WOMEN'S TRANSFORMATIONAL ROLES IN LOCAL CONFLICT PREVENTION:

Case Study of WPHF-Supported Civil Society Organizations in Burundi, Iraq, Palestine, Philippines, and Uganda

Contents

Acronyms

AOO	Accepting Others Organisation	NGO	Non-governmental organization
APFB	Association Pour la Promotion de la Fille Burundaise	NVPF	Nonviolent Peaceforce Philippines
BACHI	Baitambogwe Community Healthcare Initiative	PSD	Paradigm for Social Justice and Development
CDO	Civil Development Organization	RFPJ	Rwenzori Forum for Peace and Justice
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women	SGBV	Sexual and gender based violence
CRS	Catholic Relief Services	TF	Transforming Fragilities
CSO	Civil society organization	WAC	Women's Affairs Centre
EWRS	Early warning and response systems	WPHF	Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund
GBV	Gender based violence	WROs	Women's rights organizations
IWJF	Iraqi Women Journalist Forum	WPS	Women peace and security
NAP	National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security		

Introduction

In the current context of multiple global crises and complex violent conflict, investment in conflict prevention must be a central element of the international response. However, there has been limited focus on and investment for conflict prevention within the international peace and security community, and particularly a limited focus on how women and women's rights organizations can be supported to prevent and respond to conflict in their communities, even despite the fact that gender inequalities both drive and are exacerbated by conflict. Women play a key role as legitimate and trusted actors in their communities, responding to rising tensions, preventing the spread of conflict, and building peace.

The United Nations Women's Peace, and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) supports women's engagement in conflict prevention by providing programmatic funding to civil society organizations (CSOs) and women's rights organisations (WROs) around the world that work to prevent conflict and build peace. Recognising that women's participation in conflict prevention at family, community, sub-national and national levels is too often invisible or overlooked, the WPHF commissioned a study with the aim of generating evidence on the roles and impact of women and WROs in preventing conflict. The study documents the approaches and impact of a WPHF partners working at community or sub-national levels on conflict prevention in Burundi, Iraq, Palestine, Philippines, and Uganda. It documents the strategies, tools and innovative approaches used by these WROs; identifies best practices and lessons from their work; and provides recommendations on how best to invest in women's conflict prevention interventions. The study also aims to amplify the voices and work of WROs and women peacebuilders in conflict prevention and contribute to shifting the international funding architecture to increase financing for local conflict prevention and advancing gender equality.

The following case study draws on a review of relevant literature; WPHF documentation and data; and key informant interviews with representatives of 15 WROs working on conflict prevention in Burundi, Iraq, Palestine, Philippines, and Uganda, and representatives from UN Women and WPHF. The following WROs participated:

- Burundi: Saemaul Undong, Association Pour la Promotion de la Fille Burundaise (APFB), Dushirehamwe, AFRABU
- Iraq: Accepting Others Organisation (AOO), Civil Development Organisation (CDO), Iraqi Women Journalist Forum (IWJF)
- Palestine: REFORM, Women's Affairs Centre (WAC)
- Philippines: Nonviolent Peaceforce Philippines (NVPF), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Transforming Fragilities (TF)
- Uganda: Baitambogwe Community healthcare initiative (BACHI), Paradigm for Social Justice and Development (PSD), Rwenzori Forum for Peace and Justice (RFPJ)

The case study specifically focuses on women's role in conflict prevention at the local level. It then goes on to look at the different approaches and strategies that women take in their conflict prevention work, and the impact that results from these. The case study examines the challenges that women face in undertaking conflict prevention work and the ways in which they seek to overcome these. Finally, it draws out key lessons regarding how funders can most effectively support the conflict prevention work of grassroots WROs.

1. Women's roles in local level conflict prevention

An examination of evidence demonstrates that women play a wide range of roles in preventing conflict. This includes working in a variety of ways and at multiple levels – from family and community level to sub-national and national level - to address drivers of conflict, promote conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and participate in decision making on issues related to conflict, security, peacebuilding, recovery and reform. Women also work across multiple levels to advocate for women's participation and influence in all aspects of conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

It provides insights into how women build upon their existing roles within communities to prevent and address conflict, as well as how they challenge existing gender norms to carve out new roles for themselves within communities to participate in conflict prevention. While the study does not examine women's engagement in conflict prevention at national level, in all five of the countries women's community level conflict prevention work both contributes to and is informed by wider mobilization, activism and debate at national level on women's role in addressing conflict and building peace.

1.1 Women's motivation to address conflict

Women play diverse roles and have a range of experiences in relation to conflict, including as combatants, victims of violence, preventors of violence, mediators, and peacebuilders. Women have the right to participate fully in all aspects of conflict prevention and peacebuilding and they seek to exercise this right even in the most challenging of contexts.

There are multiple reasons why women are motivated to engage in conflict prevention. WPHF partners described how this motivation is often driven by their roles within their families and communities. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Philippines reported that women they work with are motivated to address conflict because they want to improve the situation for their family and ensure that their children are safe and have opportunities for education. Likewise in Iraq, WPHF partners reported that women are motivated to become engaged in conflict prevention by the need to protect their household, and particularly to avoid leaving the family in challenging circumstances if male breadwinners are killed or injured. Meanwhile, Women's Affiar Centre (WAC) Palestine reported that the fact that women and children are so severely affected by conflict is a major driver for women's involvement in conflict prevention.

Evidence suggests that given their central roles in families and communities women are well placed to identify the shifting local dynamics and behaviors that may indicate rising tensions and the possible outbreak or escalation of violence. For example, Bigio and Vogelstein (2016) document how Kosovan women were among the first in their communities to voice concerns when young men began massing weapons and going into the local hills for training, although there were no adequate reporting systems to capture these women's observations. Moreover, the continuum of gendered violence in women's lives means that when there are rising levels of insecurity in society, women may be the first to be affected, for example through restricted movement, increased risk of violence in public spaces, or increased domestic violence, as WPHF partners in Palestine and Iraq reported. This makes women and WROs well placed to identify growing insecurity. Likewise, Bigio and Vogelstein (2016) point out that in many countries women are well positioned to detect early signs of radicalization and extremism because their rights are often the first targets of fundamentalists, as has been documented in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Nigeria.

1.2 Women's roles in identifying and responding to conflict

Women's family and social roles also enables them to operate in different ways in order to prevent conflict. In particular, women have different networks that they mobilize for conflict prevention, have

influence within different spheres, and have different ways of approaching negotiation and conflict resolution. This alternative perspective brings significant value for conflict prevention work. For example, Saferworld (2014) argues that because women are most active at the local level, a focus on women helps to draw attention to local factors contributing to conflict, providing access to information about tensions before they reach the national level.

The informal networks among women at the community level were repeatedly highlighted by WPHF partners as a resource for conflict prevention work. For example, in the communities where Paradigm for Social Justice and Development (PSD) Uganda works, women's savings groups meet on a weekly basis. These meetings are used as a space and opportunity for women to informally share concerns related to tensions and conflict, which the most influential women from the savings group then raise with local authorities and leaders. Likewise, Reform Palestine reports that within conservative communities women can engage and mobilize other women for conflict prevention in ways that men cannot. Meanwhile, in some cases, such as the communities that Nonviolent Peaceforce Philippines (NVPF) Philippines works with, as men are more at risk of being involved in violence, it is easier for women to reach out to hostile parties to facilitate conflict resolution without the risk of being drawn into violent clashes.

WPHF partners noted that women's central role in the family gives them significant influence over family members – for example in shaping attitudes of their children or influencing their husbands - and that women's promotion of peace within families is a major contribution to conflict prevention. Partners in Iraq reported that women play a key role in preventing extremism through their influence over young people within the household. Likewise, Transforming Fragilities (TF) Philippines described how when men involved in conflict mediation processes encounter an obstacle that appears unsolvable, it is often their wives that will suggest alternative approaches that enable the mediation to move forward, drawing on their different perspective as women and their detailed understanding of what is happening on the ground.

