foundations of WOMEN PEACE + SECURITY

Lessons and opportunities for transformative peace in Cambodia

Foundations of Women, Peace & Security (WPS)

Lessons and opportunities for transformative peace in Cambodia

An Introductory Handbook

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Foreword

It is with deep pride and hope that we present to you this Foundations of Women, Peace & Security (WPS) handbook published by Women Peace Makers (WPM). This resource is more than a publication; it is a call to action and a reflection of our collective journey toward building a more peaceful and gender just Cambodia.

The Women, Peace and Security agenda, born from the landmark United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, is a global framework that also sets out a transformative vision. It recognizes that sustainable peace is impossible without the full and meaningful participation of women, and that peace must be built not only in the absence of war, but in the presence of justice, equality, and dignity for all.

In Cambodia, the relevance of WPS is profound. Our nation has endured the trauma of conflict and the long road of recovery. Women have been central to this journey, rebuilding communities, preserving memory, and leading change. Yet, their contributions have too often gone unrecognized in formal peace processes and governance structures. This handbook seeks to play a part in changing this invisibility.

The evidence is clear that when women are included in peace processes, the outcomes are more durable and inclusive. Research shows that peace agreements are 35% more likely to last at least 15 years when women are involved. Moreover, countries with higher levels of gender equality are significantly less likely to resort to violence in resolving conflicts. These are not just statistics, they are a testament to the power of inclusive peacebuilding.

As Cambodia begins the process of developing its first National Action Plan on WPS, this handbook arrives at an important moment. It offers an accessible and context-specific guide to understanding and implementing the WPS agenda in our country. Drawing from Cambodia's unique experiences, from our leadership in international peacekeeping to the legacy of transitional justice and the rise of grassroots women's movements, this resource aims to bridge global norms with local realities.

The handbook is designed for a wide range of users, including government officials, civil society organizations, community leaders and peacebuilders, educators, researchers, and students. Importantly, this handbook is not just for women. It is for everyone who believe in the power of inclusive peace. Each of us has a role to play in advancing WPS. Whether by challenging harmful norms, supporting women's leadership, or ensuring that peacebuilding efforts are inclusive and intersectional, our collective actions matter.

This handbook integrates the emerging issues such as climate security, youth engagement, and the often-overlooked burden of care work. It also celebrates the resilience and leadership of Cambodian women who, despite systemic barriers, continue to shape our nation's future.

Together, let us commit to a Cambodia where peace is inclusive, justice is gendered, and every woman and girl in all their diversity can live free from fear and full of possibility.

In solidarity,
Women Peace Makers

Chapter 1

Global Foundations

The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, as established by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions, represents a transformative framework for ensuring the meaningful participation of women in peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and post-conflict recovery.

Over the last two decades, the agenda has expanded to address the intersections of gender, security, and justice globally, emphasising the four pillars of **Prevention, Protection, Relief and Recovery, and Participation**. Despite these advancements, significant gaps remain in translating global commitments into local realities, particularly in regions such as Southeast Asia.

This handbook aims to contextualise the WPS agenda within Cambodia, a nation with a profound history of resilience and recovery from conflict. By reflecting on Cambodia's unique experiences—its leadership in international peacekeeping, the Khmer Rouge Tribunal's transitional justice initiatives, and the leadership of grassroots women's movements—this resource explores **how the WPS framework can drive transformative peace in local contexts.** The handbook is structured around key themes and practical pathways, offering a comprehensive analysis of global frameworks, regional dynamics, and national pathways specific to Cambodia.

Throughout its chapters, the handbook examines the structural and cultural barriers impeding progress while celebrating successes led by civil society, government, and international partners.

It highlights the importance of intersectionality, recognising the diverse needs of women, including those from marginalised groups, and integrates perspectives from related agendas, such as Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) and climate security.

The final chapter provides recommendations, strategic entry points, and collaborative pathways for operationalising WPS in Cambodia. By doing so, it seeks to bridge the gap between policy and practice, offering practical advice for government agencies, CSOs, donors, and practitioners to drive meaningful change.

The handbook also underscores the importance of monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) frameworks to ensure that WPS initiatives remain accountable and responsive to evolving needs.

As Cambodia continues to navigate its journey towards an inclusive, sustainable, and just peace, it is hoped that this handbook will serve as a resource for stakeholders committed to embedding gender justice at the heart of security and governance.
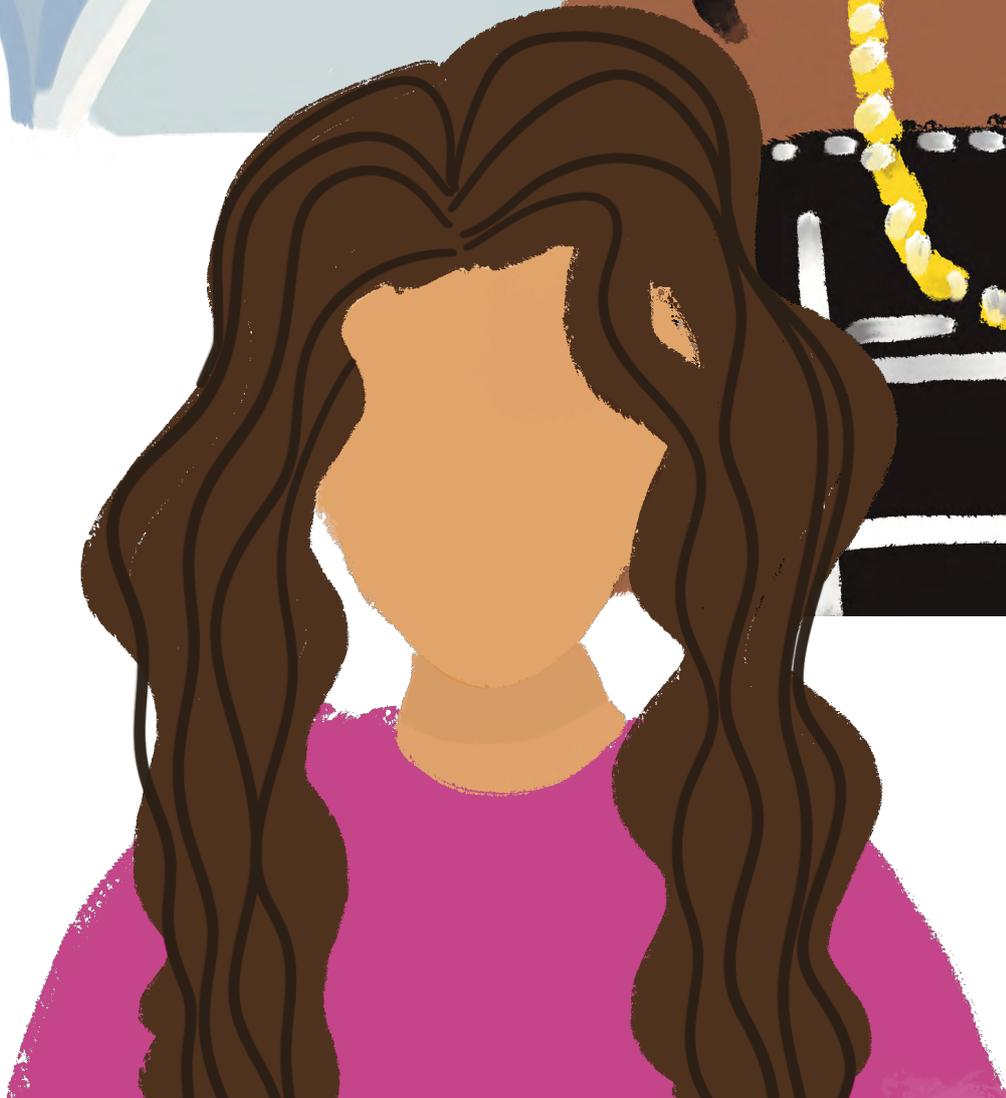
1.1. History and Significance

The WPS agenda emerged as a global response to the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls and the urgent need to enhance their participation in peacebuilding and security processes.

Its foundation lies in decades of advocacy by women-led movements, civil society organisations, and survivors of conflict who demanded recognition of their unique experiences and contributions to sustaining peace.

The landmark adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution **(UNSCR) 1325** in October 2000 marked a pivotal moment in international policy. This resolution was the first to explicitly recognise the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women and girls.

It acknowledged that women and girls are often disproportionately affected by conflict, including through gender- based violence such as sexual violence, displacement, and loss of livelihoods.

The resolution emphasised the importance of protecting women and girls from these impacts and integrating a gender perspective into conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and post- conflict recovery efforts. It also called for measures to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence during and after conflicts.

UNSCR 1325 laid out a **framework** for addressing women's rights and gender equality in conflict and post-conflict settings, focusing on four key pillars:
  i) prevention,
  ii) protection,
  iii) relief and recovery, and
  iv) participation.

Over the past 25 years, it has been reinforced by nine subsequent resolutions, collectively forming what has become known as the WPS agenda[1].

Before the formal adoption of UNSCR 1325, the role of women in peace and security had been systematically marginalised. Historical peace agreements, often brokered by male- dominated elites, rarely included women or prioritised their needs.

Yet, **women have long been critical actors** in peacebuilding at the grassroots level, mediating local disputes, providing essential services in times of crisis, and fostering resilience in their communities.

For example, in **Liberia**, women's peace activism was instrumental in ending the country's protracted civil war[2]. Organisations such as the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace used nonviolent protests and advocacy to pressure warring parties into peace talks, ultimately contributing to the signing of the Accra Peace Agreement in 2003.

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[1] The follow-up resolutions of UN SCR 1325 are Resolution 1820 of 19 June 2008, Resolution 1888 of 30 Sep. 2009, Resolution 1889 of 30 Sep. 2010, Resolution 1960 of 16 Dec. 2010, Resolution 2106 of 24 June 2013, Resolution 2122 of 18 Oct. 2013, Resolution 2242 of 13 Oct. 2015, Resolution 2467 of 23 Apr. 2019 and Resolution 2493 of 29 Oct. 2019.

The WPS agenda represents a **broader shift** in how peace and security are conceptualised globally. Traditionally, security has been framed in military terms, focusing on state sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The WPS agenda challenges this narrow understanding, advocating for a **human security framework** that prioritises the well-being and dignity of individuals and communities. It recognises that women's insecurity in conflict zones is often rooted in gender inequality, sexual and gender-based violence, and structural discrimination—issues that require comprehensive, intersectional solutions.

The significance of the WPS agenda extends beyond conflict-affected contexts. It has provided a **roadmap for integrating gender perspectives into national and regional security policies, peacekeeping missions, and development frameworks.** Over 100 countries have adopted National Action Plans (NAPs) to implement WPS principles at the national level[3].

These plans vary widely in scope and impact, reflecting the differing challenges and priorities of each context. For instance, the Philippines' 2023-2033 Plan aims to strengthen government collaboration with civil society organisations (CSOs) and to promote women's participation in local peace processes, while Colombia's 2024 NAP focuses on inclusive transitional justice and protection from gender-based violence (GBV)[4, 5].

Despite its progress, the WPS agenda continues to face significant challenges. Globally, women are underrepresented in formal peace processes, constituting less than 10% of negotiators in major peace agreements[6].

This is despite the fact that:

"Research has shown that countries with greater gender equality are more likely to resolve conflicts without violence and are less likely to use military force to resolve international disputes... Conversely, countries with more significant gender gaps are more likely to be involved in inter- and intrastate conflict" [7 citing 8].

Implementation gaps persist, particularly in fragile and conflict- affected states where resources and political will are often limited. Furthermore, the rise of authoritarianism and violent extremism in recent years has exacerbated threats to women's rights and civic space, undermining the gains made under the WPS framework[9].

Nevertheless, the WPS agenda remains a vital tool for advancing gender equality and building sustainable peace. Its increasing emphasis on **intersectionality**—acknowledging how factors like ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and disability intersect with gender—has created space for more inclusive approaches to security and peacebuilding.

In centring the experiences of women and girls, particularly those from marginalised communities, the WPS agenda challenges the structures of power that perpetuate conflict and inequality.

The adoption of the WPS agenda is not merely a symbolic victory but a testament to the power of advocacy and the critical importance of embedding gender perspectives in global peace and security efforts.

1.2. Core Concepts & Alignment with Global Frameworks

The WPS agenda is founded on the understanding that **sustainable peace is unattainable without the full inclusion of women** and the recognition of gendered experiences in conflict.

It redefines traditional approaches to security, shifting the focus from state-centric militarised notions to human security, which **centres the rights and well-being of individuals, particularly women and girls**.

At its core, WPS seeks to **address the structural inequalities that perpetuate conflict** and exclusion while promoting transformative and inclusive peacebuilding.

Core Concepts of WPS

1. **Human Security as the Foundation of Peace:**

Unlike conventional security paradigms that prioritise national sovereignty and military power, WPS emphasises human security, which addresses economic, environmental, digital, and personal threats to individuals and communities. Women and girls, who often face **intersecting vulnerabilities** during crises, are central to this framework; ensuring their safety, autonomy, and participation, creates the conditions for long-term peace.

2. **Transformative Justice:**

Transformative justice is integral to WPS, addressing not only the immediate harms of violence but also the societal inequalities that enable them. This approach seeks to rebuild relationships, restore dignity to survivors, and transform systems of oppression to prevent future violence. Examples include **truth and reconciliation** processes that integrate women's voices, as seen in Colombia[10].

3. Intersectionality in Peacebuilding:

Intersectionality acknowledges that the experiences of conflict and peace are shaped by overlapping identities such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, disability, and age. This concept ensures that WPS strategies are **inclusive** of all women, especially those from **marginalised** communities. For instance, the inclusion of Indigenous and ethnic minority women in local peace processes provides valuable perspectives that often remain overlooked in broader frameworks.

4. Agency and Localisation:

WPS increasingly challenges top-down approaches by recognising the essential role of grassroots women's leadership in peacebuilding. **Local women's networks** and organisations often serve as the first responders in conflict- affected communities, mediating disputes and providing social support. Supporting their agency not only enhances the legitimacy of peace processes but also ensures that solutions are **culturally relevant and sustainable.**

5. Gender-Responsive Accountability Mechanisms:

Holding governments, international organisations, and other stakeholders **accountable** for implementing WPS commitments is a cornerstone of the agenda. Mechanisms such as National Action Plans (NAPs), shadow reporting under CEDAW, and independent monitoring by **civil society** can serve to increase **transparency** and strengthen **enforcement**.

