The Women, Peace and Security agenda: Breaking down silos
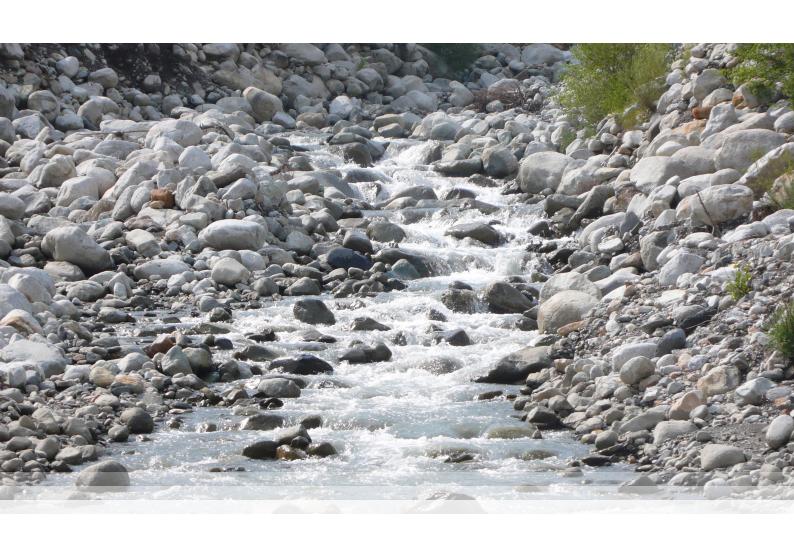
Gender-responsive reforms in transitions from conflict

Clare Castillejo and Pilar Domingo

Series

Women, Peace and Security: Breaking down silos

Disclaimer: the content of this publication has been produced to provide early ideas and analysis on a given theme. It has been peer reviewed and edited.

Cover Image: Pilar Domingo

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About this publication

This publication was produced as part of a study on Women's influence and leadership: Integrating Women, Peace and Security into wider peacebuilding engagement, which was undertaken by ODI. The research team included Clare Castillejo, Pilar Domingo, Alina Rocha-Menocal and Theo Tindall. The study examined how to integrate Women, Peace and Security (WPS) work more strategically with wider peacebuilding and conflict-related interventions to enhance women's influence and leadership across different peacebuilding processes. It developed analysis regarding how women seek to influence a range of change and reform processes related to peacebuilding that are often overlooked in the WPS agenda; how the nature of these processes and the actors involved in them hinder or enable women's access and influence; and how international actors can best support women's access and influence within these processes.

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Acronyms/Glossary

CRSV	Conflict-related sexual violence
CSO	Civil society organisation
DDD	Doing Development Differently
GEWE	Gender and women's equality
FIDA	Federation of Women Lawyers
ICC	International Criminal Court
NAP	National Action Plan
NGO	Non-government organisation
PDIA	Problem-driven, iterative and adaptive approach
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
TWP	Thinking and Working Politically
UN Women	United Nations Women
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

Executive Summary

Key Messages

- The WPS agenda has potential as a framework to advance gender equality within multiple types of post-conflict reform processes and form part of wider peacebuilding efforts. Harnessing this potential requires a broader interpretation of WPS and a recognition of its relevance across a broad range of thematic areas.

- International actors should adopt a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to WPS, connecting their engagement on different reform processes and sectors to advance gender-equality goals. This includes breaking down thematic and sectoral silos in international programming in order to integrate strategic synergies and mutually reinforcing components of different reform processes.

- This requires international actors to think and work in ways that are politically smart, to understand how context-specific bargaining processes shape opportunities to promote women's participation and influence in reform processes, and to tailor their support to respond to such shifting opportunities.

- It is particularly important that international development actors include providing long-term, strategic and flexible support to women's movements; ensure that WPS National Action Plans (NAPs) are broad, overarching and flexible; use political leverage and networking to build support for gender-equality goals; invest in their own analytical and technical capacities to undertake this work; overcome internal institutional siloes within international organisations to coordinate support across different reform processes and gender-equality objectives

Since the 1990s, there has been increasing awareness of the importance of women's voice and leadership in shaping transitions from conflict. This has involved greater recognition of the fact that conflict is experienced in gendered ways, affecting women and men differently. It has resulted in greater international support to gender-focused programming in transition settings as well as more discussion about gender-mainstreaming within peacebuilding and development interventions in such settings.