1.3. Women bring a different approach to dialogue on conflict resolution

There are many examples of women undertaking conflict prevention through dialogue. While social norms regarding women's behavior are frequently a barrier to women's participation in public dialogue, WPHF partners reported that women also use these gender normative behaviors in ways that contribute to the effectiveness of their conflict prevention engagement. For example, CRS Philippines reports that, in the communities where it works, women often take a softer approach, and a more compromised, focused and persuasive approach to dialogue, which is useful in overcoming resistance and bringing together conflicting parties. Likewise, PSD Uganda reports that women are often extremely persistent and patient, which makes them particularly good mediators, and that cases mediated by women tend to be concluded more swiftly than those mediated by men. Meanwhile, TF Philippines report that women play a particular role within conflict resolution processes of articulating and documenting the 'woundedness' of their communities and ensuring that this is reflected in the terms of conciliation. For this reason, women in these communities often take the role of documenting the conflict and the terms of agreement in negotiations.

1.4. WROs play a strategic role building on their networks and legitimacy

WROs tend to play a strategic role within communities and to have strong networks, relationships, and legitimacy, which they have built up over time by working across a wide range of issues of importance to communities - from service provision to economic empowerment. They can draw on these networks and their legitimacy within communities when engaging in conflict prevention work. For example, by using the trust and access that they have with community members and local institutions to bring

conflicting parties together and facilitate dialogue or using their extensive networks to gather information about tensions and risks. The networks, relationships, and legitimacy of WROs can be particularly critical when other more formal paths for conflict prevention are blocked or ineffective. A clear example of this is in Burundi where WROs have built strong relationships and reputation through their mediation work at family and community levels, and various stakeholders regularly seek support from them, including the local police.

This central role of WROs in communities affected by conflict and crisis is reflected in the wider evidence. A recent report from the UN Secretary General details how WROs in conflict-affected countries can draw on their central role within communities to help support those communities in times of emergency. It describes how, during the COVID pandemic, "women's groups have demonstrated that they are essential leaders in emergencies and play a key role in maintaining social cohesion and preventing further conflict and instability. They have the community's trust and outreach capacity." (UN Secretary General, 2022)

1.5 Women's role in conflict prevention is often invisible

While an examination of the work of WPHF partners reveals that women play different roles in conflict prevention, such roles are often rendered invisible because of gender bias in how peacebuilding is understood. For example, in some contexts, women's ability to engage in formal or public conflict prevention activities is severely restricted by social norms. However, even in these contexts, women still build back door networks and operate in informal and less overt ways to contribute to easing tensions and resolving conflict.

Because of its grassroots and less formal nature, women's conflict prevention work is often invisible to international actors working in the conflict prevention space, resulting in this work going unfunded. Bell (2013) describes how women's ground level conflict prevention work can be overlooked due to a focus on male dominated formal processes, "despite the fact that peace initiatives will often have been promoted by civil society and in particular women during a conflict, it is often only at the stage where the main protagonists to a conflict – primarily men – come together in a formal attempt to mediate an end to the conflict that a formal peace process is considered to exist and attracts sustained international support...however, civic peace initiatives that have preceded [more formal processes] will often be a valuable resource and constitute an ongoing pressure on the political process" (Bell, 2013).

2. Strategies and Approaches used by Women for Conflict Prevention

There is limited research on the specific strategies used by women for conflict prevention. Much research outlines, in relatively general terms, how women mediate local conflicts and participate in early warning systems in ways that contribute to conflict prevention. However, some research is more extensive. For example, UN Women (2015) describes the use of 'Women's Situation Rooms' in Africa to monitor and prevent or mitigate election-related violence, using preventive diplomacy; civic education; dialogue and advocacy; deployment of female election observers; and awareness raising about incidents of violence and intimidation. UN Women (2015) also describes how Sudanese women developed a "Minimum Agenda for Peace" to promote peace across Sudan and South Sudan, undertaking activities such as initiatives such as public hearings on women's views on the context, training in conflict resolution and mediation, and broader peace advocacy. Meanwhile World Bank and UNDP (2018) describe how women in Liberia created 'Peace Huts', where women can come together to mediate and resolve community disputes and have come to be supported by the Liberia National Police. Replications of the 'peace huts' strategy has been used by WROs supported by WPHF in Liberia as well.

An examination of the work of WPHF partners demonstrates how they have adopted a variety of strategies for conflict prevention, in response to the specific conflict dynamics in the communities where they work. These various strategies for preventing and resolving conflict are discussed below.

2.1 Mediation and dispute resolution

Many of WPHF's partners engage in mediation activities with the aim of resolving disputes and preventing these from escalating into wider violence and conflict. The broad range of disputes on which they mediate is based on a recognition of the multiple ways in which conflict, violence, and insecurity manifest and interconnect across family, community, and societal levels. For example, how family disputes over land can interact with wider tensions over natural resources or access to justice; or how broader dynamics of insecurity and rights violations influence patterns of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) within families and communities.

Rwenzori Forum for Peace and Justice (RFPJ) Uganda supports WROs mediating a wide variety of disputes, including those related to ethnic conflict; conflict over land and natural resources, election related and political violence and tensions; conflicts between different religious communities; sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), and conflict within families over issues such as economic support or inheritance. In each case RPFJ brings together the key stakeholders to identify options for compromise and resolution of the conflict, as well as to connect them to formal processes and institutions as relevant. However, the exact mechanism that RFPJ uses is different depending on the nature of the conflict. For example, in the case of tensions between religious communities RFPJ brings together religious leaders and local security actors to develop commitments from each side to avoid conflict. In the case of disputes between individuals about land, in addition to direct mediation, community meetings are conducted where community members can offer relevant information about land ownership and boundaries, and once a conclusion has been reached, RFPJ communicates this to the district land office to ensure that agreed boundaries and ownership are recorded. Meanwhile, in cases of SGBV and violations of women's rights within the family, RFPJ has trained community level gender focal people who mediate between family members and where necessary refer cases to agencies such as the police, as well as follow up to ensure these agencies take appropriate action.

WPHF partners in Burundi also have interesting examples of how women mediate to prevent conflict on multiple levels and using different approaches. APFB Burundi has developed women's networks across two provinces that identify, document and mediate wherever tensions emerge, including by organizing roundtables where authorities and citizens can discuss risks and adopt action plans to mitigate them. Dushirehamwe's Women Mediators project has been training women mediators since 2013, and now has many women who can mediate across a variety of types of conflict. Meanwhile, Saemaul Undong Burundi provides mediation at household level using a "socio-therapy" approach, in which women mediators and local authorities jointly identify families that are experiencing serious internal conflict and mediators provide socio-therapy sessions over several months to resolve the conflict, after which the family receives support in terms of empowerment and economic development to ensure its future stability.

Some WPHF partners are working on a large scale to mediate different types of conflict across a wide area. For example, Reform Palestine has developed a coalition with 17 member organizations that address emerging conflicts between different Palestinian social groups such as tribal disputes, gender-based violence (GBV) and discrimination, intergenerational tensions, access to resources and services displacement, and the rise of fundamentalism. This coalition of community service groups based both in the West Bank and Gaza, report on rising tensions, and coalition partners then bring together all stakeholders involved in the conflict to discuss and find a solution.

2.2 Early warning and response systems

Another common strategy used by WROs is the development of women-led early warning systems and support for women to feed into already established early warning and response systems (EWRS). The importance of women's involvement in EWRS has been increasingly recognized in recent years. For example, UN Women (2015) argues that women must be consulted during the formulation of early warning systems and that there should be specific channels put in place for women to report information to the central data collection site. Also, given the continuum of SGBV, it is critical that early warning mechanisms and indicators capture gender-based violations and that women and girls have safe outlets to report violence. The World Bank and UNDP also highlight how changes in women's experiences can be viewed as signs of social and political insecurity and be used as a basis for developing indicators within EWRS. These changes may include an increase in domestic violence, increased risk of GBV outside the home, an increase in the number of female headed households, a decrease in girls' attending school, and an increase in pregnancy terminations. They stress that this underscores the importance of monitoring indicators of gender equality within broader systems to prevent violence.

WROs have a central role to play in identifying such gender related conflict indicators, given their deep understanding of local gender norms and power dynamics and the information they have regarding levels of gender-based violence. UN Women argues that WROs "should therefore be engaged in roles that allow them to maximize the impact of these valuable insights within existing mechanisms and should be connected to formal early warning mechanisms" (UN Women, 2015).