6. Transformative Peace

Transformative peace goes beyond the cessation of violence (often termed negative peace) and addresses the root causes of conflict by challenging systems of oppression, inequality, and exclusion. It aims to rebuild relationships, institutions, and societal norms in ways that promote justice, inclusivity, and long-term resilience.

This concept aligns closely with **positive peace** and recognises the need for deep structural change to prevent future conflict, rather than focusing only on short-term stability. A transformative approach to peace foregrounds the participation and leadership of historically marginalised groups— especially women, ethnic minorities, and queer communities—as essential to achieving sustainable and just outcomes.

Typologies of Peace

Understanding the different types of peace is key to navigating peace and security work. While these terms are often used interchangeably, they refer to distinct concepts and practices.

Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping refers to the deployment of international personnel, usually under the auspices of the United Nations, to help maintain ceasefires and prevent the recurrence of violence in conflict-affected settings. It often involves military and police forces operating under **strict mandates of neutrality** and non-use of force except in self-defence. While peacekeeping operations are important for stabilisation, they are limited in addressing the root causes of conflict.

Peacemaking

Peacemaking involves **active efforts to negotiate and mediate an end to conflict**. It includes diplomatic initiatives, high-level negotiations, and formal dialogue processes aimed at achieving ceasefires or political settlements. Peacemaking is often led by national or international actors, but can overlook community voices if not designed inclusively.

Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding focuses on addressing the underlying drivers of conflict to create long-term sustainable peace.

It encompasses a wide range of activities—from justice and reconciliation to education and economic development—that seek to transform relationships, institutions, and structural inequalities. Peacebuilding is often locally driven and takes place before, during, and after violent conflict.

Peace Processes

The term peace processes refers to the broader sequence of initiatives that aim to resolve a conflict and establish lasting peace.

This includes formal negotiations, peace agreements, and implementation mechanisms, but also informal and grassroots efforts. While "peace process" may suggest a single event or timeline, in reality, it is complex and often non-linear, with both setbacks and progress.

Alignment with Global <u>Frameworks</u>

1 The Sustainable Development Goals:

The SDGs provide a complementary framework to WPS by addressing the systemic roots of inequality and conflict. Goal 5 (Gender Equality) explicitly seeks to end all forms of violence against women and girls, while Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) highlights the importance of inclusive decision- making and the rule of law. SDGs underscore the interconnectedness of gender, development, and peacebuilding.

2 CEDAW & General Recommendation 30:

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), particularly GR No. 30, is a critical legal framework underpinning WPS. It extends the **application** of human rights principles to conflict- affected contexts, including provisions for women's participation in conflict prevention and recovery. It also emphasises the responsibility of states to address structural discrimination and uphold gender-sensitive justice systems.

"At the international level of global peace processes, research has found that when women are included, there is a 20% increase in the probability of an agreement lasting at least 2 years, and a 35% increase in the probability of an agreement lasting at least 15 years"

3 The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995):

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995): This framework paved the way for WPS by **identifying women and armed conflict** as a critical area of concern. It called for increased representation of women in conflict resolution, disarmament, and post-conflict reconstruction. Now 30 years on, the Beijing Platform remains a vital advocacy tool for linking WPS to broader gender equality agendas.

4 Humanitarian and Refugee Framworks:

Humanitarian frameworks such as the **Global Compact on Refugees and Sphere Standards** and bodies like the GBV Area of Responsibility (AoR) complement the WPS agenda by addressing the gendered impacts of displacement and crises. They reinforce the need for protection and participation of women and girls in humanitarian responses, ensuring that their specific needs are met and their voices heard [11].

5 Integration with Broader Human Rights Frameworks:

WPS intersects with a range of global human rights instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). These connections provide a holistic basis for addressing GBV in conflict, disaster and other emergency settings, promote access to justice to women and girls, and aim to promote equality in all areas of peace and security.

1.3. The WPS Global Architecture

The WPS architecture represents an **evolving and interconnected framework** of international commitments, norms, and practices aimed at advancing gender equality and sustainable peace. Rooted in foundational documents, resolutions, and mechanisms, this architecture underpins the global response to the inclusion of women in peace and security.

UNSCR 1325 : A FOUNDATIONAL MILESTONE

Adopted in 2000, UNSCR 1325 laid the groundwork for the WPS agenda, affirming the critical role of women in preventing and resolving conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconstruction.

It called for integrating a gender perspective into peace and security processes, emphasising the protection of women and girls from violence and the importance of their active participation in decision-making.

Resolution 1325 also served as a rallying point for subsequent resolutions, shaping a growing normative framework. It underscored the need for member states to adopt National Action Plans (NAPs) to translate global commitments into tangible, context-specific actions at the national level. This marked a shift toward more structured and accountable approaches to WPS.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK

The adoption of subsequent WPS-related resolutions, expanded and deepened the scope of the agenda.

These resolutions addressed specific dimensions of WPS, including conflict-related sexual violence, women's economic empowerment, and the protection of displaced women and girls.

Each resolution contributed to refining the principles of the WPS agenda, ensuring that its architecture remained dynamic and responsive to emerging global challenges.

For instance, UNSCR 1820 explicitly recognised sexual violence as a tactic of war, calling for targeted measures to address

impunity. UNSCR 2122 focused on women's leadership in peacebuilding, while UNSCR 2467 introduced survivor-centred approaches to justice and protection.

Together, these resolutions represent the scaffolding of a comprehensive framework to operationalise the WPS agenda.

In addition to these resolutions, new initiatives such as the WPS and Humanitarian Action (WPS-HA) Compact, launched in 2021 at the Generation Equality Forum, aim to strengthen commitments and accountability mechanisms, further embedding WPS principles within humanitarian and development efforts [12].

National Action Plans: Bridging Global and Local

One of the most significant mechanisms of the WPS architecture is the National Action Plan (NAP), a tool enabling governments to localise and implement the agenda. Over **100 countries** have adopted NAPs, tailoring the WPS principles to their unique political, social, and cultural contexts[13]. These plans often prioritise areas such as capacity- building for security personnel, transitional justice (TJ) mechanisms, and strengthening institutions to respond to gender-based violence.

For example, Côte d'Ivoire's NAP highlighted protection initiatives, while Ghana's NAP prioritised addressing the intersection of conflict and displacement through a gender lens[14].

The **diversity of NAPs reflects the flexible nature** of the WPS architecture, designed to accommodate the distinct needs of different regions and contexts.

Global Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms

The WPS architecture also includes robust mechanisms for monitoring progress and ensuring accountability. The annual reports of the UN Secretary-General on WPS and conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) provide comprehensive reviews of global implementation, highlighting both successes and persistent gaps[15].

Additionally, CSOs have played a key role in monitoring WPS commitments, producing shadow reports to hold governments accountable to NAPs[16].

Further, UN Women as a dedicated entity for gender equality has enhanced coordination and advocacy efforts across the UN system.

Through its work, UN Women supports member states in implementing WPS commitments and provides technical expertise to integrate a gender perspective into peace operations, development programmes, and policymaking[17].

Challenges and Emerging Directions

While the WPS architecture represents a groundbreaking advancement, it is not without challenges.

Persistent gaps in funding, uneven implementation of NAPs, and limited participation of grassroots women in policymaking processes are recurring concerns.

Further, as new forms of conflict emerge, such as cyber warfare and climate- induced displacement, **the WPS agenda must continue to adapt**.

Looking ahead, the architecture's strength will lie in its ability to remain flexible and responsive to emerging challenges, while staying true to its core principles.

The upcoming 25 year anniversary of UNSCR 1325 provides a global moment to reflect upon and revitalise the WPS agenda, in the midst of an increasingly concerning global conflict, peace, and security landscape where the systems and mechanisms of the established rules-based international order are themselves under threat[18, 19].

1.4. The WPS Agenda: Four Intersecting Pillars

1 PREVENTION

2 PROTECTION

3

RELIEF & RECOVERY

4

PARTICIPATION

The WPS Agenda, anchored in UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions, revolves around four central and intersecting pillars:

1. Prevention

2. Protection

3. Relief & Recovery

4. Participation

These pillars are designed to ensure that the unique perspectives, needs, and leadership of women and girls are fully integrated into global peace and security efforts.

This section explores each pillar in detail, highlighting its global significance and interconnectedness within the broader WPS framework.

PILLAR 1

PREVENTION

Prevention is the cornerstone of the WPS Agenda, aiming to address the root causes of conflict and prevent the outbreak of violence through proactive and inclusive measures.

Central to this pillar is the recognition that structural inequalities, such as gender discrimination, exclusion from decision-making, and economic disenfranchisement, often fuel violence and instability.

Prevention strategies therefore focus on addressing systemic barriers, such as promoting gender equality, strengthening the rule of law, and promoting inclusive governance.

At the heart of prevention lies the belief that addressing the structural drivers of inequality creates conditions for sustainable peace.

This requires recognising and transforming unequal power dynamics that marginalise women and other historically excluded groups. For instance, investing in women's economic empowerment not only enhances their autonomy but also reduces their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.

In addition, prevention efforts must address intersectional vulnerabilities, ensuring that women from diverse ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds have equal access to opportunities and resources.

Globally, prevention initiatives have underscored the importance of community-based peacebuilding efforts that centre women's voices.

In **Colombia**, for example, women's grassroots organisations played a critical role in brokering ceasefires and advocating for the inclusion of gender- sensitive provisions in the national peace agreement. These provisions emphasised issues such as land ownership rights, GBV, and the inclusion of women in post- conflict governance. Such examples demonstrate how prevention is not merely about averting immediate conflict but also about promoting sustainable peace by transforming societal structures that perpetuate inequality[20].

Education is another vital component of prevention. Integrating gender equality and peace education into national curricula equips young people with the tools to challenge discriminatory norms and behaviours.

For example, the Generations for Peace Programme in **Uganda** has successfully engaged communities in dialogue about gendered violence and encouraged young people to become advocates for peaceful coexistence[21].

Similarly, efforts to strengthen women's access to education and vocational training in post-conflict settings, such as **Sierra Leone**, have contributed to reducing the risk of renewed violence by creating more inclusive and equitable societies[22].

Prevention also relies on ensuring women's representation in early warning systems and conflict prevention mechanisms. Studies have shown that women are often the first to detect signs of escalating violence within their communities, making their inclusion in these processes essential.

In **Kenya**, women-led networks have been instrumental in reporting human rights violations and diffusing localised tensions through dialogue and mediation. These initiatives highlight the value of leveraging women's knowledge and experiences to build resilience against conflict[23].

Furthermore, the prevention pillar highlights the importance of addressing the links between climate change, resource scarcity, and conflict.

Environmental degradation disproportionately impacts women and girls, particularly in rural and low-income areas, exacerbating existing inequalities and fuelling competition for scarce resources.

Prevention strategies must therefore adopt a gender-sensitive approach to climate action, ensuring that women are included in decision-making processes related to land use, water management, and disaster preparedness. For instance, women-led reforestation projects in the **Sahel** region of Africa have contributed not only to environmental restoration but also to reducing inter-community tensions over resource use[24].

Ultimately, the success of the prevention pillar depends on the meaningful inclusion of women in all aspects of peacebuilding and governance. As demonstrated by global examples, prevention is not simply about mitigating the risk of violence but about creating societies where equality, justice, and human security are prioritised.

PILLAR

2

PROTECTION

The protection pillar focuses on safeguarding women and girls from violence, exploitation, and abuse in conflict and post-conflict settings. It emphasises the need to ensure access to justice, psychosocial support, and healthcare, particularly for survivors of GBV.

Protection measures extend beyond immediate physical safety, encompassing broader systemic reforms to create safer environments for women human rights defenders (WHRDs) and to address the unique vulnerabilities faced by displaced women and girls.

These efforts are integral to promoting a sustainable and inclusive peace, where survivors are supported in reclaiming their agency and dignity.

Globally, the implementation of protection frameworks often hinges on the development of policies such as National Action Plans (NAPs).

These plans are instrumental in localising the WPS Agenda by outlining specific measures to safeguard women and girls in conflict-affected contexts.

For example, **Sierra Leone's** NAP is a notable case, incorporating gender- sensitive security training for peacekeepers, national law enforcement agencies, and community protection mechanisms. These measures have created pathways for more responsive and effective protection frameworks that acknowledge and address women's lived realities[25].

In **Liberia**, the establishment of specialised units within the police force has demonstrated the potential of targeted interventions to improve survivors' access to justice and accountability. These units have increased awareness and responsiveness to SGBV, although challenges such as a strained judicial system, and stigma, persist[26].

Protection, however, is not merely reactive; it demands a proactive and intersectional approach that considers the overlapping vulnerabilities of individuals based on factors such as ethnic-

ity, age, disability, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.

Displaced women and girls, for instance, face heightened risks of violence in refugee camps or informal settlements, where inadequate infrastructure and limited access to resources exacerbate their vulnerability.

Protection measures must therefore address these structural inequalities by ensuring that displaced women are included in decision-making processes related to camp management and resource allocation.

In **Bangladesh's** Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazaar, initiatives led by women volunteers have not only enhanced safety but also nurtured a sense of community resilience.

Access to healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health services, is another critical component of the protection pillar. It has long been known that conflict exacerbates pre-existing barriers to healthcare, in ways that disproportionately impact women and girls.

The protection pillar also underscores the need to create enabling environments for WHRDs, who often face targeted violence and repression for their activism.

In contexts such as **Colombia** and the **Philippines**, WHRDs advocating for land rights and environmental justice have faced significant threats, ranging from harassment to physical violence[27].

Protection measures for these defenders must go beyond individual security, encompassing systemic reforms to address impunity and ensure accountability for crimes against activists.

Strengthening international advocacy and solidarity networks can also provide WHRDs, independent journalists, and other civil society actors with critical platforms to amplify their voices and seek protection.

Moreover, the protection pillar highlights the importance of integrating community-based approaches into broader protection frameworks. Local women's organisations are often at the forefront of identifying and addressing protection gaps, leveraging their contextual knowledge to implement solutions that are both effective and culturally relevant.