The development of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda emerged from this increased focus on gendered aspects of conflict and peacebuilding. Since the landmark UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000, and the nine related resolutions that followed, the WPS agenda has provided a normative framework at the level of the UN Security Council, and a framework for action at the national level through National Action Plans (NAPs) for its implementation.

Through its four pillars – participation, protection, conflict prevention, and relief and recovery – the WPS agenda underlines the importance of ensuring women's participation and influence in all aspects of peacebuilding. A little over 20 years since the passage of UNSCR1325, however, there remains widespread criticism regarding the degree of uptake across governance issues, development sectors and government departments.

This report summarises key findings from a research study that examined how the WPS agenda can be integrated more strategically across different peacebuilding and post-conflict reform processes in order to enhance women's influence and leadership in shaping change processes and their outcomes in transition settings. The study addressed why the WPS agenda has remained unnecessarily narrow and siloed in its implementation, limiting the scope for sustained women's voice and agency across different peacebuilding processes.

The study examined three different types of reform processes related to peacebuilding that are often overlooked within the WPS agenda – constitutional reform, land reform, and transitional justice – asking how women have shaped these processes. Desk studies were conducted of three country experiences: Colombia, Kenya and South Sudan. Drawing on this evidence and on wider bodies of literature, the study considered the following questions. How have women mobilised around and influenced reform processes in different country contexts? What factors have enabled women's voice and agency across different reform processes? How have international actors engaged with reform processes and supported women's voice and agency within them? And critically, how can these experiences inform more strategic engagement with locally led peacebuilding efforts to advance wider WPS objectives?

The study identified a number of overarching lessons for international actors supporting change processes working on WPS.

- Women's organisations and movements are central to any progress in gender equality, so effective support requires a detailed understanding of how women's movements and agendas relate to wider political economy dynamics and interests. This understanding can help international actors be better placed to enhance and amplify the work of women activists and their organisations by supporting them to develop their agendas and capacities, strengthen their alliances, and access decision-making spaces.

- Meaningful support for women's voice and influence within post-conflict reforms requires international actors to provide sustained funding, strategic support and operational support to a range of women's organisations working at multiple levels. Such support must be based on recognising that the development of strong women's movements takes time. It also requires flexibility and adaptation to changing contexts or emerging opportunities for women's mobilisation efforts.

- International actors need to engage over the long term, recognising that change processes to advance gender equality are complex, slow and non-linear. In transition settings, as reforms take place this inevitably leads to new processes of negotiation and contestation, including over whether and how reforms will be implemented. At all stages – from initial bargaining over what the political settlement will look like, through formal reform processes, and as implementation unfolds – there are opportunities to advance gender-equality agendas. At all stages there will also be resistance to these agendas. Supporting reforms that result in meaningful change for women therefore needs international actors to engage early and remain engaged following 'completion' of the reforms to provide continued support to implementation.

- The WPS agenda has potential as a framework to advance gender equality within many types of post-conflict reform processes and form part of wider peacebuilding efforts. Harnessing this potential requires a broader interpretation of WPS and a recognition of its relevance across a wide range of thematic areas. In particular, it needs NAPs to be broad, overarching and flexible, and used as a framework for shared commitments and action in relation to a range of reform processes, beyond those that have traditionally been the focus of WPS work. International actors should adopt a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to WPS, connecting their engagement on different reform processes and sectors to advance gender-equality goals. This requires breaking down thematic and sectoral silos in international programming in order to build on connections and synergies between different types of reform processes. For example, working across constitutional reform, land reform, and justice sector reform processes in an interconnected and gender-sensitive way to advance women's property rights.

International actors supporting peacebuilding and post-conflict reform need to think and work in ways that are politically smart, in order to understand how context-specific bargaining processes shape opportunities to promote women's participation and influence in reform processes; tailor their support to respond to shifting opportunities that emerge from such bargaining processes; and use political leverage and networking in strategic ways to build support for gender-equality goals. This will mean that such international actors should first invest in their own analytical and technical capacities to work in politically informed ways.

