women remained excluded from the negotiations. Nevertheless, these women organisations have sought other alternatives to be involved in the process, such as through their collaboration with official institutions such as the National Security Council, the Local Steering Committee, and Parliamentary Committees involved in Track One negotiations. While at the same time furthering their involvement in Track Two negotiations, including aiding the Thai National Action Plan's implementation on WPS.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, it is clear that challenges remain. Women are still limited in Track One negotiation processes, and are often underestimated for their roles. Aceh and Thailand's peace processes are evidence of the need to involve civil society and women's organisations in formal peace processes worldwide, and highlight the need to involve gender experts to create a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to peacebuilding. All stakeholders must present in the discussion to achieve sustainable peace.

## **Intra and Inter-faith Dialogue**

Intra and interfaith dialogues are instrumental tools in promoting tolerance, harmony, and peace in diverse communities. This platform can open new opportunities for women's voices and roles to be heard and recognised. Women constitute half of the population of every community, and possess enormous potential to promote a culture of peace and conflict resolution; however, women are still not recognised in many peace processes in the region and beyond. Although some countries have begun to acknowledge women's role as promoters of peace, the numbers remain limited. Interfaith dialogue can be a method of best practices in managing a highly diverse and pluralistic society.

In 2019, the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (ASEAN-IPR) collaborated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, and with the support from the Government of Australia, the Asia Foundation, and the Government of New Zealand, convened an ASEAN Women Interfaith Dialogue, with the theme of "Promoting Understanding for an Inclusive and Peaceful Society," the first ever interfaith dialogue of ASEAN women, with more than 50 participants from across the region.<sup>11</sup> The event was held as a follow-up from the previous year's launch of the ASEAN Women for Peace Registry (AWPR) in the Philippines, and the 2017 ASEAN Leaders Joint Statement on Women, Peace and Security.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> ASEAN-IPR. 2019. ASEAN Women Interfaith Dialogue: Promoting Understanding For An Inclusive And Peaceful Society. 12 – 13 November 2019.

In order to enhance female involvement in peacebuilding, the Philippine Centre for Islam and Democracy took the initiative to empower the Muslim community by working with *Ustadzas* and women CSOs to conduct training and dialogue sharing. This prompted the establishment of *Aleemat*, *Ustadzas*, and a network of women CSO leaders called *Noorus Salam*.<sup>12</sup> Aside from forming a network, the community also focused on women capacity-building to empower women in collaboration with the Philippines Commission for Human Rights, and they produced the ‘Aleemat Module’ a human rights-based approach for community empowerment within the context of Islam.<sup>13</sup> This module has since been used as a resource to teach Muslim women in different communities throughout the region, particularly in conflict areas. This kind of training has helped women to empower and inspire themselves to become the agent of change from within.

The approach taken in the Philippines emphasises how education is crucial in empowering women. Both formal and informal education, such as through training and capacity-building development, are vital to enhance women’s participation, and to amplify women’s voices. Most importantly, since CSOs are crucial actors in a pluralistic environment, they can act as a bridge between different sectors and groups of societies, and they have the capacity and function to connect the government and policymakers with local grassroots communities. Therefore, efforts such as these in either track of the negotiations should be maintained.

For the role of women *ulemma* in Indonesia, there is the Indonesian Women’s Ulama Congress (*Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia*),<sup>14</sup> a large consolidation of male and female *ulemma*. They are very progressive in advocating for the Anti Sexual Violence Bill, encouraging maturity of marriage age, and stopping female circumcision. KUPI was transformed into a movement that encouraged “*Nyai*” and “*Kyai*” mothers to be vocal and issue fatwas that were more pro-victims.

## Local community involvement in the crisis

The increasing numbers of refugees and other displaced persons, particularly women and children, has become a new challenge that ASEAN member states must face. Furthermore, the recent rise in xenophobia that has contributed to an increase in hate-speech, regressive narratives and extremism has left these vulnerable groups becoming targets of hate crimes by people of the host country, thereby making the issue even more complex. Considering that most refugees are mainly composed of women and children, and given its unprecedented

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12 Amina Rasul-Bernando. 2021. We Still Don’t See Enough Women in Peace Processes in Southeast Asia. Peace Process in Southeast Asia: Is There Enough Involvement from Women?, 19 February 2021.