For instance, in **Malawi**, women's groups have established safe spaces for survivors of violence, offering not only shelter but also legal aid and vocational training. These initiatives demonstrate the transformative potential of protection measures that are rooted in community ownership and empowerment[28].

Education is also a key focus of relief and recovery efforts, ensuring that children, particularly girls, can continue their education despite disruptions caused by conflict or disaster. Schooling provides a sense of normalcy and hope for the future, while also reducing the risk of child marriage and other forms of exploitation.

In **Ukraine**, temporary learning centres have been established to ensure that children, especially girls, children with disabilities, and internally displaced children can access education and extracurricular activities[29].

Relief and recovery efforts must also address the legal and institutional barriers that often impede women's access to justice and rights. Post- conflict legal reforms are critical in ensuring that women can claim property rights, access compensation, and hold perpetrators of violence accountable.

For instance, in **Colombia**, women's advocacy groups successfully lobbied for the inclusion of gender-sensitive reparations in the national peace agreement, ensuring that women who had lost land or been subjected to violence could seek redress. These measures not only support individual recovery but also promote societal accountability and gender equality[30].

Ultimately, relief and recovery are not simply about returning to the status quo; they present an opportunity for transformative change. Recovery processes can challenge structural inequalities, build resilience, and create more inclusive societies, by centring women's voices and recognising their agency.

**Relief &
Recovery**

Relief and recovery address the immediate and long-term needs of women and girls in post-conflict and post-crisis settings, ensuring they have access to education, healthcare, livelihoods, legal redress, and psychosocial support.

This pillar is not only about rebuilding physical infrastructure but also about restoring social systems and empowering women to play a central role in recovery processes.

It underscores the importance of survivor-centred approaches that recognise women's agency in rebuilding their lives and communities, while addressing systemic barriers that may hinder their recovery. Relief and recovery efforts are thus a critical bridge between humanitarian action and long-term development.

In the aftermath of crises, whether natural disasters or armed conflicts, women often take on leadership roles within their communities, organising relief distribution, providing care, and advocating for recovery processes that reflect their specific needs.

For example, during post-tsunami recovery efforts in **Aceh**, Indonesia, women-led organisations fought to play a critical role in distributing relief, rebuilding housing, and advocating for disaster preparedness policies that consider gendered vulnerabilities. Their initiatives not only addressed immediate needs but also laid the groundwork for longer-term resilience by ensuring women's voices were more central to the recovery agenda[31].

Access to healthcare is a vital component of relief and recovery, particularly for women and girls who may have experienced sexual violence or other trauma during conflict or disaster.

The provision of sexual and reproductive health services, counselling, and mental health support is essential to enable survivors to heal and rebuild their lives.

In **Nepal's** post-earthquake recovery, mobile clinics were deployed to reach rural areas, providing women with antenatal care, family planning services, and support for survivors of GBV. These mobile units ensured that recovery efforts were inclusive and responsive to the needs of marginalised groups, addressing barriers such as distance and stigma[32].

Livelihood restoration is another crucial aspect of relief and recovery, as economic independence often determines women's ability to participate in broader recovery processes. Recovery programs that integrate vocational training and access to credit can empower women to rebuild their livelihoods and contribute to their communities' recovery.

In **Rwanda**, women's cooperatives established after the genocide have played a transformative role in not only rebuilding the economy but also fostering reconciliation and social cohesion. These cooperatives demonstrate how economic recovery can be a platform for healing and empowerment when women are actively involved[33].

PILLAR 4

PARTICIPATION

The participation pillar seeks to amplify women's leadership and decision- making roles in peace and security processes, recognising their essential contributions to achieving durable and inclusive solutions. Evidence demonstrates that peace agreements reached with the meaningful participation of women are more likely to be sustained over the long term.

This pillar prioritises not only women's involvement in formal peace negotiations but also their representation in governance, security sectors, and multilateral peace operations. Ensuring women's participation is a fundamental aspect of achieving gender equality and transformative peace.

Globally, **Liberia** stands out as a powerful example of women's leadership in peacebuilding. Following years of civil war, the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace movement mobilised thousands of women to pressure warring factions to engage in dialogue. Their efforts played a crucial role in ending the conflict and ushering in the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Beyond negotiations, these women continued to influence the country's recovery agenda, advocating for policies that addressed the needs of survivors and prioritised gender equality. Liberia's post-conflict transformation, including the election of Africa's first female president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, underscores the potential of women-led movements to reshape national trajectories[34].

Participation extends beyond formal political processes to include local and informal leadership by women in fostering community resilience and recovery. Women are often at the forefront of grassroots initiatives, organising community dialogues, managing resources, and leading reconstruction efforts in the aftermath of crises.

For instance, in the **Philippines**, women's organisations in conflict-affected Mindanao have been instrumental in mediating local disputes and advocating for gender-sensitive provisions within the Bangsamoro peace process. These efforts demonstrate that women's participation is not confined to elite spaces but is equally critical at the community level, where the foundations of sustainable peace are often laid[35].

Enhancing women's participation in security sectors is another critical component of this pillar. Globally, efforts to recruit and retain women in police forces, militaries, and peacekeeping missions have gained momentum, with evidence showing that women bring unique perspectives and approaches to security challenges.

For example, the deployment of all-female peacekeeping units in **Liberia** (from **India**) has highlighted the effectiveness of gender-sensitive security practices in building trust with local communities and addressing issues such as sexual violence. These initiatives underscore the need to integrate women into traditionally male-dominated sectors to create inclusive and accountable security institutions[36].

Efforts to enhance participation also require addressing systemic barriers that hinder women's leadership, such as gender discrimination, lack of access to education, and socio-cultural norms that limit women's public roles.

Targeted **capacity-building programs can empower women** with the skills and resources needed to engage in decision-making processes effectively. In Rwanda, for example, post-genocide initiatives prioritised women's leadership, resulting in the country achieving one of the highest rates of female representation in parliament globally.

These efforts have had ripple effects, encouraging women's participation across various sectors and driving forward national policies that reflect gender-sensitive priorities.

Intersectionality is crucial to the participation pillar, recognising that women's experiences and opportunities are shaped by intersecting identities such as ethnicity, age, disability, and socio-economic status. This lens ensures that efforts to enhance participation are inclusive of marginalised groups and tailored to diverse contexts. For instance, Indigenous women in **Guatemala** have been at the forefront of campaigns advocating for land rights and justice for wartime atrocities, illustrating how participation can be a pathway to addressing broader social injustices[37].

Ultimately, the participation pillar is about more than ensuring women have a seat at the table—it is about creating spaces where their voices are heard, valued, and integrated into decision-making. Through prioritising women's participation, peace and security processes can become more equitable, inclusive, and reflective of the diverse needs of societies, laying the foundation for sustainable peace.

"Unfortunately, the [UN Women 2015] Global Study demonstrates that only a small percentage of women are involved in peace processes.

The positive results of the women's active leadership and participation in peace processes are clearly proven by empirical data.

However, the numerous logistical, financial, and cultural barriers to women's full participation are still evident"[38].

Interconnectedness
of the pillars

While each pillar represents a distinct area of focus, their interconnectedness is essential for the holistic implementation of the WPS Agenda.

For instance, effective prevention relies on meaningful participation, just as protection measures must be informed by relief and recovery initiatives.

These linkages reflect the broader goal of the WPS Agenda: to create an inclusive, sustainable peace that **addresses both the structural and immediate needs** of women and girls.

By framing peace and security through these four pillars, the WPS Agenda provides a comprehensive framework that recognises women as active agents rather than passive recipients in shaping global peace processes.

The later sections of this handbook will delve deeper into the practical applications of these pillars at the regional and national levels, as well as their relevance in the Cambodian context.
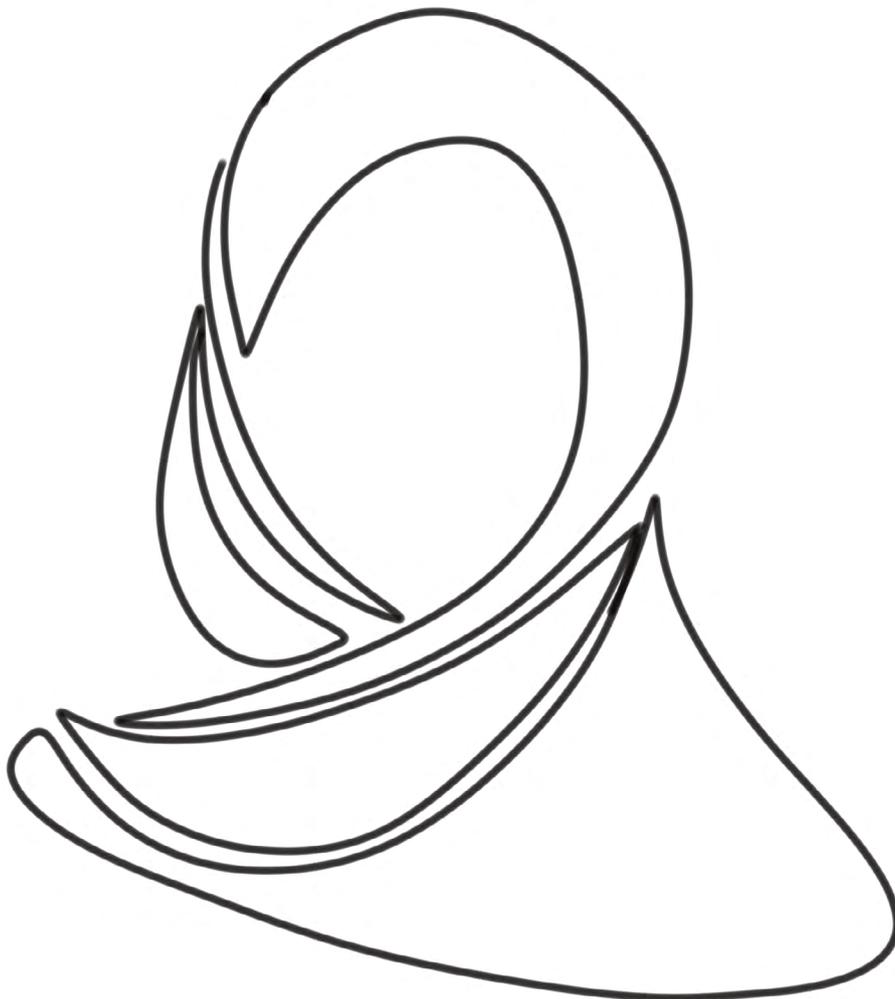
1.5 Youth, Peace, & Security

The Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda, introduced through UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250 in 2015, has brought global attention to the vital role of young people in peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and post-conflict recovery.

The YPS Agenda recognises young people not only as victims of conflict but also as **agents of change** with unique perspectives and capacities to drive peace. Key pillars of the agenda align with WPS and focus on youth participation, protection, prevention, and partnerships in peace/security processes.

However, implementation has lagged behind due to **systemic barriers** such as inadequate funding, institutional inertia, and entrenched societal perceptions that often exclude youth from meaningful decision-making roles.

Indeed, despite its transformative potential, the agenda has faced significant challenges in achieving the level of institutionalisation and prioritisation that the WPS Agenda has garnered since UNSCR 1325 in 2000.

While the YPS agenda underscores the importance of youth inclusion in decision- making and peace processes, the **absence of formal mechanisms** and limited political commitment have hindered its full realisation.

In contrast, the WPS Agenda has benefited from decades of advocacy and the establishment of national action plans (NAPs), which have provided a clear roadmap for operationalisation. The absence of a similar structured approach for YPS has resulted in fragmented progress across regions and states.

Youth-led CSOs and networks have been at the forefront of advancing the YPS agenda around the world, often filling the gaps left by governments and multilateral institutions[39].

From grassroots peacebuilding efforts in conflict-affected areas to international advocacy campaigns, these organisations have highlighted the lived experiences of young people and demonstrated their capacity to contribute to sustainable peace.

For example, in countries like **Nigeria**[40] and **Colombi**a[41], youth organisations and youth-led initiatives have successfully mediated local disputes, engaged in transitional justice processes, and advocated for the inclusion of youth-specific provisions in peace agreements. Yet, their efforts are often constrained by limited resources, tokenistic engagement from policymakers, and a lack of access to formal power structures.

One critical area of intersection between the WPS and YPS agendas lies in their shared emphasis on addressing structural inequalities that perpetuate conflict and exclusion. Lessons from the WPS agenda, such as the importance of subsequent UNSCRs to reinforce and expand the framework, could inform the YPS agenda's future trajectory.

For instance, calls for a follow-up resolution to **UNSCR 2250** could focus on strengthening accountability mechanisms, mandating youth-inclusive NAPs, and increasing financial allocations for youth- focused peace initiatives.

The YPS agenda's limited integration into national and regional policies remains a key obstacle. While some countries, such as **Finland**[42], have adopted national strategies to advance YPS principles, many states have yet to take concrete steps toward implementation.

This disparity reflects a broader challenge: the lack of political will and institutional capacity to prioritise youth within peace and security frameworks.

Moreover, intersecting vulnerabilities such as gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status further marginalise specific groups of young people, underscoring the need for intersectional approaches that recognise and address these dynamics.

Advancing the YPS agenda requires a concerted approach that includes stronger partnerships between governments, international organisations, and youth-led CSOs.

It also necessitates a shift in narrative —from viewing young people as passive beneficiaries of peacebuilding efforts to recognising them as essential actors in shaping sustainable peace.

Through addressing existing gaps and building on lessons from the WPS agenda, the YPS framework has the potential to transform peace and security policies and ensure that youth voices, especially those of young women, girls, and marginalised youth, are at the centre of decision-making processes.

1.6 Emerging Issues

The WPS agenda is dynamic, continually evolving to address emerging global challenges and integrate innovative approaches.

This section explores four critical themes that shape the current and future trajectory of WPS: human security, holistic peace, accountability, and reporting.

Human Security: Reframing Peace and Development

Traditional notions of security often centre on state sovereignty and military defence. However, the WPS agenda has been instrumental in advocating for a broader concept of human security, which prioritises the safety, dignity, and well- being of individuals.

This paradigm shift recognises that security is not limited to the absence of war but includes freedom from fear, want, and indignity.