1   Introduction

1.1   Objectives

There has been greater awareness of the importance of women's voice and leadership in shaping transitions from conflict since the 1990s. This has involved increased recognition of the fact that conflict is experienced in gendered ways, affecting women and men differently. It has resulted in both greater international support to gender-focused programmes in transition settings as well as more discussion about gender-mainstreaming in peacebuilding and development interventions in such settings.

The development of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda came out of this increased focus on gendered aspects of conflict and peacebuilding, and has since provided a framework to advance and coordinate work in this area. Since the landmark UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000, and the nine related resolutions that followed, the WPS agenda has provided a normative framework at the level of the UN Security Council (UNSC), as well as a framework for action at the national level through a National Action Plan (NAP) for its implementation.

Through its four pillars – participation, protection, conflict prevention, and relief and recovery – the WPS agenda underlines the importance of ensuring women's participation and influence in all aspects of peacebuilding. Just over 20 years since the UNSCR1325 was agreed, there has been widespread criticism of the slow uptake across governance issues, development sectors and government departments.

This report summarises key findings from a research study that examined how the WPS agenda can be integrated more strategically within wider processes of peacebuilding and post-conflict reform in order to enhance women's influence and leadership across these processes. The starting point for the study was to address the issue of why the WPS agenda has remained unnecessarily narrow and siloed in its implementation, limiting the scope for more sustainable impact in support of women's voice and agency across different peacebuilding processes.

To this end, the study examined three different types of reform processes related to peacebuilding that are often overlooked within the WPS agenda – constitutional reform, land reform and transitional justice – asking how women have shaped these. Specifically, it reviewed evidence and analysis regarding the following questions. How have women mobilised around, and influenced, these reform processes in different country contexts? What factors enabled and constrained women in exercising voice and agency across different reform processes? How have international actors engaged with these reform processes and supported women's voice and agency within them? How can these experiences inform more strategic engagement with locally led peacebuilding efforts to advance wider WPS objectives? In answering these questions, the research study aimed to develop analysis that can inform a more integrated approach to WPS by international actors, supporting them to work across the four WPS pillars, and to better connect WPS goals and strategies with wider peacebuilding and reform processes at many levels.

Box 1 Women, Peace and Security Agenda

In 2000, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). Nine additional resolutions were adopted over the following two decades. This normative framework provides the basis for engagement at global, regional, national and subnational levels on connections between gender equality and international peace and security and peacebuilding issues. UNSC Resolution 1325 identifies four interdependent pillars for engagement on WPS: **prevention**, **participation**, **protection**, and **relief and recovery**. Over the last 20 years there has been more work focused on protection and participation than the other two pillars. There is an increasing focus on relief and recovery in recent years, and more limited emphasis on prevention.

The WPS agenda is a valuable framework for governments to make commitments, coordinate action, and be held accountable on these issues.

1.2 Approach

The research included desk-based reviews of three thematic issues and three country case studies.

The three thematic analyses focused on constitutional reform, land reform and transitional justice. These reviewed how gender-responsive approaches have been integrated these reform processes, whether and how the WPS agenda informed these agendas, and what we know about international practice in this respect. The thematic papers (Castillejo, 2022a; Castillejo and Domingo, 2022; and Domingo 2022) draw on the country studies and are also based on the wider literature to include a broader range of examples and analysis.

Three desk-based country studies were conducted on Colombia, Kenya and South Sudan (Castillejo, 2022b; Rocha Menocal, 2022; and Tindall, 2022). Each of these focused on two reform processes, examining how women participated in and influenced them, and the implications for advancing gender equality in the context of peacebuilding. In each case, the study assessed the relative usefulness of the WPS agenda for advancing women's participation and gender-equality goals within these reform processes.

Across the thematic papers and country studies several cross-cutting themes were integrated into the research and analysis. These included:

- taking account of intersecting inequalities, and how these shape the interests, voice and influence of different groups of women;
- the non-linearity of conflict and violence and hence the need for responses that are adaptive over time and respond to subnational variations, as well as across thematic areas
- the degree of flexibility within international organisations to work across existing thematic or sectoral approaches and the resulting implications in how to better integrate support to women to take advantage of emerging opportunities across different reform processes.

The research included a brief review of academic and grey literature on each of the reform processes and women's engagement with them, as well as on how international actors support women's influence within reform processes and integrate WPS work into wider work on peacebuilding.