The work of WPHF partners in the Philippines provides interesting examples of women's engagement on EWRS, particularly how they connect with local authorities to feed into formal early warning systems. For example, having identified that the existing local government EWRS was not working well, CRS supported female and male local leaders to lobby local authorities to adapt this system, and continues to support communities to work in partnership with authorities for its implementation. This has included supporting WROs across five municipalities to act as data collectors and monitors on the ground, and to input their knowledge into the local government's EWRS. As part of this work CRS conducted awareness raising on WPS issues and women's role in conflict prevention with local leaders and government stakeholders, in order to create an enabling environment for women's participation in which key actors recognize and value their contribution to early warning efforts.

Likewise, Nonviolent Peaceforce Philippines (NVPF) Philippines worked with local government authorities to map out the areas in which EWRS was needed, identified priorities, and developed the capacity of community leaders, women leaders, women ex-combatants, women religious leaders and others to become early warning monitors, and in conflict prevention and women's rights. These monitors were then able to work on identifying and reporting conflict risks, as well as undertake awareness raising on conflict, gender equality and women's role in conflict prevention in their communities.

WPHF partners in Palestine have also developed EWRS that are led by or inclusive of women. WROs created early warning teams, each supported by local women responders and mediators, while local WROs coordinated between these early warning teams and local government and other institutions (WPHF Peer Exchange Brief 4: Women's Role in Conflict Prevention and Mediation, 2022). WPHF partners reported that this work demonstrated that it is possible to bridge the widespread mistrust between women and male-led government and security institutions and build cooperation between them to advance peace.

2.3 Research to inform women's engagement in conflict prevention

Women's rights organizations undertake research and analysis to inform their support for women's participation in conflict prevention. This includes research to understand local conflict and insecurity dynamics, as well as research to understand barriers to women's participation in conflict prevention.

In order to better understand and respond to local conflict dynamics, RFPJ Uganda undertook a survey to identify hot spot areas for different types of conflict and violence, such as SGBV or land related conflicts. This enabled them to identify the most common types and locations of conflict and focus their conflict prevention work on these. Likewise, the early warning monitors trained by NVPF in the Philippines conducted conflict mapping and conflict analysis in their communities to help identify indicators and triggers of conflict and inform their conflict resolution response. Meanwhile, WPHF partners in Palestine undertook research to identify different types of conflicts and inform the development of an early warning and response system. They also used these findings to inform advocacy activities to engage wider stakeholders and decision makers (WPHF Peer Exchange Brief 4: Women's Role in Conflict Prevention and Mediation, 2022).

In order to inform its support for women's participation in conflict prevention, Paradigm for Social Justice and Development (PSD) Uganda undertook research that examined the barriers to such participation and how best these can be overcome. This included conducting a study on the extent to which women are excluded from community discussions and peacebuilding initiatives, which identified that even though women are highly affected by local conflicts they are excluded from participation in resolving these for several reasons. Working on a much larger scale, Iraqi Women Journalist Forum (IWFJ) in Iraq conducted interviews with 1,800 women to identify the factors that are critical to women's empowerment and participation and shared these findings with journalists to use in their reporting, in order to highlight the issues faced by Iraqi women and their role and impact in the areas of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Meanwhile, other WPHF partners in Iraq undertook situational analysis and rapid research on the role of women in conflict prevention (WPHF Annual Progress Report Iraq 2021).

2.4 Awareness raising, advocacy and dialogue with a range of stakeholders

Awareness raising, advocacy and dialogue with communities and wider stakeholders is a central strategy for WROs working on conflict prevention, although this takes different forms depending on the context.

Almost all WPHF partners undertook community discussions and dialogue around conflict prevention and women's role in it. For example, in Iraq, WROs were involved in providing knowledge and information to communities on conflict prevention and peacebuilding and the importance of women's participation in this. They also undertook awareness raising activities that brought together people from different ethnic and religious communities to promote co-existence, as well as raised community awareness about UNSCR 1325, the National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security (INAP II), anti-domestic violence law and women's economic empowerment (WPHF Annual Progress Report Iraq 2021).

RFPJ Uganda also undertook a range of awareness raising work with both communities and key local stakeholders, including holding weekly meetings with key stakeholders in conflict hotspot areas to discuss the most urgent conflict risks and how these can be addressed or mitigated. Meanwhile, PSD Uganda undertook awareness raising and training with communities to enable them to identify potential conflicts and to prevent or mitigate them; to inform them regrading which institutions they can refer conflicts to if they are unable to resolve them at community level; and to develop their awareness on SGBV and the importance of women's involvement in conflict prevention. This

awareness raising and training activities were conducted in existing community spaces and meetings, such as women's savings groups, or events that district authorities had organized in the community.

WHPF partners recognize that the media as an important means of raising awareness on conflict prevention and women's role within it and use media channels for such work. Most notably, IWJF Iraq developed the capacity of journalists to report on gender related issues, conflict prevention, the WPS agenda and human rights, as well as conducted media campaigns across several provinces on women's role in mediation and conflict resolution. Meanwhile other WPHF partners used radio specifically to raise awareness on conflict prevention and gender. For example, Reform Palestine developed a radio programme that highlights conflict related issues in the West Bank and Gaza; Dushirehamwe, Burundi used community listening clubs and radio broadcasts to raise awareness on gender and conflict prevention issues; and PSD Uganda developed community radio programmes in different villages to raise awareness about conflict prevention.

In some cases, WPHF partners' advocacy and awareness raising work explicitly targets men and male leaders, with the aim of changing discriminatory attitudes about women's leadership and opening space for women's involvement in conflict prevention. Accepting Others Organisation (AOO) in Iraq, for example, advocated with male tribal and religious leaders as key influencers, including persuading religious leaders to talk to their communities about the WPS agenda and women's participation in decision making. AOO also ran dialogue sessions with leaders from different ethnic and religious communities discussing issues related to women's rights and empowerment in the context of conflict prevention. Likewise, Dushirehamwe in Burundi undertook dialogue on positive masculinities and behavior change among men.

2.5 Connecting women to wider conflict prevention actors and systems

A key strategy of several WPHF partners has been to strengthen connections and coordination between women and broader conflict prevention actors and systems, notably local level government authorities and justice and security actors.

In some cases, this work was focused on ensuring that women have access to these institutions and can participate in decision making related to conflict prevention. For example, APFB Burundi facilitated exchanges between administrative authorities and women leaders to advocate for the participation of women in conflict prevention processes. While in Palestine, WPHF support was used to link women involved in conflict prevention at grassroots level to local and national structures, such as the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and ensure their voices are heard within these structures.

In other cases, this work focused more on developing knowledge and capacity within government authorities regarding women's experience of conflict and the WPS agenda. For example, Baitambogwe Community Healthcare Initiative (BACHI) Uganda engaged with political leaders at district level to inform them about the conflict related issues that women face and discuss how these can be addressed. Likewise, WPHF partners in Iraq engaged local officials in various activities related to WPS and conflict prevention to raise their awareness on these agendas and ensure that they are reflected in local by-laws and regulations.

In yet other cases, WROs engagement with authorities is focused more on practical collaboration for conflict prevention work, including ensuring that there is appropriate reporting, referrals and joint interventions to prevent conflict. For example, BACHI, RFPJ, and PSD in Uganda all refer cases to, and coordinate with, a variety of local level government institutions and officials, police and security actors, and local leaders at different levels.

Several WPHF partners also have a strong focus on connecting grassroots women to larger civil society actors, women's movements and international actors working on conflict prevention. For example, in Iraq, WROs place a strong emphasis on promoting collaboration, including connecting women's groups involved in conflict prevention to each other, and to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and representatives of the international community, thereby improving coordination on conflict prevention, strengthening the gender sensitivity of EWRS and minimizing the risk of duplication (WPHF Annual Progress Report Iraq 2021). Likewise, WPHF partners in Uganda focus on coordinating with other CSOs and promoting linkages between national and international conflict reporting and response systems and women's involvement in such systems (WPHF Annual Progress Report Uganda, 2022).

2.6 Developing women's capacity to engage in conflict prevention

A central strategy for all WPHF partners is developing the individual and collective capacity of women to undertake conflict prevention work. An example of this can be seen in the work of RPF Uganda, which trained women to be community reporters, identifying, reporting on, and mediating conflicts that emerge within their communities. The women chosen for this training were already respected members of the community, with legitimacy to take on this role, but needed significant capacity support to carry it out. Similarly, the work of CRS in Philippines seeks to develop the capacity of women to participate in conflict prevention activities, with emphasis not just on building women's skills and knowledge, but also their confidence to engage, as for many this is their first experience of participating in discussions and speaking in public.