Human security challenges are deeply gendered. Women and girls often face heightened vulnerabilities due to displacement, economic instability, and systemic inequalities. For example, climate-induced displacement in the **Pacific** region disproportionately impacts women, who are more likely to lose access to land, livelihoods, and social protection systems during environmental crises. Addressing these challenges requires integrating gender-responsive strategies into climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction (DRR) initiatives.

Moreover, human security underscores the interconnectedness of global threats, such as pandemics, cyber-attacks, and resource conflicts. These threats demand comprehensive approaches that centre women's participation in decision-making spaces, from community disaster management committees to international health governance platforms.

Holistic Peace: Beyond Ceasefires and Treaties

The WPS agenda advocates for holistic peace, which extends beyond the cessation of hostilities to address the root causes of conflict and promote sustainable, inclusive development. This approach encompasses economic empowerment, social cohesion, and transformative justice, recognising that peace is only durable when it addresses systemic inequalities.

Holistic peace also integrates a gender lens into post-conflict reconstruction efforts. For instance, reparations programs in **Colombia** have included gender- specific measures to support women survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. These measures aim to restore dignity and provide avenues for economic and social reintegration, demonstrating how holistic approaches can create lasting impacts for affected communities.

The concept of holistic peace aligns closely with the **SDGs**, particularly Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).

Accountability: Holding Systems and Actors Responsible

Accountability is a cornerstone of the WPS agenda, ensuring that commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment translate into tangible outcomes.

This requires robust mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the implementation of National Action Plans (NAPs), regional frameworks, and international resolutions. One critical tool for accountability is gender-responsive budgeting, which allocates financial resources to programs that advance WPS goals. Countries like Rwanda have demonstrated how gender budgeting can enhance accountability, with funds directed toward women's economic empowerment, education, and health in post-conflict recovery.

Accountability also involves addressing impunity for GBV. The **International Criminal Court (ICC)** has set precedents by prosecuting sexual violence as a war crime, sending a strong signal that GBV is a violation of international law.

However, challenges remain, including underreporting, insufficient legal frameworks, and limited access to justice for survivors in conflict-affected regions.

Additionally, accountability extends to non-state actors and international organisations. Humanitarian agencies must uphold principles of **Do No Harm** and ensure their interventions do not perpetuate existing inequalities.

Transparent reporting and inclusive monitoring mechanisms are essential to hold these actors accountable for their impact on vulnerable populations.

Reporting: Bridging the Gap Between Policy and Practice

Effective reporting is pivotal to bridging the gap between high-level commitments and grassroots realities. The annual Secretary-General's Report on WPS serves as a key mechanism for tracking progress, highlighting successes, and identifying gaps in implementation. These reports provide evidence-based insights that inform policy revisions and resource allocations.

However, reporting is often hindered by inconsistent data collection, a lack of gender-disaggregated statistics, and limited participation of civil society. Addressing these gaps requires strengthening local capacities for data collection and analysis. Participatory approaches, where communities co- design monitoring tools, can enhance the quality and relevance of reporting.

Emerging technologies also offer opportunities to improve reporting. For example, digital platforms can facilitate real-time data collection on conflict- related human rights abuses, enabling timely interventions.

However, the use of technology must be accompanied by safeguards to protect the privacy and security of vulnerable populations.

Acknowledging and responding to caregiving realities:

The final emerging issue is that of care, which remains an often-overlooked yet fundamental aspect of sustaining peace, security, and gender equality, as women and gender-diverse people –particularly in conflict-affected and fragile settings– **continue to bear the disproportionate burden of unpaid and underpaid care work.**

This limits their full participation in peacebuilding, governance, and economic recovery, while the absence of care-sensitive policies and infrastructure further entrenches gender inequalities and hinders efforts to build inclusive, resilient, and sustainable peace.

There is an **emerging consensus** that the WPS agenda must expand its focus to recognise the centrality of care in enhancing peace and security. Care work–whether paid or unpaid, formal or informal–is a fundamental yet often invisible component of security and resilience.

> *In a 2020 survey among global peacebuilding and development practitioners with caring responsibilities, 92% said this had impacted their work in the sector, while 80% said their caring responsibilities hindered career progression & curtailed promotion opportunities[43].*

Forthcoming research from Women Peace Makers and Monash University argues that a gender-responsive WPS agenda must account for the ways that care responsibilities shape women's participation in peace processes, governance, and security institutions.[1]

The lack of investment in care infrastructure–such as affordable childcare, parental leave, and social protections–not only exacerbates gender inequalities but also limits the ability of women and gender-diverse people to engage fully in conflict prevention, resolution, and recovery efforts.

Moreover, the burden of care is exacerbated in crisis settings, where displacement, economic precarity, and the destruction of health and social services further intensify gendered inequalities.

A holistic security framework must integrate care-responsive policies that ensure equitable redistribution of care work, strengthen social protections, and recognise care as a critical dimension of peace and stability.

Integrating care into WPS aligns with broader global frameworks, including SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), reinforcing the need for policies that support both economic justice and sustainable peace.

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[1] WPM & Monash Global Peace & Security Centre (2025, forthcoming), Peace, Gender and Care in Cambodia: Pilot Study Report.

Chapter 2

Regional Contexts

Regional Action Plans (RAPs) and strategies are instrumental in translating the global WPS agenda into actionable frameworks tailored to specific regional contexts. RAPs aim to promote collaboration among member states and harmonising policies, and to address cross-border peace and security challenges while reflecting region-specific priorities.

Regional Action Plans and Strategies

African Union Continental Results Framework for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the WPS Agenda in Africa (2018-2028)

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Plan of Action on WPS (2022)

Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) Regional Action Plan (RAP) for the implementation of Resolution 1325 and related Security Council resolutions (2020-2024)

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS): Guidelines on WPS (2020)

European Union (EU) EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2019-2024)

International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) Regional Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 (2018-2023)

League of Arab States (LAS) Executive Action Plan to Protect Women in the Arab Region: Peace and Security (2015-2030)

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Women Peace and Security Policy (2024)

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Implementing the WPS Agenda in the OSCE Region (2020)

Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Regional Action Plan (2012-2015)

Southern African Development Community (SADC) Regional Strategy on WPS (2018-2022)

The East African Community (EAC) Regional Framework on UNSC 1325 (2015-2019)

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa Regional Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008). (2023-2030)

Source: WPS Focal Points Network <https://wpsfocalpointsnetwork.org/regional-action-plans>.

EUROPE

The European Union (EU) has been a leader in formalising the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda through comprehensive policy frameworks, leveraging its influence as a global actor. The **EU Strategic Approach to WPS**, adopted in 2018, and its accompanying **Action Plan (2019– 2024)**, integrate WPS principles into external action and security policies. These frameworks emphasise women's participation in peace negotiations, addressing conflict-related sexual violence, and ensuring gender-sensitive humanitarian responses[44].

The EU's mechanisms include funding WPS projects in fragile and conflict- affected regions and implementing gender-sensitive approaches in Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions. For example, the EU has actively supported women-led reconciliation initiatives in the **Western Balkans**[45].

However, critiques have pointed to inconsistencies in implementation across member states and the need for stronger accountability measures[46].

AFRICA

The framing of the WPS agenda in Africa "finds its history and origin in the Windhoek Declaration [of] 2000, which led to the birth and adoption of UNSCR 1325"[47].

Since then, Africa has made progress in terms of providing legal and policy frameworks; establishing institutional mechanisms for implementation of the WPS agenda.

Over thirty of its member states have developed national action plans (NAPs) to implement the WPS agenda, while robust regional frameworks have also been led by the African Union (AU).

For example, the Maputo Protocol provides a comprehensive foundation for women's rights, including participation in political processes and social equality.

Building upon this, the AU adopted the Continental Results Framework (CRF) for Monitoring and Reporting on the Implementation of the WPS Agenda in Africa (2018–2028). The CRF serves as a tool to enhance accountability among member states by systematically tracking progress in implementing WPS commitments.

Subregional organisations have also been active in operationalising WPS principles.

For example, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has launched RAPs and, in 2021, comprehensive Guidelines on Women, Peace, and Security which aim to support member states in integrating WPS principles into national policies and programs, providing a comprehensive regional approach to gender mainstreaming in peace and security efforts[48].

AMERICAS

Across the Americas, despite lacking a formalised RAP, regional organisations have made efforts to incorporate WPS principles into broader human rights and development agendas.

The Organization of American States (OAS), through its **Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM)**, has been active in promoting gender equality and women's rights.

The CIM has increasingly worked to integrate WPS principles, emphasising the importance of women's participation in peace and security matters[49].

Alongside the OAS and CIM, the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB) plays an important role in advancing WPS in the Americas. Operating under the OAS umbrella, the IADB has established a dedicated WPS Program to support member states in implementing WPS principles.

This program works collaboratively with various partners, including the CIM, to advocate for gender integration in defence and security sectors across the region[50].

PACIFIC

The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) has been instrumental in advancing the WPS agenda, fostering gender equality and human security across the region.

Recognising the unique vulnerabilities of the Pacific—such as the impacts of climate change, high rates of GBV, and inter-communal conflicts —the Pacific Regional Action Plan on WPS (2012–2015) provided a framework for addressing these intersecting challenges.

While now almost ten years out of date, the RAP laid a strong foundation for integrating WPS principles across the region and inspired ongoing efforts through national-level initiatives.

The RAP focused on building resilience through inclusive disaster risk management, advancing women's participation in peace processes, and addressing the root causes of insecurity. This regional initiative was complemented by the development of NAPs by member states, ensuring WPS principles were implemented at the national level.

For instance, **Timor Leste's** second NAP prioritises gender-sensitive approaches in disaster response and peacebuilding, reflecting the RAP's influence[51].

Additionally, the PIF has prioritised grassroots, community-driven approaches to peacebuilding, recognising the critical role of women's networks in sustaining social cohesion. For example, the forum has supported initiatives amplifying women's voices in decision-making processes in areas affected by inter-communal tensions[52].

ASEAN

ASEAN has made important strides in integrating the WPS agenda into its regional frameworks, with the adoption of the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on WPS (RPA) in 2022 marking a significant milestone. The RPA provides a foundation for advancing women's leadership and promoting inclusive approaches to peace-building and security.

In addition to the RPA, efforts to localise UNSCR 1325 regionally have involved collaboration among governments, CSOs, and regional bodies.

Cambodia, as the Chair of the ASEAN Advisory Group on WPS, has played an important leadership role throughout these regional processes:

"Cambodia was one of the original members of the ASEAN Advisory Group on WPS and took full leadership in driving the development of RPA-WPS...

Cambodia continues to chair the ASEAN Advisory Group on WPS to oversee the implementation of the RPA-WPS, as well as leading the development of the Guideline and Toolkit for ASEAN Member States to further localise the RPA-WPS into their national contexts, with the support of UN Women"[53].

The ASEAN WPS Toolkit and Guidelines highlight the importance of grounding WPS commitments in community-level action.

The RPA also leverages platforms such as the ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW) and the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (ASEAN-IPR) to enhance collaboration among member states.

These mechanisms aim to strengthen member states' capacities to implement WPS principles while addressing regional security challenges, such as climate-induced displacement and cross-border violence.

Despite these advancements, implementation remains uneven across ASEAN, with limited resources and varying levels of national commitment presenting significant hurdles.

Advocates, including women's rights groups across the region, continue to push for stronger accountability mechanisms to ensure that the RPA translates into tangible benefits for women and marginalised communities.

"[The] WPS Agenda is critical for the promotion of gender equality, [but] advancing WPS needs more than a regional commitment. We need to develop NAPs to ensure that regional commitment is translated into practical actions at national and local levels. As the lead country for the development of the ASEAN RPA on WPS and now for the WPS Localisation initiative, Cambodia is committed to enable the regional commitment to become a reality for all women and girls in ASEAN,"

H.E. Ing Kantha Phavi, MD, Cambodian Minister of Women's Affairs.

2.2 The Role of Global & Regional Advocacy Movements

Global:

Global advocacy movements have been instrumental in shaping regional WPS frameworks, providing momentum for the localisation and operationalisation of international commitments and Resolutions.

These movements, led by coalitions like the **Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP)**, the **Women's Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL)**, and **Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)**, create platforms for exchanging ideas, amplifying women's voices, and holding states accountable to their commitments.

They have also been at the forefront of advocating for the expansion of the WPS agenda through additional UNSCRs and general recommendations. For example, advocacy efforts significantly influenced the adoption of UNSCRs 1820, 1888, and 1960, addressing conflict- related sexual violence, and CEDAW General Recommendation 30, which reinforces the WPS agenda by connecting women's rights obligations under CEDAW with peace and security frameworks.

For example, the below joint civil society statement from October 2024 boldly challenges global leaders to confront their failures in delivering on the promises of peace and security, calling for transformative action and accountability to prioritise justice, inclusion, and nonviolent conflict resolution:

> "As women peacebuilders, and members of the WPS community, we have been at the forefront of efforts to mitigate conflict in our own countries, while valuing the multilateral system and its nonviolent conflict resolution mechanisms.
>
> But we are **tired of the hypocrisy of states** which claim to champion peace but profit from the sale of arms used in countless atrocities. We are tired of the double standards that enable powerful governments to obfuscate international laws and shred our norms and means of equal coexistence, as peoples and states.
> **We are tired of the empty promises of peace, justice, and inclusion.**
>
> We urge global leaders, the UN, and Member States to acknowledge the failure of "business as usual". We need a paradigm shift where peace is the goal and the strategy.
> **Violence is not inevitable. It is a choice and tactic.**
>
> True leadership for peace and equal coexistence requires **the courage to talk, not to shoot.** This is not idealism. It is the hard work that peacebuilders do every day, often risking their own lives."

Extract from a joint statement by the Women's Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL), '24 Years After UNSCR 1325: Women, War, and Insecurity,'[54].

Another important example of a global advocacy network is that of the **NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security**, a coalition of leading international NGOs that advocates for the full and effective implementation of the WPS agenda at the Security Council.

At the heart of its work is advocacy at the UN, where the NGOWG pushes for stronger commitments to gender equality in peace processes, peacekeeping missions, and humanitarian responses. The Group engages directly with the Security Council, providing expert analysis and policy recommendations on how WPS issues should be addressed in country-specific discussions and thematic debates.

The group regularly produces Monthly Action Points (MAPs), offering concrete steps for the UN and its member states to strengthen the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and subsequent WPS resolutions. It also facilitates direct participation of women peacebuilders in UN discussions, creating space for civil society leaders from conflict-affected regions to share their experiences and shape global policy.