2 Breaking down silos in WPS

Peacebuilding involves far more than formal peace talks and agreements, and a much wider range of reform processes through which the rules of political, social and economic exchange are contested and renegotiated. These processes of change may be more or less formal, they may pre-date a formal peace process, run simultaneously with it, or flow from it. They may take place at different levels – nationally and subnationally. In all cases, however, they are part of the wider peacebuilding landscape, although not always formally recognised as such. At the core of these reform processes are issues of how power and resources are redistributed, often in relation to specific areas of contestation or underlying causes of conflict (UN and World Bank, 2018).

Such reform processes in peacebuilding contexts inevitably have consequences for gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE). They also have the potential to affect different groups of women – for example indigenous women, rural women, or migrant women – in varied and complex ways. In many contexts, however, women have struggled to access and meaningfully influence such processes, while international actors have frequently engaged with them in a gender-blind way, failing to effectively link support for these wider processes with work to advance WPS objectives (Swaine 2017; Davis and True, 2019; Ni Aolain and Valji, 2019).

This study focused on three particular types of reform processes – land reform, constitutional reform and transitional justice – in order to understand the opportunities, constraints and entry points to advance gender equality within these processes, how women mobilise to influence these processes, and what this means

for international actors supporting such reform processes or engaged on WPS. It is important to note, however, that such reform processes are part of a wider range of possible post-conflict reforms and that form part of the broader peacebuilding or transition landscape. These can also include reform of the justice sector, security sector, a wide range of economic reforms, tax reform, decentralisation, electoral reform, and health-sector reforms, among others. In all cases the nature of these different reform processes has consequences for the prospects of advancing GEWE. The findings from this study will be relevant to other types of reform and change processes, where opportunities and mobilisation to advance gender-equality goals, as well as resistance to these goals, are likely to be shaped by similar dynamics in the context of transitions from conflict.

2.1 Transitional justice

2.1.1 What works in advancing gender-responsive transitional justice

Transitional justice can be defined as 'the array of processes designed to address past human rights violations following periods of political turmoil, state repression, or armed conflict' (Olsen et al., 2010). has become a staple of peacebuilding efforts, identified as an important process by which to address the legacies of conflict-related violence and rights abuses. In practice, transitional justice involves a range of different processes and mechanisms. These include: *retributive justice* aimed at addressing impunity through judicial accountability for crimes at the international or domestic level; *truth-telling* often in the form of truth commissions aimed at giving voice to victims and establishing a record of experiences of violence

and rights abuses; *reparations and restorative justice* measures aimed at the restitution of land, property or material loss, and at achieving reconciliation; and recommendations for *institutional reform* often relating to the rule of law, justice and security systems to strengthen rights protection.

The specific form that transitional justice takes, and the mechanisms that are adopted, are the outcome of context-specific political negotiations, which in turn will shape the extent to which transitional justice is gender-responsive. Since the 1990s, addressing the gendered experience of conflict-related violence has become more prominent in transitional justice (Pankurst, 2009; Valji, 2012; Buckley Zistel and Zolko, 2013; O'Rourke, 2013; Swaine 2017; Yarwood 2013; Coomaraswamy, 2015). This predates the WPS agenda. The development of gender-responsive approaches to transitional justice reflects converging trends at the global and national levels. Civil society actors working at these multiple levels have been instrumental in driving this.

At the **global level,** parallel legal, institutional and policy developments have come to constitute a body of global norms in support of gender-responsive transitional justice. First, developments in international law, through the jurisprudence of special courts (Yugoslavia and Rwanda), and the Rome Statute which established the International Criminal Court (ICC), have contributed to codifying that rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy and enforced sterilisation and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence constitute crimes against humanity, war crimes and acts of genocide. Second, developments in the UN peacebuilding architecture and associated expansion of norms and policies on human rights abuses, conflict-related violence and war crimes have resulted in language on the need to address gender-based

harms in conflict and transition settings, and explicitly in relation to transitional justice. This is reflected, for instance, in the *Sustaining Peace* agenda (UNSCR 2282) and in the UN rule of law agenda (UN, 2004). And third, successive UNSC resolutions of the WPS agenda have come to explicitly state that transitional justice mechanisms need to take account of women's experience of violence and conflict and to involve women in defining transitional justice mandates and architecture.