Some WPHF partners also have a strong focus on developing women's leadership skills. For example, CDO in Iraq helps CSOs to build relationships with women in political positions and to support them to play a leadership role on conflict prevention, recognizing that while there is a quota for women in parliament, some women parliamentarians lack capacity to influence decision making around conflict and peacebuilding. Likewise, AOO, Iraq provided training to women on leadership skills related to the WPS agenda, WPS NAP and conflict prevention issues, with women going on to establish a new women's rights organization in their region.

In terms strengthening the collective capacity of WROs, some WPHF partners support grassroots WROs to build the technical skills and knowledge required to engage effectively on conflict prevention. For example, APFB Burundi trained women-led community organisations on mediation, advocacy, and conflict prevention techniques. Likewise, C Civil Development Organization (CDO) Iraq trained WROs and youth groups on conflict prevention strategies, and these groups went on to undertake advocacy and training with other actors such as government and political stakeholders.

WPHF partners have also focused on developing the organizational capacity of grassroots WROs and CSOs involved in conflict prevention. For example, CRS Philippines supported women at grassroots level to form their own organisations, through which they can engage in conflict prevention work. CRS also supported these women to formalize and register these organisations with national authorities, as this will allow them to have formal representation and voice within local conflict prevention structures and processes.

2.7 Engaging the most marginalized women in conflict prevention

All WPHF partners recognize that particular groups of women are more severely impacted by conflict and face greater barriers to participating in conflict prevention efforts. Several partners have developed strategies to engage the most marginalized women in conflict prevention activities, as well as to ensure that these activities addressed the specific circumstances and needs of different groups of women. Some pointed out that the work of grassroots WROs tends to be naturally intersectional

because, in being so close to the communities that they work with, they understand the needs of different groups of people within those communities.

In terms of purposefully engaging marginalized women, APFB Burundi ensures that a certain quota must be reserved within its project activities for women and girls from marginalized groups, such as indigenous women, women living with HIV, disabled women, albino women, women returnees, and women and girl household heads. Likewise, all the conflict prevention work of PSD Uganda addresses intersectional vulnerabilities and involves a component that targets marginalized people. For example, PSD liaises with the district level office for people with disabilities to ensure that disabled people's issues are fully addressed in its conflict prevent work. Meanwhile in Iraq, some WROs focus on supporting Yazdi women given their high level of exclusion and specific experience of conflict and violence.

Not only do these WROs explicitly address intersectionality, they seek to reach the most marginalized women within their programme activities. The fact that they work at grassroots level and in the most conflict affected areas means that they are already engaging with some of the most vulnerable and excluded populations. For example, CRS Philippines reported that while many conflict prevention initiatives are concentrated in safer areas, based on their mapping of where most conflict affected women are located, they decided to work in hard-to-reach interior areas. These areas have received very little support for women's empowerment or mobilization in the past and there is significant appetite among these largely overlooked groups of women to be engaged in conflict prevention.

2.8 Linking conflict prevention work to issues of displacement, climate, and natural resources management

WROs working on conflict prevention are frequently engaged on issues of displacement, climate change and natural resource management, given that these factors are often closely connected to conflict and have gendered impacts. There are several examples of work on natural resources and displacement by WPHF partners in Uganda. In one case, a community was displaced because of the construction of a sugar factory, creating negative impacts such as contaminating water and impeding access to services. The WPHF partner mediated between the community and factory and supported women community members to raise their concerns with relevant authorities. In another case, a community was displaced by a quarry and PSD Uganda engaged with a range of stakeholders such as local authorities and the district human rights committee to raise the concerns of the displaced community and mediate between them and the quarry. These efforts contributed to the authorities ultimately halting the work of the quarry company. Meanwhile, in the Philippines, NVPF identified that one of the areas where it supports EWRS monitors was highly affected by recurring displacement driven by violent extremism. NVPF supported discussion between the displaced population and actors such as local authorities, local leaders, police, and security forces in order to facilitate the return of displaced population, while the EWRS monitors supported this displaced population on their return, for example to access services.

Engaging on the intersection of climate crisis, conflict and gender inequality is likely to become an increasing focus for WROs in coming years, for "as climate change drives conflict across the world, women and girls face increased vulnerabilities to all forms of gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, human trafficking, child marriage, and other forms of violence" (UN Women, 2022). The WPHF partners interviewed recognized the need to work on climate related aspects of conflict prevention and several of them noted that grassroots WROs working on conflict prevention are very well placed to work on climate because of their strong networks within communities; their detailed knowledge of the local environment and ability to identify changes in it that could exacerbate

conflict; and their engagement in broader early warning and crisis response structures that can be mobilized to address climate related crisis. UN Women (2015) points out that women's knowledge of the natural environment and resource scarcity can play an integral role in EWRS for climate-related resource scarcity and conflict.

2.9 Identifying and preventing violent extremism

UN Women (2018) describes how "structural gender inequalities and systematic discrimination directly contribute to root causes of violent extremism. Yet, in some instances frameworks to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism may exacerbate gender inequality". Support to address violent extremism must therefore be based on an understanding of the local gendered dynamics of violent extremism and the contextually specific ways in which extremist ideologies undermine women's rights, as well as the impacts of counterterrorist activities on women. WROs are well placed to develop responses to violent extremism that both address root causes of radicalization and reshape extremist views.

Several WPHF partners have a focus on identifying and preventing violent extremism in their conflict prevention work. WPHF partners in Iraq are particularly engaged in this area, with an emphasis on changing the attitude of communities to extremism; helping people to understand and address the root causes of conflict rather than see conflict through an extremist lens; and working with a range of stakeholders to jointly address extremist ideologies and mobilization (e.g., official bodies, governors, religious and traditional leaders, women leaders, and police).

In some cases, WROs work specifically with populations at risk of recruitment into violent extremism. For example, AOO in Iraq has organized training camps with young people that aim to empower and develop the capacities of young men and women from conservative communities to reduce their vulnerability to recruitment. Likewise, PSD in Uganda has worked with refugee communities that were identified as vulnerable for recruitment into violent armed groups, including working to deradicalize women who have been targeted by extremists and address the issues such as lack of livelihoods that push women to join armed groups.

In the Philippines, extremist groups seek to recruit young people who are out of school or who have previous combat experience, for example through involvement in clan feuds or with armed rebels. Communities see women as playing a key role in combatting this threat by supporting young people within their families or clan to resist recruitment. NVPF Philippines seeks to build on and strengthen this existing role of women in combatting violent extremism, by training the women EWRS monitors to identify indicators of radicalization and recruitment and respond by conducting awareness raising in the community.

2.10 Working across the conflict – humanitarian - development - human rights nexus

Grassroots WROs involved in conflict prevention tend to naturally work across the nexus of conflict, humanitarian, development, and human rights issues because their work is informed by the realities of communities' experiences and needs in which these areas are closely interconnected. All WPHF partners were working across this nexus, for example providing psychosocial services or livelihood activities, or taking up human rights and justice issues, alongside more traditional conflict prevention work. It was reported that in the Philippines there is a particularly strong nexus between climate change, food insecurity, violent extremism, displacement, and conflict, although this manifests differently in different parts of the country. WPHF partners in the Philippines reflected that they could play an important role in reporting on and responding to this nexus, but that this would require them to build their understanding of these different types of challenges and how they relate to each other, as well as strengthen their connections to relevant structures that work on these different threats.

While the international community often divides the above issues into separate silos, for WROs and the communities they are highly interconnected and often indivisible. Indeed, it is frequently through their work on humanitarian or development issues, and notably through their service provision work, that WROs build the legitimacy that allows them to engage in politically sensitive and male dominated areas such as conflict prevention. For this reason, WROs may integrate elements of women's economic empowerment or humanitarian service provision in projects on conflict prevention, to help build legitimacy and access. However, this is often not a priority of funders, who expect projects to fall neatly into the conflict prevention silo. In recognition of this reality, WPHF seeks to be flexible, and demand driven in its funding, recognizing that conflict prevention can involve many different things depending on context.

3. The Impact of Women's Conflict Prevention Work

An examination of the work of WPHF partners, as well as a review of the wider literature, reveals the multiple ways in which women's conflict prevention work results in impact. Both in terms of identifying, avoiding, or resolving conflict, and in terms of empowering women and advancing their voice and decision making. WPHF reports that in 2022, across all of their partners in Burundi, Iraq, Palestine, Philippines and Uganda, 8,313 women participated in decision making in conflict prevention processes and response, resolving, averting or referring over 25,000 conflicts (WPHF Annual Report, 2022).