Regional:

Regional advocacy movements play a critical role in translating WPS commitments into action, while addressing region-specific challenges and opportunities.

These movements often bridge the gap between global commitments like UNSCRs, and their national-level implementation, creating platforms for collaboration, policy development, and accountability. Across the world, these movements have contributed to shaping WPS frameworks and driving change.

In Africa, networks such as **Femmes Africa Solidarité** have worked to promote women's leadership in peace processes and conflict resolution. Through advocacy and engagement with international bodies, FAS has championed the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and later Resolutions across the continent, in particular promoting greater inclusion of women in peacebuilding efforts.

In Latin America, the **Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights (CLADEM)** has united women's rights organisations across the region to promote gender equality in peace and security contexts. CLADEM's advocacy focuses on advancing transitional justice, combating GBV, and strengthening democracy, peace, and women's human rights.

In the Pacific, feminist coalitions like the **Pacific Women Mediators Network** have prioritised community-driven peacebuilding initiatives, ensuring that women's voices are central to mediation and conflict prevention efforts.

ASEAN:

Regional advocacy movements have also played an instrumental role in embedding the WPS agenda across Southeast Asia. While state-driven initiatives often focus on policy-level commitments, feminist advocacy networks, coalitions, and grassroots campaigns work to ensure these commitments translate into meaningful action.

A key example is the **Southeast Asian Women's Caucus on ASEAN**, (commonly known as the Women's Caucus) which has been at the forefront of advocacy for gender-inclusive policymaking in the region. The Women's Caucus has consistently called for stronger accountability mechanisms within ASEAN to ensure that WPS principles are operationalised across member states. Its efforts, including regional consultations, policy briefings, and strategic engagement with policymakers, have driven visibility for issues such as GBV and women's leadership in post-conflict recovery and disaster risk reduction[55].

Similarly, feminist coalitions such as the **Asia-Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)** have leveraged regional platforms to demand structural reforms. APWLD's advocacy highlights the interconnectedness of women's economic, social, and political rights, as well as climate justice, in achieving sustainable peace[56].

However, these movements face significant challenges. Regional spaces for civil society engagement, such as ASEAN's forums, remain limited by state-centric structures that marginalise dissenting voices. Additionally, the rise of authoritarian governance across several member states has curtailed feminist organising and advocacy, creating shrinking civic space for WPS-related work[57].

Despite these barriers, regional feminist movements continue to innovate and adapt. Digital advocacy campaigns, cross-border solidarity efforts, and partnerships with international feminist networks have provided new avenues for mobilisation. New investments, such as **The Asia Foundation's new AMPLIFY Project**, hold significant potential. to strengthen these efforts across the region.

Key takeaway:

Globally, peace agreements are
64 per cent less likely to fail
when civil society representatives
participate![58]

2.3 Regional Challenges and Opportunities

Implementing the WPS agenda in Southeast Asia presents both significant challenges and unique opportunities. The region's diverse political, cultural, and socio-economic landscape shapes how WPS principles are interpreted and operationalised. While regional frameworks like ASEAN's Regional Plan of Action on WPS offer a foundation, translating these commitments into tangible outcomes presents a number of challenges.

Challenges:

One of the primary challenges is the divergence in political priorities among member states, especially given that Southeast Asia is home to a wide spectrum of political systems.

This disparity can lead to inconsistent adoption of WPS principles. For instance, while some states have developed robust National Action Plans (NAPs) that integrate WPS commitments, others lack even a basic policy framework to address gendered dimensions of peace and security.

Another critical challenge is the limited accountability mechanisms within regional frameworks. Although ASEAN has made strides in incorporating WPS principles, it remains a state-driven institution with limited enforcement capabilities.

This often results in a gap between high- level commitments and grassroots realities, leaving many women and girls excluded from peacebuilding processes.

The **shrinking civic space in the region** further exacerbates these issues. Civil society organisations, particularly feminist movements, face increasing restrictions on their ability to operate[59]. Censorship, and the criminalisation of activism, hinder the participation of women's rights advocates in WPS implementation. This is particularly concerning given the vital role that grassroots organisations play in holding governments accountable and driving gender- sensitive reforms.

Cultural and social norms also pose barriers. **Patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes** persist across the region, limiting women's participation in decision-making processes.

In some contexts, women are still viewed as passive victims of conflict rather than as active agents of change, which undermines the potential of the WPS agenda.

Opportunities:

Despite these challenges, Southeast Asia also offers significant opportunities for advancing WPS. The region's rich history of women-led peacebuilding provides a strong foundation for advocacy. For example, in the Philippines, women have played critical roles in mediating peace agreements and rebuilding communities in conflict-affected areas like Mindanao [60]. These successes demonstrate the importance of leveraging local expertise to inform regional strategies.

Regional frameworks, such as ASEAN's Regional Plan of Action on WPS, offer a **platform for collaboration and standard-setting**.

While not without limitations, these frameworks provide a shared language and set of objectives that member states can adapt to their national contexts.

Strengthening ASEAN's capacity to monitor and evaluate WPS implementation could help bridge the gap between regional commitments and local realities.

The growing emphasis on **intersectionality and inclusivity** within regional advocacy movements also presents an opportunity. Increasingly, organisations are recognising the need to address overlapping forms of marginalisation, such as those based on ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation.

This shift creates space for more nuanced and inclusive approaches to WPS that reflect the region's diversity.

Technology and digital platforms offer another avenue for progress. Digital advocacy campaigns and online networks have enabled feminist organisations to **circumvent traditional barriers to participation**, reaching wider audiences and mobilising support across borders. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, regional organisations used digital tools to ensure that women's voices were included in disaster response planning.

Finally, there is growing international support for WPS initiatives in Southeast Asia. Partnerships with global actors, such as UN Women, and regional feminist networks, have provided much-needed resources, expertise, and visibility for regional efforts.

The **ASEAN WPS platform**, established to advance the WPS agenda in the region, serves as a central hub for knowledge-sharing, policy alignment, and capacity-building efforts among member states and stakeholders.

These partnerships can help sustain momentum and ensure that regional challenges are met with coordinated, multi-stakeholder responses.

Southeast Asia has the potential to serve as a global leader in operationalising the WPS agenda. However, sustained political will, strengthened accountability mechanisms, and a commitment to protecting civic space will be critical to realising this vision.

2.4 REGIONAL GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY

THE PHILIPPINES 4ᵗʰ WPS NAP

The Philippines' National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (NAPWPS) 2023–2033 exemplifies a robust, inclusive approach to advancing the WPS agenda. As **the first Southeast Asian country to adopt a NAPWPS in 2010**, the Philippines has demonstrated a pioneering commitment to this field. The fourth iteration of the NAP builds on this legacy, incorporating lessons learned and addressing gaps identified in the previous plans[61].

A defining feature of the Philippines' approach is the **extensive involvement of civil society organisations** like WE Act 1325, and other women's rights and queer advocacy groups. For the 2023–2033 plan, consultations included grassroots women, feminist organisations, Indigenous groups, and LGBTQIA+ advocates, ensuring the plan's responsiveness to diverse, marginalised perspectives. CSOs contributed an 11-point agenda, focusing on conflict prevention, representation, and capacity-building for women in conflict-affected areas.

The 2023–2033 NAPWPS incorporates several groundbreaking features. For instance, it explicitly integrates emerging issues such as

- **digital peace and cybersecurity,**
- **climate security**,
- and the gendered implications of **disaster risk reduction.**

It also adopts a Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) system to ensure comprehensive tracking of progress and the collection of intersectional data. This is a critical move to address past critiques, including the lack of robust monitoring frameworks and limited public awareness of WPS initiatives.

Despite these advancements, challenges persist. Fragmented implementation across government agencies, insufficient intersectional data, and limited localisation efforts in areas beyond Mindanao have been identified as barriers to fully realising the NAPWPS's goals. The underutilisation of gender and development (GAD) plans and budgets further exacerbates these issues.

However, the 2023–2033 NAPWPS aims to address these gaps through targeted strategies, such as enhanced CSO- government collaboration and the integration of WPS into broader governance frameworks.

Chapter 3
National Pathways

3.1 The significance of WPS in Cambodia

Cambodia's history has been profoundly shaped by conflict and resilience. The Khmer Rouge regime (1975–1979) and its aftermath left a legacy of mass violence, forced displacement, and systemic human rights violations. Women, including ethnic Vietnamese and Cham women, disproportionately bore the impacts, enduring sexual violence, forced labour, displacement, and family separations.

Indeed, more than 60% of the survivors were women, who contributed to rebuilding the country from its total devastation but were not recognised in formal peace processes [62]. These historical challenges have had enduring, intergenerational effects, particularly on women and marginalised groups, underscoring the need for **gender-responsive approaches** in peacebuilding, humanitarian efforts, and development processes.

Although Cambodia is no longer experiencing large-scale conflict, the WPS agenda remains a vital framework for fostering inclusive peace and security. This chapter examines the ongoing relevance of WPS in Cambodia, its potential to address systemic inequalities, and its role in empowering marginalised communities.

"Ensuring that significant numbers of women are not merely included, but central to peacebuilding efforts, is not only a matter of justice, but also a prerequisite for sustainable peace."

3.1.1. Women, Peace and Transitional Justice

The **Paris Peace Agreements** of 1991 marked a pivotal moment in Cambodia's history, officially ending years of conflict and laying the foundation for peacebuilding and national reconstruction[63].

While the Agreements established mechanisms for political transition and laid the groundwork for democratic governance, they were emblematic of a broader international trend that frequently excluded women from peace negotiations.

Despite the Agreements' significant achievements, the participation of women was limited, with notable exceptions such as Pung Chhiv Kek Galabru, who emerged as a key advocate for human rights and justice. Her role highlights the potential for transformative leadership in spaces where women's voices are often marginalised[64].

The transitional justice process that followed, particularly through the establishment of the **Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC)**, provided an important, albeit incomplete, platform for addressing past atrocities.

The ECCC's mandate included prosecuting some senior leaders most responsible for the crimes of the Khmer Rouge regime (1975–1979), which devastated the country and disproportionately affected women.

Gender-based violence, including forced marriages and sexual violence, featured prominently among the atrocities, though these issues were often under-explored in early proceedings.

Over time, the inclusion of civil parties and victim testimonies, many of whom were women, added a critical dimension to the court's work, amplifying the experiences of survivors and underscoring the necessity of integrating gender perspectives into transitional justice.

The process also illuminated persistent gaps. While the ECCC made strides in addressing gender-based violence, its focus remained primarily on prosecuting high-level perpetrators, leaving many survivors of lower-profile cases without recourse.

This limited scope underscores the broader challenges of ensuring that transitional justice mechanisms are inclusive and responsive to the needs of all affected communities, particularly women who continue to face structural and cultural barriers to participation.

Beyond formal mechanisms, Cambodia's transitional justice efforts have spurred important grassroots initiatives. Civil society organisations, often led by women, have played a crucial role in documenting histories, preserving memory, and encouraging intergenerational dialogue.

Projects such as participatory arts programmes and community-led education on Khmer Rouge history have created spaces for healing and reflection, bridging the gaps left by institutional processes. Cambodia's complex history demonstrates the critical urgency of including women – in at least 30% of decision making roles – in broader peacebuilding processes.

Ensuring that significant numbers of women are not merely included, but central to peacebuilding efforts, is not only a matter of justice, but also a prerequisite for sustainable peace.

3.1.2. Cambodia's Leadership in Global Peacekeeping

Since 2006, Cambodia has become a notable and highly active contributor to UN peacekeeping missions, deploying over 9,197 personnel, of which 8% were women, to 11 mission of conflict zones worldwide, including South Sudan, Lebanon, Mali, and the Central African Republic.[65] As of January 31, 2025, Cambodia deploys a large proportion of uniformed personnel to UN peace operations, and is ranked third among ASEAN member states and 28th (out of 123 countries) globally.[66] The government of Cambodia also aims to increase the percentage of military women deployed to UN peace operations to 20% by 2024.[67] Efforts are underway to push the number of women peacekeepers even closer towards gender parity.[68] However, while women make up the majority of administrative staff (88%), they make up just 13% of leadership, indicating a need for targeted efforts to advance women into decision-making and command roles within peacekeeping efforts.[69]

Despite this gap, Cambodian women peacekeepers have played important roles in building trust with local communities, addressing sexual and gender-based violence, and supporting women's leadership in post-conflict settings. For example, in South Sudan, Cambodian women peacekeepers have worked within local communities to create safer environments for women and children.[70]

These efforts demonstrate the transformative potential of integrating gender perspectives into peacekeeping missions, aligning closely with the WPS agenda. Cambodia's leadership in this area serves as a model for other post- conflict nations aiming to transition from recovery to active contributors to global peace efforts.

"As Cambodia has started the process to develop its first National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, [it is] crucial [to] promot[e] the meaningful role and participation of women in UN Peacekeeping Operations.
Cambodia has been one of the regional leaders in this area.
I hope this… will inspire other ASEAN Member States to also increase women's participation and leadership in peace and security roles."

Christine Arab, UN Women Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific[71].

3.1.3. Cambodia's Regional Leadership

As outlined in Chapter 2, Section 1, Cambodia has played an active leadership role in advancing the WPS agenda and developing pathways towards regional localisation within the ASEAN framework.

The country's involvement in developing **the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security (ASEAN RPA-WPS)** has been commended for showing dedication to regional collaboration on gender and security issues.

As a member of the ASEAN Advisory Group on WPS, Cambodia played a pivotal role in formulating the RPA-WPS, which was adopted by ASEAN leaders in November 2022 and launched in Phnom Penh in December 2022[72].

Building on this regional commitment, Cambodia has led the development of the **"Localisation Toolkit and Guidelines for the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security. "**

Launched in Phnom Penh on December 2023, this toolkit provides technical guidance for ASEAN member states to adapt the RPA-WPS to their national contexts, facilitating the implementation of WPS principles at national and sub- national levels[73].