13 Ibid.

14 [www.kupi.or.id](http://www.kupi.or.id) (website in Bahasa Indonesia) accessed March 18, 2021.



scale and complexity, this issue must be approached by recognising and supporting women's equal participation in decision-making, as well as crisis preparedness, response, and recovery roles. In most cases, the conflict's underlying cause can be attributed to the lack of policies and proper mechanisms that facilitate dispute resolution amongst different groups. Therefore, policies must be in place that can properly address problems related to migration, refugees, and asylum-seekers. Policies should not be ad-hoc in nature but rather take a long-term approach that will establish communication channels between the different groups, and create policies that foster a real sense of acceptance for all.

In the case of Aceh which has welcomed Sri Lankan refugees to its shores, as well as Tamil refugees, and even Rohingya refugees, communication has been key to maintaining peace in the area. To encourage communication between the different groups, the Acehnese used their specific customary structure of gathering local actors, from the Tunku Imam, to the local village leader, to the local fishermen's association, to the provincial government to sit down and discuss with the arriving refugees what is expected of them as 'guests.'<sup>15</sup> This transparency and transparent delivery of local expectations has so far enabled the refugees and locals of Aceh to integrate as a community.

In the Ampang suburb of Kuala Lumpur, some masjids are even led by Rohingya Imams, and the congregation consists of Rohingya and locals. The constant communication between the two groups have made it possible for the two cultures to live together. However, in other more sensitive areas, such as Selayang, the refugees' entrance into their community requires a more formal form of policies. In this case, the local authorities, local community leaders, and refugees and asylum seekers, must gather, discuss, and agree on the 'laws' of the community, means of interaction, and structures wherein people can address problems when they arise.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, both cases have underscored how transparent communication and policies are crucial to maintaining peace in a pluralistic community. There must be coherent policies on the matter at the national level. On the local and municipal levels, there must also be mechanisms or channels for communication, and a means to understand one another through the *rukun tetangga* (neighbourhood watch) structure, the *penghulu* (village headman) structure, and others.

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<sup>15</sup> Lilianne Fan.2020. The Rise of Hateful Extremism: Far-Right Ideologies Pushing Xenophobia in Times of Crisis. 8 May 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



## Communal Healing

From the findings and discussions of the SEAWPN webinar series and conference discussing on communal healing, the participants recommended several approaches to empower women's meaningful participation in peacebuilding, and to mainstream the community's WPS agenda.

First, to enhance women's participation in peace processes, women need to consider being a subject specialist to be taken seriously, and to gain an edge over their male counterparts. By becoming a subject specialist in non-traditional areas such as decentralisation, economic reform and infrastructure, women can have an advantage over male peacebuilders who are often less qualified for these roles. Their expertise and specification will enable them to reserve a seat at the negotiation table.

Second, women in Track One peace negotiations should use their position to highlight women's issues, and promote other women's works from different fields, or seek ways to involve those in Track Two peace negotiations at the discussion table. Advocating for quota increase of women in several specialist positions, and establishing a gender perspective commission to assess peace negotiations, will mainstream the Women, Peace and Security agenda at the institutional level nationally, and ultimately, to the public through the Government's policies. Such practices have already been implemented in other countries, for example during the Colombia - FARC negotiations that appointed a special subcommittee to assess the peace agreement from a gendered perspective.

Third, women should use the feminist model of peacebuilding centred on the concept of power-sharing to seek ways to combine each individual's expertise to complement one another, and generate even greater power. This approach acknowledges the value of various professions and skills that each individual brings from different societies, and encourages every woman to play a role. Therefore, this peacebuilding approach can empower women's involvement in peace processes, and enhance collaboration to explore peacebuilding solutions.

Fourth, mainstreaming the Women, Peace and Security agenda cannot be done in isolation. Women need to engage with men to support women's empowerment within the broader Women, Peace and Security agenda, and to further engage with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) under its mandate as launched during the ASEAN HeForShe Campaign back in 2017.

Five, it is vital that women should be supported in their role to promote a culture of peace that educates and empowers all people, by both public and national institutions, in order to achieve sustainable peace.

Six, women and girls should be enabled to meet their specific needs in humanitarian settings. As women are often prevented from participating in peacebuilding due to their familial responsibilities, states should also offer other means of support to help them be a part of this opportunity, aside from providing them with the opportunity to participate. This includes providing the full range of accessible and affordable medical, legal, educational, psychosocial, housing, and livelihood services, following applicable laws and policies. Having these supports will enable women to optimise their function in society, and bring a more significant contribution to peacebuilding efforts.



# Conclusion

**H**istorically, women have always been omitted from peace processes. Only recently have women been included in peace processes, as seen in the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, and other ASEAN member states. This change is followed by the creation of future trajectories for women's roles in peace processes. As it stands, women's contributions to peace negotiations are currently limited to primarily Track Two, or informal peace negotiations that do not involve the government. Therefore, efforts need to be made to involve more women in Track One peace efforts. This is perhaps part of a more significant failure of current political-economic systems that do not prioritise peace and justice.