3.1 Stronger early warning and response systems
Existing evidence suggests that women's participation contributes to stronger early warning systems including through a more comprehensive set of risk indicators; reporting of important information that would otherwise be overlooked; a more gender sensitive analysis of conflict dynamics and potential; identifying risks, including risks to women, that would otherwise be missed; and a more gender sensitive response.[1] Arnado (2012) argues that, "combining gender-sensitive conflict early warning information with the involvement of both men and women in the analysis and response can improve the quality of the analysis gathered as well as strengthen women's roles in conflict prevention processes, and lead to gender sensitive responses to security threats".

UN Women (2015) and Saferworld (2014) identifies the factors required for a gender sensitive EWRS as including equal participation of men and women in the conception, design, and implementation of early warning measures; gender as a category of analysis; and the development and use of indicators that are gender-specific, as well as indicators that are sex-gender specific. However, UN Women(2015) also argues that, although the use of women-led or informed strategies of early warning and conflict resolution are proven tools to strengthen the effectiveness of conflict prevention, in practice these are only rarely incorporated.

WPHF partners provide clear examples of how women's engagement can strengthen EWRS. For example, Reform Palestine supported women in Hebron to design an early warning system and act as early warners. The success of this work resulted in the Ministry of Interior Affairs mainstreaming this EWRS into their structures. Beyond the establishment of a successful and sustainable EWRS, this work also increased the capacity of women in Hebron to collect, monitor and analyze data related to conflict, making them better equipped to formulate responses; empowered women to speak out and intervene in community affairs and on issues related to conflict; supported women to engage and coordinate

---

[1] See for example, Saferworld, 2014.

with authorities such as police and government officials; and challenged perceptions that conflict resolution should be in hands of older men.

Similarly, PSD Uganda, in partnership with the local authorities, developed an early warning system at village and sub-county level which includes templates and processes for reporting and following up on, as well as referring, disputes and conflicts. This EWRS is reported to be working well and has resulted in increased reporting on a range of threats and conflicts including in relation to family, land, and displacement. PSD are seeking further funding to expand this successful EWRS to district level, so that village and sub-county level conflict risks can be reported up to district level actors, who can then systematically follow up on them.

3.2 Resolution of local disputes and conflicts

There is evidence that women can have a significant impact in resolving local level grievances and conflicts, drawing on their relationships and legitimacy with local communities to do so. World Bank and UNDP (2018) describe how low-cost, local, women-led interventions can fulfil important roles in communities that lack access to state justice mechanisms, including in providing conflict mediation, community policing, awareness raising, and sensitization. Meanwhile, United States Institute for Peace argues that WROs "often have […] a track record of addressing community needs. This gives them legitimacy to call community forums and be mediators within their communities. In many instances, women's organizations are found to be non-polarizing, and hence efficient conduits for expressing and addressing grievances that may arise within communities." (United States Institute for Peace, 2015).

There are multiple examples of such impact in the mediation work of WPHF partners. For example, in Burundi WPHF partners are engaged in conflict prevention initiatives within communities through the 'Women Mediators Network' and joint safety committees, with hundreds of disputes being averted, resolved, or referred through these mechanisms (WPHF Annual Progress Report Burundi, 2022). Likewise in Uganda WPHF grantees have built the capacity of women in conflict mediation and prevention and related referral pathways, resulting in large numbers of cases of SGBV, land conflicts or communal conflicts being reported, referred, or mediated (WPHF Annual Progress Report Uganda, 2022).

Grievances over access to resources and services can be a particular trigger for violence in conflict contexts and WPHF partners have demonstrated results in addressing such grievances. For example, Reform Palestine successfully mediated between populations of displacement camps in the West Bank and water authorities to address tensions over a polluted water supply, as well as mediated between refugee and non-refugee populations that were clashing over access to electricity. It is important to note that not only do WROs have impact through mediating conflict, but they also have impact through their role in connecting citizens to formal duty bearers such as police, justice institutions or government authorities to demand rights and address conflicts.

3.3 Stronger capacity of women to address conflict

The conflict prevention work of WROs has impact in terms of increasing women's confidence, knowledge, and capacity to prevent conflict within their communities. For example, in Palestine WPHF partners reported that as a result of conflict prevention work by WROs, women's awareness has been raised on the importance of their participation in conflict prevention; women have been empowered to participate in decision-making and responses related to conflict prevention; women's participation in socio-political spheres has been strengthened; and women's role in maintaining civil peace and social cohesion has been enhanced (WPHF Annual Progress Report Palestine, 2022). Notably in both Uganda and Burundi, capacity development work has targeted and empowered marginalized groups

of women such as refugee women, disabled women, ethnic minority women, and young women, among others.

The example of the work of BACHI in Uganda demonstrates how women's capacity can be systematically developed and used for conflict prevention. BACHI trained a woman representative in each village to represent the interests of women and children on the local council. This training was followed by mentoring and supervision to help them navigate any challenges as well as monthly performance review meetings to identify what they have done and what help they require. These representatives now have the capacity to address a whole range of conflicts and to participate effectively at local council meetings to advance the interests of women and children. Similarly, NVPF Philippines found that at the beginning of their work with grassroots women, that they often lacked confidence to speak up, but as a result of the capacity development efforts, their knowledge and confidence improved to the extent that the young women that NVPF was working with decided that they would run community awareness sessions for others in their community.

Not only have individual women's' capacity been strengthened, but a central impact from several WPHF partner projects has been stronger technical and organizational capacity within grassroots women's organisations. For example, in the Philippines grassroots women have been supported to successfully establish their own organisations to work on conflict prevention, while in Burundi and Iraq there has been significant capacity development for community level women's organisations. A notable example of impact in supporting grassroots WROs is the work of NVPF with women ex-combatants in the Philippines, with the aim of increasing their voice and participation in conflict prevention and in wider political dialogue. This work supported women ex-combatants to establish their own organisations, built their capacities to undertake early warning and mediation, and connected them to wider early warning activities. The development of organizational capacity within WROs contributes to their ability to create a sustainable impact in the area of conflict prevention.

3.4 Women's leadership fostered in other spheres

Women's participation in conflict prevention can help foster women's leadership in other spheres, notably political life, as women use the skills and confidence that they have gained through their involvement in conflict prevention to gain access to male dominated institutions. For example, WPHF partners in Burundi report that a large percentage of women mediators go on to be elected to leadership roles within provincial hill committees, and conversely that the election of women at regional and national level enables these women to participate in conflict prevention and to influence the administration's conflict prevention and response (WPHF Annual Progress Report Burundi, 2022). Likewise in Uganda, women who were trained in conflict prevention and involved in mediation activities developed the skills, knowledge, and confidence to put themselves up for election for leadership positions. Also in Uganda, women involved in conflict prevention work were able to join local bodies such as district committees and land committees for the first time, thereby bringing gender and conflict prevention issues to the work of these committees. Meanwhile, in Iraq some of the women that have been involved in AOO's conflict prevention projects are seeking election, with AOO providing capacity support to help them engage effectively in politics. In addition, it was reported that the awareness raising work of WPHF partners has shifted the attitudes of communities in several contexts, to become more accepting women's of women's leadership in conflict prevention and beyond.

3.5 Women are more connected to local institutions and processes

An important impact from the work of WPHF partners has been stronger links between women and WROs and the local institutions responsible for conflict prevention and peacebuilding, security, justice

and governance. Some partners, such as CRS Philippines, stressed that while it is important to build women's capacities, it is also critical to ensure that there is a recognition of women's role within different levels of government, in order for women to be able to participate effectively and sustainably in conflict prevention processes. In Burundi and Uganda, WROs have also ensured that their projects are integrated into local community development plans, thereby promoting the sustainability of these interventions, and resulting in their acceptance by local authorities. Meanwhile, CRS Philippines, is undertaking sustained policy engagement to ensure that local authorities formally recognize the role of women within conflict prevention and early warning activities, and that the data gathered by women conflict monitors is fed into regional conflict data. Likewise, NVPF Philippines has successfully advocated for the early warning structures involving women ex-combatants that it helped establish to be recognized by the local government authorities, which it is hoped with increase their impact and sustainability.