The success of these initiatives will depend on sustained political commitment, effective resource allocation, and continuous engagement with civil society to ensure comprehensive and inclusive implementation.
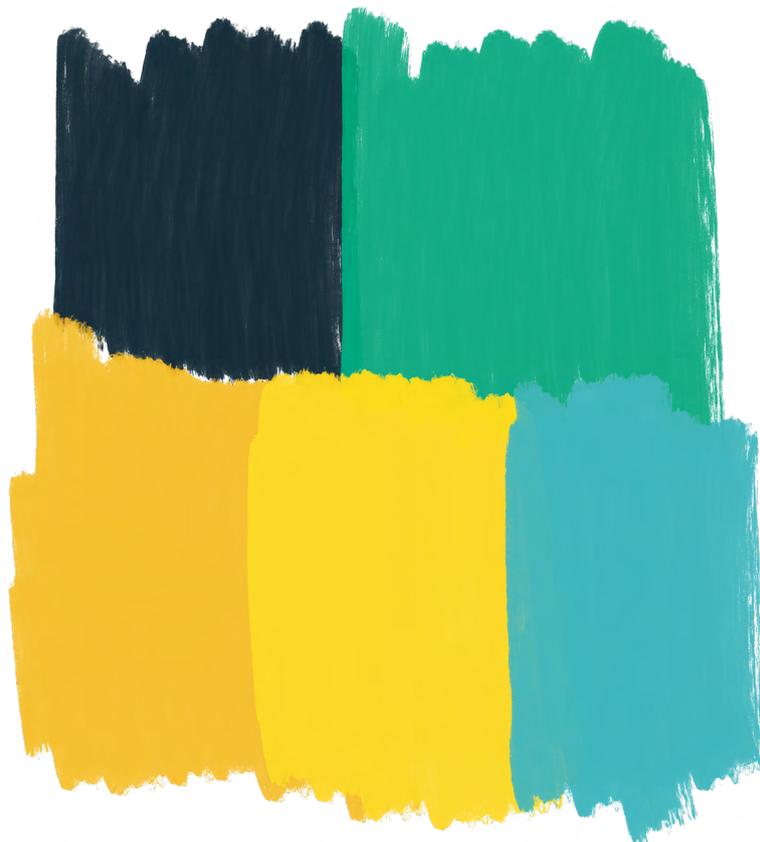
3.1.4. Cambodia's National Action Plan (NAP)

At the time of writing, Cambodia's WPS NAP remains in its early stages of consultation. Spearheaded by the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) in collaboration with UN Women, the development of the NAP signifies a critical step forward in embedding WPS principles into Cambodia's national policy framework.

This process has also featured relatively strong engagement from CSOs, whose contributions are aiming to shape a plan that is inclusive, participatory, and reflective of the realities faced by Cambodian women in a post-conflict setting, where resolving rights shortfalls remains a pressing urgency for many.

The development of the NAP holds significant promise as a milestone in Cambodia's efforts to address the gendered dimensions of peace and security. It reflects a **commitment to recognising women** not only as victims of conflict but **as active agents** in peacebuilding, recovery, and decision- making processes.

By institutionalising aspects of the four WPS pillars, it is hoped that the NAP will to provide a structured approach to tackling systemic challenges such as GBV, women's underrepresentation in leadership, and the vulnerabilities faced by women in disaster-prone regions and conflict-affected communities.

While Cambodia's NAP-WPS represents an important milestone, its development and implementation is likely to come up against some significant challenges.

One critical issue is the need for **adequate resources** and **sustained political commitment** to ensure meaningful implementation.

Despite comprehensive frameworks like the **Neary Ratanak Strategic Plan VI –** which outlines national commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment – stakeholders have raised concerns about the potential gap between policy ambitions and local realities, particularly in rural areas where infrastructure and institutional capacity remain limited.

Entrenched **gender norms** and a sensitive political environment featuring shrinking civic space is likely to continue to pose barriers to the uptake of WPS principles at all levels of society, further complicating efforts to ensure meaningful participation and protection for women and gender-diverse people.

Another key challenge is the **low level of awareness and understanding of WPS** among key stakeholders, including CSOs, rights holders, and government actors outside the limited number of gender- and peace-focused organisations.

For instance, many gender organisations may not yet engage with – or even be very familiar with – WPS as a distinct framework, limiting opportunities for important inputs and collaborations. Raising awareness and building capacity among civil society, government officials, and communities will be critical to ensuring the plan is understood and well implemented.

One significant step towards this end is that of a New Zealand government- funded regional program initiative, **AMPLIFY: Amplifying women's peace actions in ASEAN**. Over five years, the AMPLIFY project, led by The Asia Foundation in partnership with MoWA, is investing in strengthening civil society capacities and networks on WPS. This includes support for introductory training, cross-sector dialogues, technical advice and strategic planning for CSOs and ministries engaging with the WPS agenda in Cambodia.

AMPLIFY's 2023 WPS Scoping Study highlighted that Cambodia presents a complex case in WPS implementation, as it has made notable contributions in some areas—particularly through its leadership in international peacekeeping missions, where it is the largest ASEAN contributor of female peacekeepers.

At the same time, **significant gaps will need to be overcome in domestic implementation**, particularly in areas such as protection from GBV, access to justice, and security sector reform, where progress has been inconsistent.

If implemented effectively, Cambodia's NAP may have the potential to serve as a regional example of how WPS principles can be operationalised in a complex socio-political context.

Its success will depend not only on strong policy commitments, but on sustained collaboration between government actors, CSOs, and international partners, alongside ongoing efforts to build institutional capacity, address structural gender inequalities, and ensure accountability in implementation.

3.1.4.Cambodia's National Action Plan (NAP)

Why WPS is relevant in Cambodia: Beyond the NAPVAW and existing gender policies

A key question often raised in policy discussions is why the WPS agenda is needed in Cambodia, given that the country already has the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women (NAPVAW), gender equality policies, and various working groups on gender and GBV.

While these frameworks have played a significant role in advancing gender equality and addressing GBV, they do not comprehensively cover all dimensions of WPS, nor do they integrate conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and security considerations into their scope.

Unlike sector-specific gender policies, the **WPS framework is holistic and cross-cutting**, connecting issues of gender-based violence, justice, governance, conflict resolution, and security sector reform.

The WPS agenda emphasises not only protection from violence but also women's participation in decision- making, leadership, and peace processes.

In the Cambodian context, WPS is relevant because:

- It **bridges the gap between security and gender justice**. While NAPVAW focuses primarily on responses to domestic and sexual violence, WPS expands the conversation to include structural violence, economic insecurity, and women's roles in peace and conflict governance.

- It **strengthens women's participation** in governance, mediation, and justice mechanisms. While existing policies address gender equality broadly, they do not explicitly ensure women's leadership in decision-making bodies related to conflict prevention and security.

- It **connects local efforts to global commitments.** Cambodia, as a signatory to international human rights and gender justice frameworks, can use WPS to align national efforts with global commitments under CEDAW, the SDGs, and the UN Security Council's WPS resolutions.

Thus, rather than duplicating existing frameworks, WPS provides a more integrated approach that strengthens gender-responsive mediation, enhances survivor-centred justice responses, and promotes women's leadership in conflict resolution.

Gender-Responsive Mediation: Strengths and Challenges

In Cambodia, alternative dispute resolution practices (ADR) have historically been widely used for resolving family and community disputes, including disputes between spouses.

However, as prior research by WPM has highlighted, local dispute resolution (LDR) mechanisms have often failed to prioritise survivor safety or adhere to principles of gender equality[74].

While there have been significant challenges in ADR approaches to GBV in Cambodia, efforts are underway to formalise and limit mediation practices, ensuring they are survivor-centred and trauma-informed. There are also efforts to encourage more women to act as mediators at all levels.

Gender-responsive mediation (GRM) seeks to professionalise and standardise mediation practices, limiting practice to only those cases that do not include physical violence. GRM also seeks to ensure that mediation is survivor-centred and reduces harm while offering an accessible and culturally appropriate dispute resolution option.

The GRM model includes:

- **Screening** and **referral** mechanisms to ensure that cases involving violence are appropriately **redirected to law enforcement and other services.**

- **Training** and accreditation of mediators, with a focus on increasing women mediators and gender-sensitive practices.

- **Survivor-centred approaches** that prioritise the needs and agency of women affected by disputes.

While these efforts show promise, there remain barriers to fully implementing GRM effectively. This includes inconsistencies in training and knowledge application, gaps in the enforcement of administrative decisions and protection orders, and cultural norms that prioritise family reconciliation over survivor protection.

These challenges highlight the need for continued investment in capacity-building, clearer guidelines, and mechanisms that ensure women who experience violence can access both justice and support.

The Role of Mediation in Prevention and Participation

Beyond its role in addressing (non-violent) disputes, GRM has the potential to contribute to violence prevention and women's participation in conflict resolution and community leadership.

Mediation, when carried out effectively and ethically, can serve as an early intervention tool, de-escalating tensions before they lead to more severe violence.

Further, the integration of **women as trained mediators and decision-makers** within local dispute resolution mechanisms can enhance women's participation in peace and security efforts.

3.2 Exploring the 4 pillars in the Cambodian Context

As outlined in Chapter 1, section 4, the WPS Agenda revolves around four central and intersecting pillars:

Prevention   **Protection**

Participation   **Relief & Recovery**

These pillars are designed to ensure that the unique perspectives, needs, and leadership of women and girls are fully integrated into global peace and security efforts.

They provide a flexible framework for understanding and addressing the gendered dimensions of conflict, peacebuilding, and security governance, ensuring that women, girls, and gender-diverse people are not only protected but also empowered as active agents of change.

This section will **explore how each of these four pillars applies** within the Cambodian context, considering the country's historical experiences, contemporary challenges, and ongoing efforts to implement WPS principles.

 It is important to note that these pillars do not exist in isolation—**their boundaries are fluid and overlapping**. Many issues, case studies, and policy considerations fit across multiple pillars, reflecting the complexity of real-world peace and security dynamics.

Rather than presenting rigid categories, this framework offers a **starting point for deeper analysis** and discussion on how WPS can be applied, adapted, and operationalised in the present Cambodian context.

The aim is to showcase some examples of how WPS principles can be applied (and are already being applied!) to enhance rights, justice, peace, and security for all women, girls, and gender-diverse people in Cambodia today.

3.2.1.

PILLAR 1

PREVENTION

Prevention, as articulated in the WPS agenda, **addresses the root causes of conflict** and prioritises efforts to avert violence before it arises.

It recognises that systemic inequalities, gender discrimination, and structural power imbalances often underpin cycles of violence.

Through addressing these root causes, **prevention not only mitigates the immediate risk** of conflict but fosters environments conducive to lasting peace.

This includes promoting gender equity, empowering women and girls, and ensuring inclusive governance that values diverse voices, particularly from marginalised communities.

In Cambodia, prevention takes on a distinct urgency.

Its history, marked by deep conflict and decades of recovery, underscores the importance of preventing intergroup tensions and safeguarding women and girls who are disproportionately affected by systemic injustices.

Within this context, two critical areas—interethnic/religious conflict and disputes over land and natural resources—highlight the gendered implications of prevention efforts and the importance of integrating WPS principles.

Interethnic & religious conflict prevention

Land & natural resource conflict prevention

Can you think of more examples of the Prevention pillar in action, in Cambodia?

Interethnic and Religious Conflict:
Women at the Intersection

Cambodia is no stranger to interethnic and religious tensions, particularly in rural and economically marginalised communities. **Such conflicts often revolve around competition for resources, cultural misunderstandings, or political manoeuvring.**

While these disputes impact entire communities, women frequently bear a unique and often disproportionate burden.

Women are not only **more vulnerable** to violence stemming from intergroup hostilities but are also **excluded from conflict resolution mechanisms.**

In many cases, patriarchal norms dictate that **men dominate decision-making spaces**, whether formal or informal, leaving women's voices unheard. This exclusion perpetuates a cycle of inequality and silences the lived realities of women who often serve as mediators and caretakers within their communities during crises.

One illustrative example is the discrimination faced by Muslim Cham women in Cambodia, who often contend with both gender and religious-based exclusion.

During episodes of intercommunal tension, Cham and Ethnic Vietnamese women have experienced higher rates of displacement and economic marginalisation, exacerbated by systemic barriers to accessing justice or government support[75].

These historical grievances were at their worst point from 1975-79, when ethnic Vietnamese and Cham Muslims were targeted for mass killings during the Khmer Rouge regime – atrocities that have since been recognised as acts of genocide by the Khmer Rouge Tribunal. This legacy of violence continues to shape interethnic and interreligious tensions in Cambodia today.

Their vulnerabilities underscore the need for WPS-aligned frameworks that **prioritise women's inclusi**on in peacebuilding initiatives.

Investing in education, intercultural dialogues, and grassroots-led mediation initiatives that amplify women's voices offers a path forward.

As seen in the case study, community programs facilitated by Cambodian women-led organisations have shown promise in **creating safe spaces** for **intergroup dialogue**, bridging cultural divides, and reducing tensions.

NATIONAL GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY:

PREVENTING INTERETHNIC & RELIGIOUS CONFLICTTHROUGH COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING.

Women Peace Makers (WPM)

Cambodia is home to a diverse mix of ethnic and religious communities, including ethnic Vietnamese, Cham Muslims, and Indigenous groups. While 90% of the population is ethnically Khmer, minority groups continue to face **discrimination, exclusion, and intercommunal tensions**[76]. Historical grievances, land disputes, and social marginalisation contribute to deep-seated divisions, sometimes escalating into conflict.

Recognising the urgent need for interethnic and religious conflict prevention, WPM launched its Peace & Conflict Transformation Program, which applies gender-sensitive mediation, nonviolent communication (NVC), and conflict transformation tools to build trust, understanding, and cooperation between communities.

Building nonviolent conflict prevention and strengthening women's peace leadership

A core element of WPM's approach is empowering women as peacebuilders, leaders, and change agents in their communities; going beyond just victims or participants. Through transformative peace training, inclusive dialogue, human-centered trust building, and effective community mobilization, women and youth from diverse genders, ethnicities, religions, and social statuses are equipped with the skills to de-escalate tensions, address social conflicts, and advocate for peaceful coexistence. Participants, some even formed into networks so as to continue to, lead peace actions and help prevent the spread of misinformation, reduce discriminatory attitudes, and **facilitate conversations and interfaith dialogue between historically divided groups.**

WPM also employs creative tools and engagement, such as Facilitative Listening Design, a homegrown conflict transformation peace action research tool, to identify key sources of interethnic conflict and develop targeted and strategic interventions. This tool also serves as evidence-based documentation to influence policies, public narratives, and key stakeholders[77].