At the **national level,** developments since the 1990s include greater inclusion of gender-responsive components across different transitional justice experiences. In Guatemala, indigenous women who were the victims of sexual violence and domestic slavery held in a military detachment were able to file a legal complaint in 2011 in the Guatemalan justice system for crimes of sexual violence (Coomaraswamy, 2015). The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1995-1998) was an early example of women's successful mobilisation to secure recognition and recording of gender harms as a component of truth-telling. Since then, truth commissions have had a greater focus on gender. The Peruvian commission (2001-2) was the first to include sexual violence in its mandate. In Sierra Leone (2002-4), measures were taken to create safe space for women victims to share their experiences of violence during the context. In Timor-Leste (2001-6), the hearings included, beyond sexual violence, a more multi-dimensional approach to women's experience of the conflict, taking account of such violations as forced disappearances, torture, displacement and wider socio-economic violations.

The experience of Colombia is a notable example of how transitional justice measures were developed *before* the 2016 Peace Accord, with

varying degrees of inclusion and consensus. These included an effort at demobilising certain armed actors (in 2005), reparations, truth-seeking mechanisms, and land-restitution procedures for victims of the armed conflict (in the Victims and Land Restitution Law of 2011). The 2016 Peace Accord established additional transitional justice objectives. Importantly, these different processes have gradually secured gains for women victims, recognising conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), and also established that women victims of conflict should have preferential and priority treatment in reparations and land restitution. Distinctively, in Colombia transitional justice elements were the object of negotiation before the peace agreement, and provided a platform for a victim-centred approach in the context of ongoing conflict. Women's organisations mobilised strategically to integrate gender-responsive elements at different stages of this evolving transitional justice architecture.

Overall, however, even when transitional justice mandates have incorporated gender-responsive measures, their implementation has been extremely challenging. In the case of South Sudan, mechanisms are not yet in place, while the wider context of continued conflict-related violence remains very problematic. However, the fact that gender-responsive measures – at least formally – are no longer exceptional in transitional justice is noteworthy.

The following factors help to explain these advances.

In all cases women's organisations have been at the centre of framing gender-responsive approaches to transitional justice. This has involved building coalitions with other civil society actors, including victims' associations and human rights organisations, and (variably) through strategic lobbying of political actors, decision-makers and unlikely partners. It has also involved building strategic networks among organisations in different countries, which has helped in exchanging learning and hard-won political lessons on navigating and negotiating trade-offs and dilemmas – for instance, amnesty in exchange for greater scope for truth-telling, and mobilising civil society capacity at multilateral levels, such as at the UNSC, to give political visibility to gender harms in conflict, which often remain invisible.

Reform processes which are either parallel or enabling over time – including constitutional reform, legal change, peace agreements and other peacebuilding or transition mechanisms – have, to various degrees, created enabling opportunities for gender activists and civil society to tactically advance gender-responsive approaches to transitional justice. This has included (as in South Sudan) connecting transitional justice with constitutional reform and the wider peace processes. In the case of Colombia, the 1991 constitution and later constitutional court jurisprudence (reliant on the establishment of an independent constitutional court) advanced normative change supportive of gender-responsive measures in framing transitional justice. In turn, the 2016 Peace Accord was informed by existing transitional justice laws, and under this peace agreement additional measures were developed which further strengthened women's voice within the emerging transitional justice architecture, also related to land-redistribution measures and reparations.

Political skills as well as technical expertise (relating to specific transitional justice mechanisms) have been important to maximise civil society organisations' (CSOs) negotiating capacity in both the formal and informal spaces of political bargaining that underpin peacebuilding and transition processes.

2.1.2 International support and WPS agenda

The role of international support remains particularly understudied regarding transitional justice that is grounded in local priorities (Paige and Yakinthou, 2018). This is even more so for gender-responsive approaches. And there is even less systematised knowledge about how the WPS agenda has contributed to informing the framing of transitional justice.[1]

Support to civil society and international NGOs in terms of peer exchange, transnational networking, and capacity development has been important for women's and victims' organisations both nationally and internationally. In Colombia this enabled activists to mobilise strategically across different sites of negotiation and contestation, including the evolving transitional justice architecture in the country's efforts to address the legacies of its almost 60-year armed conflict, as well as engaging with the peace process and its implementation (Domingo et al., 2015). Transnational networking among women's organisations has resulted in important peer exchange and cross-fertilisation. The South African experience has informed transitional justice experiences in other African countries, for instance.