3.6 Challenges in capturing impact from women's conflict prevention work

Capturing impact from women's conflict prevention work is challenging for several reasons. Firstly, because it is hard to identify conflicts that have been prevented and have not developed. Likewise, because the types of changes that women's conflict prevention work seeks to achieve may be subtle or require long-term solutions – such as shifting norms, building relationships or reducing tensions – and are unlikely to be visible within the life of a short-term project. Moreover, UN Women (2015) identifies how practical challenges such as low literacy or ICT skills can limit women's ability to report to wider conflict prevention mechanisms, requiring efforts to train women or offer them alternate avenues for reporting. Because the conflicts that women are active in preventing are often at very local level, for example within families or among neighbors, wider peacebuilding actors such as governments or international funders may not recognize this level of work as 'real' conflict prevention. However, these small conflicts are often connected to wider patterns of insecurity and violence, and women's involvement in addressing these smaller conflicts can be critical in building their legitimacy within communities to engage on larger scale conflict issues.

It is also challenging that many of the impacts from women's conflict prevention work reported in the published literature refer to mid-level outcomes or progress towards outcomes. For example, that communities have greater awareness, EWRS are more gender sensitive, or women are more involved in decision making. Further evidence is required about higher level impacts from women's conflict prevention work, either in terms of preventing conflict and advancing peace, or substantively advancing women's rights. Generating this evidence may require monitoring the impact of conflict prevention programming over the long-term and using different techniques, including by strengthening the capacity of WROs in systematic and gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation, as well as undertaking dedicated research in this area.

4. Challenges to Women's Participation in Conflict Prevention

Women and WROs working on conflict prevention face a range of challenges. For example, Simpson and Assaad (2022) describe how the barriers to women's active engagement and leadership in conflict prevention are complex and interlinked, based on patriarchal systems, power structures and social norms, and interplaying with mental health and wellbeing, psychosocial, social, socio-cultural, and economic factors. It is important that funders and others who support women's conflict prevention work understand and take account of these challenges. However, Lenhardt (2021) argues that policies and programmes seeking to support greater participation and decision making by women in this area often struggle to address broader structural factors that inhibit women's empowerment, and that

there is a need for policies and programmes that support women to act as agents of change in their own communities and amplify their voices rather than speak on their behalf.

4.1 Discriminatory gender norms and male resistance

WPHF partners faced a range of challenges related to discriminatory gender norms and male resistance. In some cases, this involved resistance to women taking an active and public role in addressing conflict. For example, in the Philippines WROs reported resistance due to cultural beliefs that women should not engage outside the domestic sphere or become involved in public affairs, particularly in relation to security issues. This meant, that although women were able to gain some access to formal government-led conflict mediation structures, they remained largely excluded from tribal-led conflict resolution processes and completely excluded from conflict resolution processes led by religious leaders, both of which were much more shaped by discriminatory gender norms. Likewise, in Iraq, WPHF partners reported that resistance against women's participation in conflict prevention came from traditional and religious leaders, who saw women's participation as going against religious values. This resulted, for example in women being unable to participate in capacity building activities if men were present.

In order to overcome such resistance WROs all engaged intensively with formal, traditional, and religious male leaders, as well as male family members of women who wanted to participate in conflict prevention activities, in order to explain the importance of women's conflict prevention work. They also focused on building women's confidence to advocate for their own inclusion in decision making processes, and in some cases adapted planned activities so that male family members would allow women to participate.

4.2 Threats of violence and harassment

Several WPHF partners reported that harassment and the threat of violence was a significant barrier for women seeking to participate in conflict prevention work. This is part of wider patterns of violence often targeted at women who raise their voices or seek to participate in politics and public life. For example, BACHI, Uganda had to liaise with police and other duty bearers to ensure that women representatives did not face violence while doing their work, while in Iraq, IWFJ reported high levels of harassment of female journalists working on conflict related issues. Likewise in Palestine, WROs reported that women activists who raised issues related to women's rights, Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) or WPS faced threats and violence. Meanwhile, in the Philippines, WROs described how, in a wider context of shrinking space for civil society, women activists working on conflict related issues are increasingly exposed to harassment, including being targeted with sexist messages and threats of rape. However, they also reported that women living in conflict affected areas of the Philippines were motivated to engage in conflict prevention work despite these threats because they already experienced so much conflict and insecurity in their lives.

4.3 Difficulties accessing and coordinating with wider conflict prevention structures

A significant challenge faced by several WPHF partners was exclusion by or difficulties coordinating with other actors involved in conflict prevention. This reduced these organizations' ability to coordinate their conflict prevention work effectively with others and feed into wider processes, which is critical for impact and sustainability.

In many cases this took the form of WROs having difficulties accessing and engaging with male dominated governance institutions. For example, WROs in Uganda faced a significant barrier in the form of women's traditional exclusion from local level governance structures, based in part on gender norms that women should not "sit at the table with men." This meant that partners in Uganda had to invest significant time and energy in building relationships and credibility with local leaders and

government officials and lobbying for women's access to local committees, in order to ensure that women's conflict prevention work was effectively coordinated with these authorities. Likewise, WPHF partners in Palestine reported that women face high levels of exclusion within politics and government institutions at all levels, which makes it difficult for them to engage in wider conflict prevention structures and processes. This is exacerbated by the geographical and political fragmentation of Palestinian governance structures and the 'frozen' Palestinian political situation, which makes it still more difficult for women access or influence decision making processes regarding conflict and peacebuilding. Across several of the countries, it appeared that where women did gain access to male dominated spaces and processes, these were generally only elite women, for example women from powerful clan families in the Philippines.

In some countries government resistance to WROs is part of broader resistance to civil society engagement in conflict prevention. For example, some interviewees reported that government authorities are resistant to working with CSOs on conflict and peacebuilding issues, as they believe CSOs should have a purely humanitarian role and should not engage in 'political' issues. This can result in government structures delaying approval for conflict prevention projects or refusing to engage with and participate in them, thereby limiting the possibilities for WROs to access, influence or coordinate with government.

It was also reported that in some countries, WROs face challenges coordinating their conflict prevention work with other civil society actors. For example, in Burundi competition between WROs undermines collaborative efforts, with the resulting lack of harmonization and coordination between organisations and projects leading to overlapping and wasted resources and duplication of effort. WPHF funding in Burundi seeks to support more effective coordination between WROs working on conflict prevention in order to avoid such overlap and ensure a more coherent and effective approach.

4.4 Conflict prevention work caught up in wider political economy dynamics
Several WPHF partners reported that their conflict prevention work can get caught up in wider local political economy dynamics in ways that impede their effectiveness. For example, BACHI Uganda reported that it is particularly difficult to mediate on land grabbing cases where a powerful local actor is involved, due to unequal power dynamics, intimidation, and the fact that resolving such conflicts can involve long term engagement and lengthy legal action that runs beyond the life of conflict prevention projects. Meanwhile, other WPHF partners reported that a significant challenge to their mediation work is widespread corruption, particularly in family or land disputes, in which one party bribes the police and the case is abandoned resulting in frustration and further tension. Some of them work with whistleblower mechanisms to report and address such corruption.

In Palestine, WROs describe how a complex and challenging political context – the ongoing occupation, the fractured nature of Palestinian politics, and a backlash against gender equality agendas - makes it difficult for Palestinian women to engage effectively in conflict prevention. The humanitarian crises provoked by occupation has resulted in WROs being continually pushed back into service delivery to affected populations, reducing their capacity to engage in a sustained way on more political agendas related to conflict prevention and women's participation in peacebuilding. Meanwhile, the fractured political and geographic context makes it hard for WROs in this context to find a unified space to collaborate and advance strategic change. Moreover, a shrinking of civil society space and push back on women's rights and gender equality agendas requires them to invest significant effort in combatting resistance and building legitimacy.

4.5 Structural barriers to participation in conflict prevention

Grassroots WROs and the women they work with face a range of structural and practical barriers to their participation in conflict prevention, including barriers related to capacity and knowledge, time and resources, and economic challenges.

Some of the major challenges faced by WPHF partners were related to capacity constraints. These included the low levels of education and literacy, and limited knowledge, skills, and confidence among the women at community level with whom these organisations were working. Most WPHF partners have provided intensive and continuous capacity development to the women involved in their conflict prevention projects in order to address this challenge, with this taking up a large amount of their organizational time and resources. Some partners also adopted different methods for working with these women. For example, Association Pour la Promotion de la Fille Burundaise (AFPB) Burundi adapted its capacity building methodologies for conflict prevention work with marginalized and illiterate women, using images, group work and face-to-face exchanges instead of written materials.