To increase women's participation, both men and women must work together to ensure that proper frameworks and mechanisms are created to involve women in peace processes. Ensuring women's involvement in peace processes is a collaborative effort between both men and women. As institutions and organisations become more representative and inclusive, they will drive policies and regulation to support WPS aims, and thereby achieve the initial goals for gender equality at the heart of resolution 1325. It is crucial to analyse the future of the WPS agenda to include various emerging issues such as climate, food, and water security. Also, women can directly participate in these discussions.

Communal healing focuses on mental and emotional healing by building sustainable and revolutionary ways to support one another within the community. The peace process in Bangsamoro in the Philippines not only involves Muslims but also includes Christians and Indigenous people of the region. At the Track Two level, the community works through an informal peace process that allows different existing communities to share their aspirations, promote sustainable livelihood, and participate in local political mechanisms to maintain the security in Bangsamoro.<sup>17</sup> The Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission has facilitated more than 200 different listening processes in other areas within and outside of the Bangsamoro, and documented the historical justices, legitimate grievances, human rights violations, and marginalisation of land dispossession that are the result of the conflict in the area.<sup>18</sup>

Also, the Independent Working Group on Transitional Justice has implemented listening processes that were mainly centred around events such as the Burning of Jolo in 1974, the Manila Massacre of 1972, the Palembang Massacre of 1974, the Zamboanga Siege of 2013, and the Marawi Siege of 2017.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, UN Women facilitated discussions in 2017-2019 centred around events such as the Marawi Siege, the Zamboanga Siege, and the 1972-1976 massacres in Sarangani, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao, Sulu, Basilan, Tawitawi, Gensan, and Lanao del Norte. There is also a future project for 2021, such as by WeACT 1325, that will be hosting healing sessions with certified psychologists in Basilan Sulu, Tawitawi, and Zamboanga City.<sup>20</sup> Based on the experiences of Bangsamoro, listening processes and healing sessions are incredibly important in maintaining sustainable peace in the region.

Furthermore, in ensuring female inclusion in official peace talks, women-oriented organisations nominated female representatives to the Bangsamoro Transition Commissions 1 and 2 that were tasked with drafting new local laws. In doing so, women-oriented organisations were able to include gender recommendations from the Bangsamoro and non-Moro female communities in the Bangsamoro Basic Law of 2015, and the Bangsamoro Organic Law of 2018, including the specific call for the Bangsamoro budget to allocate 15 percent of the budget towards Gender and Development (more than the national government minimum of 5 percent) as well as the calls to have female representatives in the Bangsamoro Parliament, and the passage of a law creating the Bangsamoro Commission on Women.<sup>21</sup>

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17 Amina Rasul-Bernando. 2021. We Still Don't See Enough Women in Peace Processes in Southeast Asia. Peace Process in Southeast Asia: Is There Enough Involvement from Women?, 19 February 2021.

18 Fatimah Pir Aliyah. 2021. Community-Based Peace Process in Mindanao. Community-Driven Peace Processes and the Role of Women, 19 February 2021

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

In Poso, Indonesia, a pluralistic region where Christians, Muslims and Hindus used to live in harmony for centuries, has become a hub for an extremist religious terrorism in the past decade, due to the heightened conflict and religious rivalry. This was fuelled by the political instability that was triggered by remnants of the 1998 conflict. Back in 2009, there were a variety of initiatives by women's groups both at the local and national levels to develop a women's education model to encourage women's leadership. A number of organisations such as the Central Sulawesi Women's Equality Struggle Group (KPKPST), Women's Solidarity, Libu Perempuan, Mosintuwu Institute, Mobine School, Indonesian Women's Coalition (KPI), and AMAN Indonesia have also since 2010 built community resilience in tens of villages through the role of women interfaith. They all have their Women's School program with different names. In general, these organisations aim to rebuild the Poso community, and restore conditions to before the conflict, so that people can once again live harmoniously and peacefully with each other.

One of the women's schools' primary aims is to establish a network for communication between different communities, and conduct critical discussions, and act as a protector for one another.<sup>22</sup> Some of the talks held in the classroom tackled development issues in Poso, policy recommendations on women's participation, and the laws of the region of Poso. They believe that Poso women and girls have vital roles within the community as religious leaders, judges, and decision-makers. It is also evident that women were the first that crossed the peace line, and initiated the peace process in the region. The school is proof that even in post-conflict societies, a community can reconcile and unite to develop.