The organisation aims to incorporate a gender lens into interethnic conflict resolution, thereby aligning the programme with the WPS agenda, specifically under the Prevention Pillar. WPM works to break cycles of violence, dismantle systemic discrimination, and nurture long-term social cohesion between Cambodia's diverse ethnic and religious communities while addressing gender discrimination against marginalised women and promoting women's leadership and rights in overall. Institutionalising the peace infrastructure is key to transformative peace and WPM is working to introduce peace education peer mediation into high school at the rural areas as well.

Land & Natural Resource Conflict:
Gendered Impacts & Tenure Security

Cambodia's rapid economic development has brought with it significant challenges, particularly in disputes over land and natural resources.

Large-scale land acquisitions, often for agribusiness or extractive industries, have **displaced thousands of rural families, disproportionately impacting women**[78].

These disputes are further compounded by the country's history of **land tenure insecurity**, where post- conflict recovery efforts failed to establish robust systems to protect vulnerable populations.

For women, land disputes carry unique consequences. Women are often **excluded from land ownership** due to cultural norms that prioritise male inheritance and ownership.

This exclusion renders them more vulnerable to displacement and economic insecurity when disputes arise.

Women-headed households, in particular, face heightened risks as they navigate eviction threats, legal barriers, and systemic discrimination.

For instance, land disputes often lead to heightened rates of gender-based violence (GBV)[79].

Displacement resulting from forced evictions increases the vulnerability of women and girls to exploitation, trafficking, and abuse. These risks are exacerbated when affected women and girls are left out of land tenure decision- making processes and advocacy efforts.

Addressing these challenges requires integrating **gender-sensitive approaches** into land governance policies.

Strengthening tenure security for women and recognising their rights as landowners is a crucial step. Initiatives such as **legal literacy programmes** specifically targeting women facing eviction and community mobilisation efforts led by grassroots human rights and community development organisations work hard to support affected or at-risk populations.

For example, Cambodian CSOs like CCHR have advocated for gender-responsive land and housing policies, while BCV works to empower communities with knowledge about their land rights, emphasising the intersectionality of gender with land and natural resource management (see cases overleaf).

NATIONAL GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY:

SUPPORTING WOMEN'S TENURE SECURITY

Advocacy: Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)

The Cambodian Centre for Human Rights (CCHR) has led work to prevent land conflicts by advocating for **stronger tenure security for women.** Women's land ownership is a key factor in stabilising communities and reducing the risk of disputes and displacement, yet systemic barriers often leave women vulnerable to land grabbing, forced evictions, and GBV.

CCHR's documentation has shown that when women lack secure land rights, they are more exposed to **economic precarity, violence**, and **displacement**, increasing the likelihood of social unrest and inter-community tensions. By conducting legal analysis, human rights reporting, and advocacy campaigns, CCHR works to ensure that gender-sensitive land policies are prioritised in national and local governance frameworks.

A core focus of CCHR's work is on **deterrence and prevention**—in holding state actors, companies, and powerful landowners accountable, their advocacy aims to reduce impunity for land grabs and establish legal precedents that protect women's land rights in the long term. Ensuring that women can own, inherit, and defend land not only improves their **personal security** but also helps **prevent protracted disputes** and instability, particularly in contexts where they face structural disadvantages.

You can read the full report here: https://www.cchrcambodia.org/en/publications/general-reports/116

Community empowerment: Building Community Voices (BCV)

Building Community Voices (BCV) has focused on empowering communities through education and grassroots capacity building, aiming to **prevent land conflicts** before they occur or escalate. BCV supports **community-led initiatives** that strengthen tenure security for women and marginalised groups by providing legal literacy education, training on land rights, and other local development initiatives such as savings groups and agricultural projects.

Their **community media centres** serve as platforms for community members, including women and Indigenous people, to share information, express concerns, and raise awareness about land rights and related issues. BCV also aims to ensure that community members are **actively involved** in land-related decision-making processes, thereby promoting more **equitable and transparent governance**.

Though much work remains to be done, BCV works to prevent land conflicts in Cambodia by **empowering communities** with the tools, knowledge, and platforms necessary to manage their resources sustainably and advocate for their rights effectively.

You can read more about their work here: https://bcv-cambodia.org/what-we-do-en/

3.2.2.

PILLAR 2

PROTECTION

Ensuring safety, justice, and rights for those most at risk

Protection is a core pillar of the WPS Agenda, focusing on preventing and responding to violence, ensuring access to justice, and safeguarding the rights of women and marginalised groups.

In Cambodia, this includes efforts to protect those facing gender-based violence, trafficking, and forced criminality, ensuring that survivors receive the support they need.

For instance:

- **The Cambodian Women's Crisis Center (CWCC)** provides shelter, legal advice, and reintegration support for survivors of all forms of gender-based violence.

- **Banteay Srei** supports women's safety through community-based protection work and advocacy for justice and survivor rights (see case study).

- **Anti-Trafficking Initiatives** work to prevent the exploitation of women and girls, addressing cross-border trafficking and forced labour.

While progress has been made towards strengthening protection for GBV survivors, improving Cambodia's alternative dispute resolution (ADR) practices in family dispute cases remains crucial.

Cases of intimate partner violence are still too often directed into mediation instead of formal justice pathways, increasing risks for survivors.

Ensuring that screening and referral systems are robust—so that cases involving violence are properly identified and redirected to law enforcement and support services—is essential to prevent re-victimisation and uphold survivor rights.

Cambodia's protection mechanisms are evolving to be more survivor- centred and rights-based, but challenges remain in ensuring access to justice, preventing re- victimisation, and addressing emerging threats such as online exploitation and forced cyber- scamming operations.

Gender-based violence protection work

Trafficking and migrant worker protection work

Can you think of more examples of the protection pillar in action, in Cambodia?

Gender–based Violence Protection work

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains one of the most pervasive human security threats facing Cambodian women, particularly those from marginalised communities.

Despite the adoption of successive National Action Plans to Prevent Violence Against Women (NAPVAWs) with committed leadership from the **Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA)**, systemic barriers continue to limit access to justice, protection, and survivor-centred support.

GBV in Cambodia manifests in various forms, including domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking, and workplace harassment.

Women from rural areas, ethnic minorities and Indigenous women, LGBTQ+ communities, and those with disabilities face heightened vulnerabilities, **often struggling to access legal and psychosocial services.**

Many cases go unreported due to stigma, economic dependence, and fear of retaliation, while survivors who do seek justice often encounter discriminatory attitudes and bureaucratic hurdles within the legal system[80].

Additionally, gaps in protection services, particularly in rural areas, leave most women survivors without safe shelter or legal aid.

While the NAPVAW has strengthened policy frameworks, its effectiveness remains reliant upon **sustained investment** in survivor-centred services, stronger **law enforcement responses**, and efforts by civil society (see case study) to support survivors and to **dismantle cultural norms** that tolerate GBV.

NATIONAL GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY:

PROVIDING GENDER–RESPONSIVE AND DISABILITY– INCLUSIVE PROTECTION FOR GBV SURVIVORS

Banteay Srei

Women and girls with disabilities in Cambodia face heightened risks of violence, including domestic abuse and sexual assault. In 2022, the local women's rights organisation Banteay Srei provided services to seven women with disabilities through their Safe House program, out of a total of 158 women served that year[81]. These cases encompassed various forms of violence, including **physical** and **psychological**.

Banteay Srei, as a well-established local organisation, offers comprehensive **support to survivors of GBV**, including counselling and assistance throughout the legal process. However, women with disabilities often encounter significant barriers when seeking justice. Initial attempts to obtain help from local authorities frequently result in inadequate responses, with some officials favouring informal mediation over formal legal action.

Challenges for women survivors with disabilities, such as difficulties in communication, limited understanding of legal procedures, and financial constraints, further impede their access to justice. Banteay Srei has explained that negative societal perceptions also contribute to their marginalisation, and local authorities often lack the awareness or commitment necessary to support them effectively.

When working to enhance protection against gender-based violence, it is crucial to develop strategies that **actively engage with and support women and girls with disabilities.**

Banteay Srei's work exemplifies a good practice under the Protection pillar, providing targeted support to marginalised groups of women GBV survivors.

You can read more about Banteay Srei's work to protect and promote women's rights here: https://banteaysrei.info/

Women Migrant Workers:
Risks and Protection Challenges

Labour migration has become an essential livelihood strategy for many Cambodian women, particularly those from rural and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Thousands of Cambodian women migrate each year to work in domestic service, factories, agriculture, and construction in countries such as Thailand and Malaysia. However, their migration is often unprotected, informal, and highly vulnerable to exploitation.

Women migrant workers face a range of human security risks:

- **Labour Rights Violations:** Many women work in unsafe and exploitative conditions, with **low wages, excessive working hours, and no legal protections.** Domestic workers, in particular, remain excluded from formal labour laws, leaving them vulnerable to abuse.

- **Gender-Based Violence:** Women working in private households or isolated environments are at heightened risk of sexual harassment, physical abuse, and forced labour.

- **Debt Bondage & Forced Labour:** Recruitment fees and predatory loan practices trap migrant women in cycles of debt, making it difficult for them to leave abusive work situations. Some women find themselves coerced into forced labour to repay debts to brokers and agencies[82].

- **Human Trafficking & Smuggling:** The lack of safe migration pathways increases the likelihood that Cambodian women are trafficked through deceptive recruitment schemes, ending up in exploitative jobs or even forced criminality.

The Cambodian government has taken some steps to address these risks, including signing Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with destination countries. [83]

However, gaps remain in implementation, enforcement, and protection mechanisms, particularly for **undocumented workers.**

The role of labour rights organisations (see case study) has been critical in filling these gaps, ensuring that migrant women can access support, justice, and redress mechanisms.

NATIONAL GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY:

PROTECTION FOR VULNERABLE WOMEN MIGRANTS

The Centre for Alliance of Labour & Human Rights (CENTRAL)

CENTRAL is a leading advocate for Cambodian women migrant workers, working to address the systematic vulnerabilities that leave them **exposed to exploitation and abuse.** Through legal aid, policy advocacy, and worker empowerment, CENTRAL **strengthens protections** for women who migrate for work, particularly to Thailand and Malaysia.

One of CENTRAL's core interventions is providing direct legal assistance to migrant workers who have experienced **wage theft, wrongful dismissal, or GBV.** Many Cambodian women migrate through informal channels, leaving them without contracts or legal protections. When cases of exploitation arise, they often have little recourse. CENTRAL works with affected women to **file complaints,** seek compensation, and, in some cases, negotiate directly with employers or recruitment agencies to secure unpaid wages or **legal redress.**

Beyond legal support, CENTRAL has been a key voice in policy advocacy, pushing for **stronger protections** in Cambodia's agreements with labour-receiving countries. The organisation has actively engaged with policymakers to **demand improved working conditions,** ensuring that Cambodian women are covered under relevant labour laws and that exploitative recruitment fees—which often push migrant workers into **debt bondage**—are abolished.

CENTRAL also focuses on prevention, running **pre-departure training sessions** to educate women on their **rights, legal protections**, and how to **report abuse.** They also support returnee migrant workers, helping them reintegrate and avoid re-exploitation.

CENTRAL can be seen to strengthen the Protection Pillar of WPS, by embedding gender-sensitive protections into migration policies, ensuring economic security and human rights for women migrant workers. Their work highlights the **need for collaboration** between governments, trade unions, and civil society to transform migration into a **pathway for opportunity rather than exploitation.**

3.2.3.

PILLAR
3

Relief & Recovery

Relief and recovery efforts are essential to ensuring that crises—whether caused by conflict, disasters, or political instability— do not further entrench gender inequalities.

The Relief & Recovery pillar of WPS focuses on providing inclusive, gender-responsive humanitarian assistance, rebuilding communities, and ensuring that recovery efforts address the needs of women, girls, and marginalised groups, including LGBTQIA+ individuals and persons with disabilities.

In Cambodia, **relief and recovery efforts** have been critical in responding to climate-induced disasters, land dispossession, and post-conflict rebuilding. Cambodia faces frequent flooding and droughts, which disproportionately impact women, especially those in rural and Indigenous communities, by disrupting livelihoods, increasing risks of GBV, and limiting access to essential services.

In addition, large-scale land evictions and economic land concessions have led to forced displacement, particularly affecting women-headed households, informal workers, and those with precarious housing.

From gender-responsive disaster risk reduction programs to **transitional justice** initiatives that acknowledge the diverse experiences of conflict- affected populations, there is a growing recognition of the importance of centring the voices and leadership of women and marginalised groups in recovery processes.