WROs often require investing in institutional strengthening, in order to develop their technical and organizational capacities and enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of their work. For example, in the Philippines, several WROs working on conflict prevention are often grassroots movements that are powerful advocates but have limited financial and administrative capacity, and in many cases are not formally registered. This makes it difficult for such organisations to access funding for their work. In addition, WPHF partners reported that local WROs in some cases are led by one high profile woman who is connected to local power structures and are very personality driven, which can both undermine the sustainability of these WROs and potentially exclude the perspectives of more grassroots women.

WROs and the women they work with can face significant time and resource constraints that limit their conflict prevention work. For example, women councilors that BACHI Uganda supports have many other activities and priorities in their lives, and thus limited time to dedicate to their conflict prevention and mediation. Moreover, although there is high demand for their work, with many conflicts to address, limited resources mean that BACHI can only support one woman councilor per village. Meanwhile, WPHF partners in Uganda reported that women mediators need to travel long distances to reach some cases, but that limited resources for travel mean that mediation services cannot operate effectively in all areas. Likewise, CRS Philippines reports that for women's organisations in remote communities it is difficult to travel to participate in trainings and activities and requires significant effort and expense.

WROs have limited ability to purchase the resources and materials that are required for their work, due to stretched finances. For example, in Uganda, all women involved in mediation should have copies of the Land Act, but this requires printing and distributing these copies at significant cost. Likewise, NVPF Philippines has trained grassroots WROs to conduct conflict prevention and mediation activities, but these women lack the basic materials needed to undertake such work.

Women involved in conflict prevention activities at the grassroots level often face significant economic challenges and are working intensively to maintain their livelihoods. This means that they have limited time and energy for conflict related work. For example, CRS Philippines reports that although women are keen to participate in their activities, many of these women are almost entirely focused on daily survival. Several WPHF partners stressed that it is critical to link conflict prevention and livelihood activities, as strengthening women's livelihoods empowers them to play a greater role as community leaders and peacebuilders.

5. Recommendations for International Support to Women's Conflict Prevention Work

An examination of the experience of WPHF partners and of the wider literature reveals a number of key lessons regarding how funders can most effectively support the conflict prevention work of grassroots WROs.

6.1 WROs require sufficient, long term and flexible funding for their conflict prevention work, to enable them to meet the scale of conflict related challenges and demand within communities, build sustainable programmes that result in impact, and respond quickly to emerging priorities and changing circumstances.

The UN Secretary General's 2020 report on Women, Peace, and Security stresses that it is critical to direct resources, through pooled funds and other means, to local women's groups at the front lines of crises. This need for sufficient and sustained resources was highlighted by all interviewees. In particular, CSO partners stressed that long term funding was critical for them to be able to achieve scale, sustainability and impact and typical projects of 1-2 years were not long enough given the complexity of the contexts they are working in and the issues that they are addressing. For example, RPF Uganda pointed out that it had to spend a significant amount of time building capacities and gaining access to key stakeholders at the beginning of its WPHF funded project, meaning that a two-year timeframe was not long enough to do this and to implement the project and fully demonstrate results. Likewise, PSD Uganda reported that an 18-month funding timeframe meant it could only target a small part of the district where it works and reduced its ability to provide follow up support and oversight to the women that it trained, thereby undermining sustainability. NVPF Philippines also reported that its work with women ex-combatants was limited by short-term funding timeframes, given that scale of the challenge and high demand, and that the project required a building a favorable environment and setting the groundwork before it could begin to produce results.

Flexible funding is key for WROs to develop interventions that are most relevant to their local context and to respond to shifting conflict dynamics and emerging priorities. For example, WAC Palestine described how they require institutional funding to ensure their sustainability and long-term engagement in communities, as well as flexible funds that can be used to address new emergencies and conflicts that arise.

WPHF partners appreciated that WPHF funding gives them the flexibility to develop their own agenda as most relevant for their context, particularly in comparison with some other types of support that tend to have more pre-defined pathways and objectives. This flexible approach also recognizes that needs and contexts can change over time and allows partners to adapt projects based on what is working and on changes in context.

6.2 Support for women's participation in conflict prevention should be based on a solid understanding of the context specific relationship between conflict dynamics and gender inequalities; and a recognition of the existing strategies that women employ to address conflict in their communities, and of the challenges they face in doing so. This requires robust gender and conflict analysis, widespread consultation, and empowering women to lead in designing programmes and platforms in order to ensure it is relevant for context.

Existing literature suggests that support for women's participation in conflict prevention must be based on an understanding of how gender norms, gender relations and gender inequalities influence the potential for conflict. This includes a recognition of how the "continuum of gender-based violence across contexts underlines the false distinction between the private and political spheres, and between

conflict and peace… [and the] need for specific attention to and treatment of gender-based violence as a crucial element in conflict prevention" (UN Women 2015). It also suggests that a starting point for funders should be recognizing and supporting the work already being done by women, not just with funding and capacity development but also through wider support for women's voice and empowerment, and enhancing women's understanding of how gender is socially constructed and interacts with conflict dynamics (Simpson and Assaad, 2022).

In addressing the context specific linkages between conflict and gender inequalities, it is important to understand and work with local norms. For example, TF Philippines reported that a useful approach has been to work with local norms in order to shift these towards being more supportive of gender equality and women's participation in conflict prevention, building on a nuanced understanding of the important roles women already play in the community. TF Philippines highlights that too frequently conflict prevention fails to understand local norms and juxtaposes them with international standards in ways that are unhelpful and provoke resistance from local communities.

There is a strong emphasis within the literature on developing conflict prevention strategies and activities based on gendered analysis of conflict drivers and gender responsive indicators. Saferworld (2014) suggests that participatory conflict analysis methods can provide an effective means of involving women and men in the process of identifying and monitoring drivers of conflict, although also warns that women's participation in analysis does not by itself guarantee that gender-sensitive conflict indicators will be developed, as there must be an explicit intention to do this.

6.3 Support should seek to reach grassroots women and their organizations and empower them to lead conflict prevention work within their local communities, as well as link grassroots women organizations with women's movement for peace at other levels.

Stakeholders stressed the importance of supporting localized conflict prevention work in communities that is conducted by grassroots organisations that know the community well, understand the local dynamics of conflict and gender, and have credibility and legitimacy. For example, PSD Uganda reported that its work was able to have impact because it was supporting community members themselves to implement the activities, people who were accepted, trusted and were able to fully understand and communicate with other community members. WPHF is highly appreciated as for its ability to fund such grassroots activity, often working with very small WROs in remote areas, many of which have never received UN funding before.

In supporting grassroots women's conflict prevention work, it is also important to support these women to connect with sub-national and national women's organisations working on conflict prevention, to ensure that their voices are represented in wider discussions and debates. However, this must be done in ways that do not place an unrealistic burden on small WROs with limited capacity. For example, BACHI Uganda stressed the importance of supporting women's conflict prevention work at local, subnational, and national levels jointly in order to speak with a common voice as a community of WROs. While CDO Iraq suggests that funding for women's conflict prevention work should support network strengthening to overcome weak coordination among CSOs working in this area.

6.4 Funding for women's conflict prevention work should be combined with political, policy and networking support to create an enabling environment for women to effectively carry out this work.

WPHF partners stressed that working with local or national governance structures has been key to ensuring legitimacy, impact, and sustainability for their work, but described how difficult it can be for WROs to access such structures. It could be useful for donors to combine funding for WROs with political or advocacy engagement to encourage government structures to seriously engage with WROs

on conflict prevention. For example, some WPHF partners argued that donors should encourage government actors to engage with CSOs and WROs, to understand the value of their work, and to consult and coordinate with them, as government resistance to working with civil society is a major challenge.

WPHF partners also stressed that donors can encourage the adoption of policy frameworks that facilitate women's participation in conflict prevention, notably through their engagement around the NAP. In the Philippines, WPHF partners also reported that it would be helpful if there were local level policies in place to empower trained women mediators to undertake their work and connect them to the relevant formal mechanisms. Likewise, Reform Palestine stressed that funders can provide vital political support when it comes to lobbying on issues such as establishing EWRS, thereby backing the work of WROs not just financially but politically.