The field of transitional justice has been susceptible to an excessive focus on technical support by international actors on the different formal mechanisms, in ways that take insufficient account of the politics of transitional justice efforts. However, some testimonies, for example in Colombia and South Sudan, suggest that politically strategic support for women's rights in transitional justice, and through the WPS agenda, has enabled women's rights organisations to position themselves in a politically strategic way to secure access to the decision-making processes where transitional justice mandates are defined.

The WPS agenda provides a useful policy platform and normative framing to strengthen the gender-responsive elements of transitional justice. It is sufficiently broad to be used as a framework for engagement with a range of parallel but potentially mutually reinforcing processes of change (transitional justice, constitutional, political, and justice-sector reform, for instance). The evidence in evaluations or grey literature suggests that strategic support through WPS to empower women not as victims but as agents of change across the pillars of protection, recovery, participation and prevention at key junctures and opportunities across evolving agendas of transitional justice and other transformational change processes can be effective (e.g. Colombia). It is, however, unclear how far international support to transitional justice draws strategically on the WPS agenda to address conflict-related violence; or the extent to which local mobilisation sees the value in invoking the WPS agenda to advance transitional justice objectives. This would include connecting support to gender-responsive approaches to transitional justice to wider reform processes associated with peacebuilding and transition from conflict.

Women's organisations in Colombia found it politically useful to invoke the WPS agenda as the transitional justice architecture has evolved, but it is not evident that drawing the connections between transitional justice and wider peacebuilding processes through recourse to the WPS agenda is the norm.

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1   There is a body of literature, for instance, in UN Women and OHCHR country offices different aspects of gender-responsive transitional justice elements, but there is a relative lack of knowledge on how the WPS agenda informs these gains.

The WPS agenda may be used more strategically in order to advance gender-equality and transitional justice objectives in interconnected ways, and where this has political traction – including because of country-level commitments and engagement with the WPS agenda. Clearly, the WPS agenda is not the only basis to advance this. But strategic choices by international actors regarding their commitment to advancing gender equality and WPS objectives means that they will have to be engaged with the needs of women's rights movements and gender activists to ensure a locally driven agenda.

2.2 Constitutional reform

2.2.1 What works in advancing women's rights through constitutional reform

Post-conflict constitutional reforms have been used to advance women's rights across a range of contexts, such as Kenya, Nepal, and South Africa. The disruption of power relations caused by conflict, combined with opening of democratic political space that often follows, provides entry points for women to influence the processes of constitutional reform. However, promoting gender equality in post-conflict constitutional reform poses challenges, including resistance from male elites and the difficulties of developing a common women's agenda in highly polarised contexts.

Women have used a number of productive strategies to ensure their participation in constitutional reform processes. These include mobilising early to influence the structure of these reform processes; pushing for women's representation in constitution-making bodies, including through mechanisms such as quotas; demonstrating women's expertise to overcome

being seen as tokenistic; presenting a united front in efforts to increase women's inclusion; and advocating for special mechanisms to facilitate women's participation in constitution-making where there are significant structural and normative barriers (see UN Women, 2017; Tamaru & O'Reilly, 2018).

Translating women's participation into influence within constitutional reform processes is not straightforward. As Waylen (2014) argues, 'ensuring women's "presence" may be necessary as a mobilizing idea and a way of incorporating women into processes, but it is not sufficient to ensure gender-friendly outcomes.' Evidence suggests that women are more able to exert influence over constitutional content when they are present at all levels and in a range of roles within these processes; frame gender-equality demands in relation to overarching goals of peace or democracy; and cultivate strategic alliances and broad coalitions. Women's rights activists are most effective where they have a clear understanding of the constitution-making process, key actors, and major interests, and of how bargaining over the constitution relates to broader power struggles over the political settlement. The case of Kenya illustrates how women successfully used many of these strategies to promote gender equality within the 2010 constitution. Kenyan women lobbied at the outset to ensure the process was participatory; developed a broad and inclusive women's coalition with a common agenda; engaged with key stakeholders, including political parties and parliament; developed communication and media strategies to gain wider support for their goals; drew on the international normative framework to develop a Kenyan agenda of gender equality; and adapted their strategies to respond to emerging challenges or opportunities.