Looking at the roots of the Poso conflict, it was not the different faiths in the community that triggered the war, but rather it was related to the politicisation of religious identities by corporations to protect their interests to exploit abundant natural resources in the area, which created tensions within the community.<sup>23</sup> Hence, the conflict was about political rivalry driven by economic interests. So, when the school was established, it aimed to heal past wounds, but it has since been transformed into a facility to train female leaders and independent women. Education will empower women to contribute to sustaining peace, and to the decision-making process. It is this empowerment that will prevent future conflicts in Poso.

As mentioned earlier, Poso and Bangsamoro's cases highlight the critical role that women play is limited to peace processes involvement. They are also key actors in creating a peace culture in post-conflict regions. More importantly, the cases highlight women's ability to navigate a society in conflict to heal mentally and emotionally from the wounds of the past, and to merge the community into one to ensure the region's sustainability.

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22 BBC News Indonesia. 2019. Poso yang tidak Anda ketahui: Kesaksian agen perdamaian Poso, Lian Gogali (Article in Bahasa Indonesia). <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-46745614>

23 Ibid.

## Policy Recommendations

From the findings and discussions of the SEAWPN webinar series and conference, the participants recommended several approaches to empower women's meaningful participation in peacebuilding and mainstream the community's WPS agenda.

First, in order to enhance women's participation in peace processes, women need to consider being subject specialists so that they can be taken seriously, and gain an edge over their male counterparts. By becoming a subject specialist in non-traditional areas such as decentralisation, economic reform and infrastructure, women can have an advantage over male peacebuilders whom are often less qualified for these roles. Their expertise and specification will enable them to reserve a seat at the negotiation table.

Second, women in the Track One peace negotiation should use their position to highlight women's issues and promote other women's works from different fields, or seek ways to involve those in Track Two peace negotiation at the discussion table. Advocating for quota increase of women in several specialist positions, and establishing a gender perspective commission to assess peace negotiations will mainstream the Women, Peace and Security agenda at the national institution level, and ultimately, to the public through government's policies. Such practices have already been done in other countries such as during the Colombia - FARC negotiations that appointed a special subcommittee to assess the peace agreement from a gendered perspective.

Third, women should use the feminist model of peacebuilding centred on the belief of power-sharing that seeks ways to combine each individual's expertise to complement one another and generate even greater power. This approach acknowledges the various professions and skills that each individual brings from different societies, and encourages every woman to play a role. Therefore, this peacebuilding approach can empower women's involvement in peace processes, and enhance collaboration to explore peacebuilding solutions.

Fourth, mainstreaming the Women, Peace and Security agenda cannot be done in isolation. Women need to engage with men to support women's empowerment within the broader Women, Peace and Security agenda, and to further engage with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), under its mandate as launched during the ASEAN HeForShe Campaign back in 2017.

Five, to achieve sustainable peace, it is vital that women's role in promoting a culture of peace should be supported by public and national institutions, so that the culture of peace educates and empowers all people.

Six, women and girls should meet their specific needs in humanitarian settings. As

women are often prevented from participating in peacebuilding due to their familial responsibilities, states should also offer other means of support, aside from providing them with the opportunity to participate. This includes providing the full range of accessible and affordable medical, legal, educational, psychosocial, housing, and livelihood services, following applicable laws and policies. Being provided with these supports will enable women to optimise their function in society, and bring a more significant contribution to peacebuilding efforts.

Seven, communal healing is critical in any way, but more so to overcome residual violence against individuals. This can be broken down in the form of positive activities supporting peace. The role of psychologists is crucial in making this communal healing effective.

## **Conclusion**

Historically women have always been omitted from peace processes. Only after the recent shift, have women been included in peace processes in the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, and other ASEAN member states; with the creation of possible future trajectories for women's roles in peace processes. Women's contributions to peace negotiations are currently limited to primarily Track Two, or informal peace negotiations, that do not involve the government. Therefore, the target should be women participation in the Track One peace efforts in order to improve current political-economic systems that do not prioritise peace and justice.

Both men and women must work together to ensure that frameworks and mechanisms can facilitate women's participation in peace processes. Ensuring women's involvement in peace processes is a collaborative effort between men and women. Institutions and organisations can become more representative and inclusive. This will drive policies and regulation to support WPS aims to achieve the initial goals for gender equality, which are at the heart of resolution 1325. It is crucial to analyse the future of the WPS so that they include various emerging issues such as climate, food, and water security. Therefore, women can directly participate in these important discussions.









Steering Committee SEAWP

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