Various WPHF partners reported that receiving international funding, such as from WPHF, provides visibility and credibility to WROs. For example, CDO Iraq reported that when Iraqi leaders see that CSOs are supported by INGOs or UN agencies they are more willing to engage with them. Hence, providing funding can be an important way of supporting visibility, credibility, and access for WROs working on conflict prevention. Moreover, where funding can be used in part to disseminate and showcase the work of WROs this can further increase their visibility, access, and influence with key local and national stakeholders, as well as their ability to access further funds from international or national sources, thereby contributing to the sustainability of their work.

6.5 Support for women's conflict prevention work must include both technical and organizational capacity development for WROs involved in this work, with a particular focus on building strong and sustainable organizations and networks that can undertake conflict prevention work over the long term. This requires supporting WROs with both institutional and programmatic funding.

WPHF partners stressed the value of support to build their technical skills and knowledge on conflict prevention, in areas such as conflict analysis, early warning, mediation skills, communication, and advocacy on conflict issues, as well as around relevant legal and policy frameworks and processes. They also valued support to develop their capacity to operate politically, gain access to key institutions and exert influence, which can be provided through accompaniment and mentoring during the implementation of projects. Support to develop their capacity to link conflict prevention work to other critical issues such as climate change and natural resource management will also become increasingly important.

However, even more crucial, WPHF partners stressed the importance of organizational capacity development. Stakeholders reported that while many WROs are excellent activists and advocates, they are organizationally weak. This not only limits the effectiveness of their work but undermines its sustainability, as this makes it difficult for them to access larger funding amounts. However, WPHF partners also reported that the need for organizational development is often overlooked by funders. For example, PSD described how WROs in Uganda need support to strengthen their organizational systems and practices in order to effectively undertake conflict prevention work, but funders tend to support individual projects and programmatic interventions which do not strengthen organizational capacity. Supporting WROs engagement on conflict prevention must therefore involve strengthening their capacity in areas such as organizational and programme management, information management, human resource management, monitoring, evaluation and learning, and fundraising and resource mobilization, as well as helping them think through how they can integrate issues of inclusion and representativeness into their structures and processes. In particular, WROs require support to

document the links between gender equality and conflict prevention and the impact of their work, in order to make the case with funder for investing in women's conflict prevention work.

Developing the capacity of WROs working on conflict prevention must be a long-term endeavor beyond the life of individual projects, with a focus on building women's movements, not only in strengthening capacity to implement projects. Approaches such as embedding capacity development within existing institutions at national or sub-national levels could help to create such long term and sustainable capacity support for CSOs and WROs in conflict contexts.

6.6 Support for women's conflict prevention work should be based on an understanding that WROs work holistically across silos in response to community needs. Such support should itself adopt a holistic approach, in recognition that empowering women across multiple areas of their lives strengthens their ability to engage in conflict prevention.

WPHF partners' work on conflict prevention is closely connected to their work on issues such as SGBV, women's political voice and participation and women's economic empowerment. Working to strengthen women's capabilities and rights across these other areas is key to enabling women to engage effectively in conflict prevention activities. However, WPHF partners point out that funding is often highly siloed, with funders rejecting proposals that involve activities that they do not recognize as traditional conflict prevention work.

All WPHF partners stressed that supporting women to undertake conflict prevention requires also addressing their social and economic needs, for example relating to insecurity and violence, service access, housing, or livelihoods. In particular, support for women to engage in conflict prevention must be combined with support for women's economic empowerment in order to give them the autonomy, time, resources, and confidence to work on building peace within their communities. The importance of women's economic empowerment for conflict prevention is increasingly recognized, although still not sufficiently reflected in programming. For example the UN Secretary General's 2019 report on Women Peace and Security states that addressing women's economic rights is important during conflict and post-conflict phases as a prevention strategy.

6.7 Opportunities to learn from others and share experiences are highly valued by women working on conflict prevention at local level. It is valuable to build such learning and exchange into support for women's conflict prevention work.

WPHF partners who had taken part in the WPHF Global Learning Hub, exchange sessions or other international events, reported that this was highly useful for strengthening their work. For example, IWJF in Iraq reported that their work on conflict prevention had been strengthened by their participation in international events where they had exchanged information and knowledge and learned about the experiences of WROs in other countries. WAC Palestine stressed the value of international exchange in allowing them to share their stories and raise awareness about their situation, as well as helping them to feel less alone given the movement restrictions that they experience. Meanwhile, several UN Women Country Offices reported that bringing together grassroots WROs working on conflict prevention for exchange at the national level had significant value, and that such meetings provide opportunities not only to share experiences and build networks, but also to provide capacity development inputs to multiple WRO partners simultaneously.

Such learning and exchange, at national and international levels, should therefore be built into support for women's conflict prevention work. This is already being done by WPHF, which facilitates sharing of experiences among the more than 1,000 WROs that it supports through its Learning hub.

Conclusion

An examination of the work of WPHF partners demonstrates the different roles women play in preventing conflict; the strategies that they adopt to do this; and the value of women's conflict prevention work in contributing both to conflict and peacebuilding goals and to gender equality goals. It also demonstrates how women's conflict prevention work at community level is connected to a range of other roles and activities women undertake and should be seen thorough a holistic lens. Moreover, the experience of WPHF partners illustrates the multiple challenges that women face in undertaking conflict prevention work and how they seek to overcome these.

In order to work effectively and sustainably to prevent conflict, WROs require support that is based on a strong understanding of the local context, women's existing roles and activism, and the challenges that WROs face. They also require support that goes beyond funding short-term projects focused on a very limited set of conflict prevention activities, but rather it must focus on empowering these organizations and the women they work with to develop conflict prevention strategies that are connected to their wider priorities and activities and can be sustained over time. This includes helping them to access financing, capacities, knowledge, networks, and political spaces that are required for them to work effectively to prevent conflict and build peace in their communities.

Conflict prevention has tended to be overlooked and underfunded both within the peace and security community and the WPS community. This has meant that visibility and funding for conflict prevention work in general has been limited, and for women's conflict prevention work even more so. However, there are signs that this may be changing. For example, the 'New Agenda for Peace' that was presented by the UN Secretary General in July 2023 places a strong emphasis on conflict prevention, as does the 'Pathways for Peace' agenda laid out by the World Bank and UNDP in 2018. An increased international interest in conflict prevention is crucial to expand and deepen support for women's conflict prevention work, as an integral part of wider international investment in preventing conflict rather than just responding to it.

References

Arnado, M. 2012. Women's involvement in conflict early warning systems: Moving from rhetoric to reality in Mindanao. Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

Bigio J & Vogelstein R. 2016. How Women's Participation in Conflict Prevention and Resolution Advances U.S. Interests. New York: Council on Foreign Relations

Bell, C. 2013. Women and peace processes, negotiations, and agreements: operational opportunities and challenges. Oslo: NOREF

Lenhardt, A. 2021. Progress towards meaningful women's participation in conflict prevention and peacebuilding decision-making. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies

Simpson R & Assaad L. 2022 Prospects and challenges for women's roles in conflict prevention and reconciliation in Lebanon: Lessons from leading women peacebuilders in Tripoli and Baalbe. London: International Alert.

Saferworld, 2014, Gender and Conflict Early Warning: Results of a literature review on integrating gender perspectives into conflict early warning systems. London: Saferworld

United Nations, 2023. Our Common Agenda: A New Agenda for Peace. New York: United Nations

UN Women, 2022. Explainer: How gender inequality and climate change are interconnected. New York: UN Women

UN Women, 2018. Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) Focus Areas. In Brief. New York: UN Women

UN Women, 2015. Global Study on Implementation of UNSCR 1325, UN Women. New York: UN Women

UN Secretary-General, 2021. Women and peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General. New York: UN

UN Secretary-General, 2020. Women and peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General. New York: UN

United States Institute for Peace, 2015. Women Preventing Violent Extremism: Charting a New Course. Washington: USIP

World Bank and UNDP, 2018. Pathways for Peace. Washington DC: World Bank Group

Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund 2022, Annual Report

Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, 2022, Annual Progress Report Burundi

Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, 2018 Annual Progress Report Iraq

Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, 2022, Annual Progress Report Palestine

Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, 2022 Annual Progress Report Uganda

Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, Peer Exchange Brief 4: Women's Role in Conflict Prevention and Mediation