IN BRIEF

WOMEN PEACE AND SECURITY

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Photo: UN Women/Fahad Kaizer

THE ISSUE

Women and girls suffer disproportionately from conflict, terrorism, and violent extremism, yet they remain largely invisible in the process of negotiating and building peace around the world. Bangladesh was a pioneering inspiration behind the landmark UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS). This, and nine consecutive resolutions, build the normative foundation of the WPS agenda, and it is further bolstered with other related normative frameworks. UN Women works to build a more equal, just, inclusive, and cohesive society with the meaningful participation of women, using the normative framework of the WPS agenda. Bangladesh has a heritage of tolerance and diversity and has contributed globally to building peace.

STRATEGY

In line with Bangladesh’s 8th Five-Year Plan and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2022-2026, the UN Women country programme (Strategic Note) for Bangladesh contributes to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. UN Women is committed to the implementation and localization of the WPS agenda in Bangladesh. Through its WPS programme, UN Women seeks to (i) strengthen the capacity of the government to implement its normative commitments, including the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, (ii) strengthen the capacity of women and civil society on the WPS agenda to ensure their participation in addressing WPS-related issues.

APPROACH

When women are empowered and are part of decision-making in their communities, societies are more cohesive and more peaceful. Enhancing women’s engagement for sustainable peace requires an integrated approach that simultaneously addresses conflict prevention, resolution, and recovery, while strengthening national accountability and ensuring women’s protection from all forms of human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence. In keeping with this approach, UN Women engaged with the rights holders and duty bearers to promote women’s role in building resilient societies. The WPS programme fostered strong partnerships with the government, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to support the development and adoption of the country’s first National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (NAP WPS) in line with Bangladesh’s commitment to fulfilling the WPS agenda set forth by the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325).
The 2019-2025 NAP WPS has a robust framework that includes strong civil society engagement in the implementation and monitoring process. UN Women forged strong partnerships with civil society and especially supported women-led CSOs to strengthen knowledge and skills concerning the localization and implementation of NAP WPS. A key component of the UN Women WPS programme portfolio in Bangladesh has been the regional project on preventing violent extremism and building resilient societies. With the aim to empower women, especially young women, as a crucial strategy for building social cohesion, UN Women supported rural women and female students from at-risk communities to engage in social entrepreneurship, knowledge exchange, and community engagement to promote a society that is peaceful, tolerant, and inclusive. Notable partners of the WPS programme include the line ministries under the Inter-Ministerial Coordination Group for NAP WPS, the Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Opera on Training (BIPSOT), leading academic institutions such as the Centre for Peace and Justice of Brac University, and women-led organizations such as Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha. UN Women has been implementing the programme in Dhaka, Mymensingh, and Rangpur with the generous support of the Governments of Australia and Japan.

RESULTS

2020-2022

- Bangladesh developed and launched its first National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security in 2019 as part of its commitment to UNSCR 1325. The plan was created through an extensive and participatory process involving nationwide, grassroots-level consultations in 21 districts. UN Women provided technical support to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to lead the process. UN Women will continue to support the localization, monitoring, and reporting of NAP WPS, which has been extended till 2025, with engagement from key government partners coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

- Over 120 civil society actors, including women leaders, from 15 districts, have strengthened understanding of WPS issues and how to support the localization of NAP WPS in partnership with Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha. Another 195 participants engaged in dialogue on WPS issues in the context of Bangladesh, and 600,000 people were reached through social media awareness campaigns promoting NAP WPS. Around 30 Members of Parliament, including the Speaker, received orientation on NAP WPS and their role in promoting the WPS agenda within their communities and constituencies.

- The Women Peace Café, co-created by UN Women and the Centre for Peace and Justice of BRAC University, is a university-based platform for the civic engagement of young women and men to become active agents of peace.

Four Women Peace Cafés have been established in three districts: the University of Dhaka, BRAC University, Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University in Mymensingh, and Begum Rokeya University in Rangpur.

- Under the Women Peace Cafés model, approximately 1,000 university students have gained greater knowledge and skills in social entrepreneurship, gender and leadership, peacebuilding, social cohesion, and digital literacy. Over 15,000 community members have benefited through 18 student-led social entrepreneurship initiatives that tackled diverse issues, such as COVID-19 awareness and prevention; sexual and reproductive health rights issues among the most vulnerable bede (snake charmers), tea garden workers, and Bihari communities; and entrepreneurship training for out-of-work women during the pandemic. Over two million people have been reached through various social media platforms of the Women Peace Cafés with messages promoting peace, fighting against hate speech and misogyny, and preventing extremism. BRAC University has institutionalized the Women Peace Café as a university club which ensures the sustainability of the intervention. In addition, students at the Asian University of Women in Chittagong have led the process of setting up their own Peace Café on their campus without any external intervention. This demonstrates the organic replicability and sustainability of the model.
IMPACT STORY
MAHUMUDA SULTANA SHORNA

Mahmuda Sultana Shorna is the President of the Women Peace Café (WPC) at Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University (JKKNIU) in Mymensingh, Bangladesh. Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit Bangladesh, she has found innovative ways to keep spreading messages of peace while helping women in her community.

“The pandemic has completely transformed the ways we used to do things. Our Women Peace Café (WPC) work has been affected, everything has shifted to digital platforms, and the situations at home have also changed. As soon as the university closed, I had to move back home. To share the burden of the household work, I created a chore distribution chart for my brothers to help me at home. At first, it was difficult to persuade my brothers, but now they have adapted well and help with several chores, such as cooking.

To help women who are suffering from the consequences of the pandemic, we raised funds from the community and distributed food and hygiene items to support women in vulnerable positions. Through WPC funds, we have been able to help at least 50 vulnerable women by distributing essential goods to them. I have, for example, coordinated the donation of a sewing machine to a woman who could not feed her children after her husband lost his job. She was already skilled in sewing, and the machine helped her to provide for her family.

During the lockdown, the WPC meetings were held online, and we are creating weekly digital content to spread messages of peace during the crisis. We are taking the initiative to learn from a freelance digital literacy expert.

Since the virus outbreak, I have seen a rise in fake news and misinformation related to COVID-19. The misinformation is quickly being shared by many people. Before the pandemic, I did not know what I could do to stop the spread of fake news, but after attending a Digital Literacy Training led by UN Women, I have learned how to report fake news and misinformation when I see it. I miss the personal interaction with my teachers, peers, and fellow WPC members, but I am using technology to stay connected and learn to live my new normal.”