As Cambodia faces increasing risks from climate change-related disasters, including floods and droughts, as well as the ongoing impacts of past conflicts, it is essential to integrate gender-sensitive policies and programs into humanitarian response, peacebuilding, and reconstruction efforts.
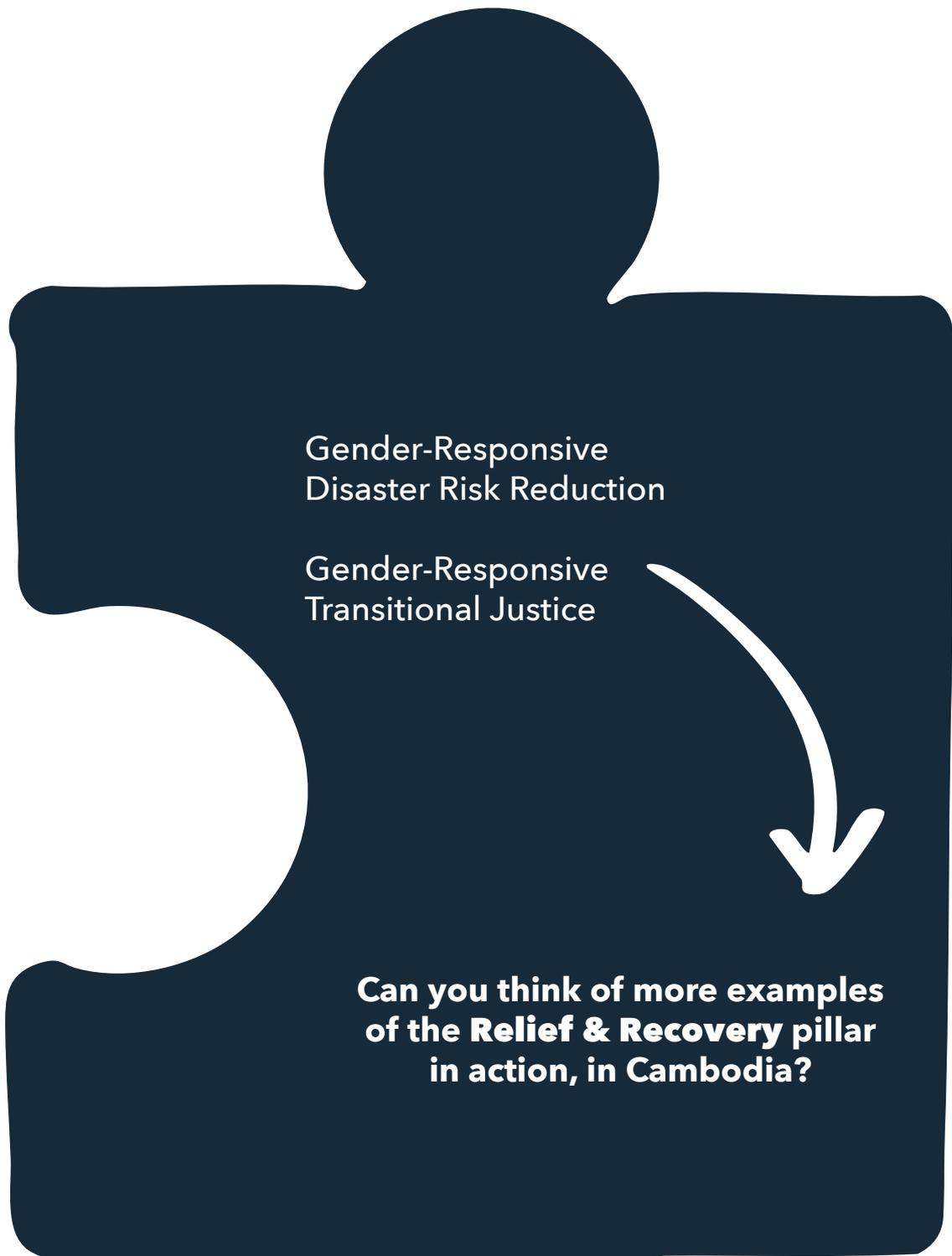
Gender-Responsive
Disaster Risk Reduction

Gender-Responsive
Transitional Justice

**Can you think of more examples
of the Relief & Recovery pillar
in action, in Cambodia?**

Gender–Responsive Disaster Risk Reduction

In Cambodia, climate change and disaster risks disproportionately impact women, girls, and marginalised groups, exacerbating existing inequalities and threatening fundamental human rights.

Extreme weather events—including floods, droughts, and typhoons—have devastating effects on livelihoods, food security, and access to essential services. These crises heighten women's vulnerability to economic insecurity, GBV, and barriers to decision- making in recovery efforts.

The Right to Protection and Resilience Women have the right to protection from climate-related risks and must be included in disaster **preparedness and response.** However, Cambodia's DRR policies and climate adaptation strategies can fail to prioritise gender-responsive approaches. Women's exclusion from disaster response planning, land-use decision-making, and climate adaptation programs limits their ability to influence policies that affect their lives.

The Right to Participate in Decision-Making Despite bearing the brunt of climate change impacts, women remain underrepresented in disaster governance structures. Meaningful participation in local DRR committees, climate adaptation strategies, and recovery programs is essential to ensuring that responses prioritise gender-specific needs and are informed by local knowledge. Women-led disaster risk reduction initiatives in Cambodia demonstrate how empowering women and marginalised groups enhances community resilience and sustainable recovery.

The Right to Livelihoods and Economic Security Climate-induced disasters disproportionately disrupt women's access to land, water, and economic opportunities, **deepening gendered poverty and limiting their ability to rebuild**. Rural women, particularly smallholder farmers and Indigenous communities, face land dispossession and inadequate climate adaptation support, making economic recovery difficult. Ensuring gender-responsive adaptation policies, access to financial resources, and skills- building programs is critical for advancing climate justice.

NATIONAL GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY:

WOMEN–LED DISASTER RISK REDUCTION EFFORTS

ActionAid Cambodia & CWDCC

The Women-Led Alternatives to Climate Change in Cambodia (WLACC) project exemplifies a collaborative effort between ActionAid Cambodia and the Children and Women Development Center in Cambodia (CWDCC) to enhance women's leadership in climate resilience and disaster risk reduction. Launched in April 2022, the project operates in Kampot, Koh Kong, Kampong Thom, and Pursat. [84]

A cornerstone of the WLACC initiative is the establishment of the Women Champion Network (WCN). This network empowers women to actively participate in local governance and decision-making processes related to climate change adaptation and disaster preparedness. Through capacity-building workshops, **women champions** are trained in conducting Hazard, Vulnerability, and Capacity Assessments (HVCAs), developing **early warning systems**, and implementing sustainable practices such as **effective water management** and **climate-resilient agriculture.**

The project also emphasises the importance of integrating women's perspectives into policy frameworks. By **facilitating dialogues** between women leaders and government officials at various levels, WLACC ensures that women's voices are heard in the formulation and implementation of climate and disaster-related policies. This approach not only addresses immediate environmental challenges but also **promotes gender equality** by recognising women's contributions to community resilience.

Through the partnership between Action-Aid Cambodia and CWDCC, the project demonstrates the effectiveness of **community-driven, women-led initiatives** in building adaptive capacities and fostering sustainable development in the face of climate change.

You can read more about ActionAid Cambodia's work here: https://cambodia. actionaid.org/publications/2022/action-aid-cambodia-newsletter-may-2022-1

Gender–Responsive Transitional Justice

Transitional justice (TJ) is a vital mechanism for addressing past human rights violations, promoting reconciliation, and ensuring sustainable peace and recovery in post-conflict societies. In Cambodia, where the legacies of the Khmer Rouge regime continue to shape political, social, and economic realities, TJ is essential to restoring dignity to survivors and preventing future violence.

Why Transitional Justice Matters in Cambodia

The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) was a landmark effort in seeking justice for Khmer Rouge-era atrocities, but its gender-responsive approach was limited.

While it addressed forced marriage and sexual violence, many survivors, particularly women, continue to experience stigma, trauma, and a lack of reparative measures.

Beyond the Khmer Rouge trials, gender-responsive transitional justice must go further, recognising and addressing:

- The long-term effects of conflict- related GBV, including the **social and economic marginalisation** of survivors.

- The **intergenerational impacts** of conflict, particularly on women-led households, displaced communities, and ethnic minorities.

- The need for **community-driven truth- telling and memorialisation** efforts that acknowledge women's experiences and contributions to peace.

Under the WPS Relief & Recovery pillar, transitional justice plays a key role in ensuring that the legacies of conflict- related violence, including GBV, are addressed through education and dialogue, preventing future cycles of violence and discrimination.

While the ECCC created pathways, much work remains to ensure that transitional justice contributes to meaningful, gender-inclusive peacebuilding.

CSOs in Cambodia have been instrumental in bridging these gaps through survivor-led initiatives, intergenerational dialogues, and community-driven justice programs (see case study).

NATIONAL GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY:

SUPPORTING WOMEN SURVIVORS OF KHMER ROUGE–ERA GENDER–BASED VIOLENCE

Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO)

During the Khmer Rouge regime (1975–1979), gender-based violence (GBV) was widespread. However, it remained insufficiently addressed in later transitional justice processes. Survivors, particularly women, faced **systematic forced marriage**, rape in prisons and re-education camps, and **sexual violence** among Khmer Rouge soldiers. However, these crimes received little public attention as the country sought to rebuild.

As a result, many women survivors lived in silence for decades, facing stigma, psychological trauma, and a lack of support services or legal recognition. In response, the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO) Cambodia implemented a **community-based mental health and justice support program** to provide **recognition, psychosocial care,** and **legal assistance** for these women.

A key initiative of the program was **Testimonial Therapy**, where survivors were encouraged to share their experiences in structured and supportive settings. These sessions culminated in public ceremonies that formally acknowledged their suffering and resilience, fostering emotional healing and social recognition. For many, this was the first time their voices had been heard, offering closure and empowerment.

To further support women's recovery, TPO provided **on-site mental health services** at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC). Women participating in legal proceedings related to Khmer Rouge-era crimes received **trauma-informed counselling** before, during, and after testifying.

Additionally, TPO **trained** legal professionals and community advocates in **survivor-centred approaches**, ensuring that women seeking justice were met with dignity, sensitivity, and appropriate support.

TPO's work directly contributed to the Relief and Recovery Pillar, ensuring that women affected by conflict-related GBV received long-overdue justice, care, and pathways to healing.

You can read more about TPO's work here: https://tpocambodia.org/community-mental-health-programs/survivors-and-victims-of-gender-based-violence-under-khmer-rouge-regime/

3.2.4.

PILLAR 4

PARTICIPATION

Ensuring Women's Leadership in Peace and Security

The Participation pillar of the WPS Agenda focuses on enhancing women's roles in decision-making, governance, and peace processes.

In Cambodia, while progress has been made, women remain underrepresented in leadership roles, political decision- making, and security sectors. Strengthening women's participation at all levels is crucial for ensuring that policies and peacebuilding efforts reflect diverse perspectives and needs.

- **Women's political leadership** – Initiatives supporting women's representation in government and local leadership structures have helped increase women's voices in policy and decision-making, but barriers remain in achieving gender parity. At the local level, policies mandate that at least one woman should hold a position at the 1) provincial, capital, municipality, district and khan level, 2) the commune or sangkat level as the focal person with the CCWC, and 3) at the village level.[85]

- **Women in peacekeeping** – Cambodia is a regional leader in women's participation in UN peacekeeping, with one of the highest percentages of female peacekeepers among ASEAN nations. Cambodian women have served in missions across Africa and the Middle East, contributing to conflict resolution, humanitarian assistance, and post- conflict reconstruction.

- **Women in demining operations:** Cambodia's Gender Mainstreaming in Mine Action Plan (GMAP) 2021–2025 aims to integrate gender considerations into all aspects of mine action, promoting women's equal participation in demining activities and decision-making processes. The plan focuses on implementing gender- sensitive guidelines, building capacity among stakeholders, and ensuring inclusive participation in mine action services, including support for survivors and risk education initiatives.

Women at the front:
Peacekeeping operations

Women's leadership and
political empowerment

**Can you think of more examples
of the Participation pillar in
action, in Cambodia?**

Women's representation in Peacekeeping

Cambodia has emerged as a leading contributor to United Nations peacekeeping missions, particularly notable for its **high participation of women**. Since 2006, the country has deployed over 9,200 peacekeepers to 12 missions across 10 countries, with women comprising approximately 8.2% of these forces.[86]

This commitment has positioned Cambodia as the top ASEAN nation for female peacekeeper deployment, ranking 9th globally among 123 contributing countries. In 2024, the proportion of Cambodian female peacekeepers reached over 17%, **surpassing the UN's 2025 target** of 15%.

These women serve in various capacities, including medical personnel, security forces, civil engineers, and demining experts, significantly enhancing the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations through gender-sensitive approaches. The Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) has also implemented targeted training programs and established a Gender Mainstreaming Group to further promote women's leadership and participation in peacekeeping roles.[87]

This strategic focus on gender inclusion not only **elevates Cambodia's standing** in global peacekeeping efforts but also **reinforces the importance of women's roles in achieving sustainable peace and security.**

Women's leadership and political empowerment

Despite comprising more than half of the population, **Cambodian women remain significantly under- represented in leadership roles**, both at the national and sub-national levels. In the 2023 general elections, women secured only 13% of National Assembly seats, marking a decline from previous years.[88]

In response, the Cambodian government has introduced initiatives such as the Neary Rattanak Strategic Plan (2024-2028), which aims to promote gender equality and enhance women's leadership across sectors.[89]

On a regional level, Cambodia has also pushed for greater female representation in decision-making through the ASEAN Inter- Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA).[90]

At the sub-national level, the government has set a target to increase the percentage of women in leadership roles within the sub- national administration to be-

tween 28% and 36% by 2028, along with an increase in the training and capacity-building of these women to ensure the appropriate number of qualified female leaders.[91]

However, significant barriers persist. Deeply rooted **cultural norms** continue to discourage women from pursuing leadership roles, while economic constraints and limited access to leadership training and education further restrict opportunities.

Without targeted investment in gender-inclusive **policies, mentorship programs,** and **financial support** for women leaders, achieving gender parity will remain an uphill battle. Sustained efforts from both government and civil society are critical to ensuring that women's voices are heard in shaping Cambodia's future.

NATIONAL GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY:

ADVANCING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE

SILAKA

The WPS Agenda recognises women's meaningful participation in governance and decision-making as essential to sustainable peace. In Cambodia, where women remain underrepresented in political leadership, SILAKA has played a crucial role in strengthening women's leadership, including at the sub-national level through its Women Leaders at Sub-National Level (WLSN) program.[92]

Building Women's Leadership in Governance
The WLSN program focused on empowering women leaders and young women activists to engage in local governance, policymaking, and advocacy. Operating in eight districts across six provinces, the program successfully enhanced women's decision-making skills, leadership capacity, and confidence in political participation.

Key activities under the program included:
- **Capacity Building** – Training women leaders on governance, gender equality, and policy advocacy.

- **Networking and Mentorship** – Strengthening peer support networks among women in leadership to increase visibility and influence.

- **Advocacy and Public Engagement** – Organising public forums, media campaigns, and direct engagement with policymakers to advance women's representation and voice in decision-making.

Impact and Contribution to the WPS Participation Pillar
Given that it equipped women with the skills, networks, and confidence to participate in governance, the WLSN program directly supported the WPS Participation Pillar. Increased women's representation at the sub-national level strengthens gender- responsive governance, ensuring that peacebuilding and development efforts address women's needs and priorities.

SILAKA's ongoing work contributes to more inclusive decision-making structures and stronger democratic processes in Cambodia, which is a critical aspect of WPS implementation.

You can read more about SILAKA's work here: https://www.silaka.org/archives/our_projects/wlsn-2/

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