2.2.2 International support for women's participation and influence in constitutional reform

International actors frequently support women's participation in post-conflict constitutional processes and promote the inclusion of gender-equality provisions within constitutional content. They employ a range of strategies to do this, including financial and technical support for gender activists, encouraging actors such as political parties to ensure women's participation, supporting strategic alliance building, and facilitating consensus on a common women's agenda. However, international actors may face significant challenges in supporting women's participation and influence in constitutional reform. These challenges include building trust among the various actors, maintaining a balance between being non-prescriptive while advocating for international gender-equality commitments, and remaining engaged beyond short-term programme cycles. Perhaps the biggest challenge for international agencies is to understand the complexity of bargaining over the political settlement in post-conflict contexts, and how this shapes opportunities for advancing gender equality within constitution-building.

While international actors tend to provide support for women's participation during the constitution-making process, this support often dries up when it comes to implementation (International IDEA, 2011). Ensuring the realisation of constitutional commitments to gender equality requires ongoing investment in a broad range of implementation strategies and oversight and redress mechanisms, as well as long-term support for women's movements. It also calls for taking account of the ways in which implementation may be resisted at multiple levels by a range of actors. For example, in Burundi, despite constitutional

commitments to equality, women's demands for equal inheritance rights were strongly resisted by the government and political elite because they threatened power structures based on exclusionary patterns of land access.

Constitutional reform processes have the potential to advance many aspects of the WPS agenda, particularly elements related to women's participation and rights. The WPS agenda can also be an important framework for promoting women's participation in constitutional reform processes, framing their demands in relation to constitutional content, and pressing for implementation of constitutional commitments. There is, however, limited evidence of international actors connecting their work on WPS and constitutional reform, even though this work often shares a number of goals related to voice and participation, decision-making and rights. It is important for international actors to recognise where such goals align in a given context, and identify opportunities to move beyond existing silos and connect their work where this can provide greater traction. In particular, they should reflect on how the WPS NAP can provide a framework for shared commitment between national and international stakeholders on these goals, as well as a framework for coherent and consistent international support to them. For this to happen in a systematic fashion, international agency staff have to overcome any thematic silos and explore interconnections, and to engage with stakeholders beyond their usual interlocutors.

Analysis of international engagement on constitutional reform and on WPS reveals that they share similar weaknesses. Engagement in both is often undermined by a limited understanding of the complex power dynamics of peacebuilding and post-conflict reform, and their implications

for advancing gender-equality goals. For example, in Nepal a lack of attention to how struggles over women's rights related to wider contestations between identity-based elites in relation to the post-conflict political settlement meant that many international agencies failed to recognise how tensions related to Nepal's relationship with India and the status of the ethnic Madhesi population along the border undermined women's demands for equal citizenship status in the new constitution.

Work on both constitutional reform and WPS would benefit from more politically informed approaches – for example, to take account of how constitutional reform processes relate to the wider political economy and bargaining over the political settlement, the ways in which gender issues are caught up in these dynamics, and how women position their demands in relation to them. Likewise, these approaches would help in understanding how existing interests, identities and cleavages shape opportunities for women to mobilise around a common agenda, as well as how issues of power and representativeness play out within women's movements; and, of course, to identify where and how resistance may emerge and how this can be addressed.

2.3 Land reform

2.3.1 What works in advancing women's land rights

There is a growing body of evidence regarding the impact of conflict on women's access to land and how post-conflict reforms can advance women's land rights. This evidence shows that during conflict women frequently adopt more traditionally 'male' responsibilities in relation to land use and land governance, and that such shifts in norms and roles during conflict can create

entry points to advance women's economic empowerment and participation in decision-making (UNEP et al., 2020). However, evidence also demonstrates that women face increased insecurity in relation to land during conflict owing to displacement, violence and land grabbing.

Various reform processes can provide opportunities to advance women's land rights in post-conflict settings. While the most obvious is land reform, which is often undertaken where grievances over land have fuelled conflict, land issues are also frequently addressed in peace agreements, constitutional reform, law reform and transitional justice processes. For example, in Kenya women's land and property rights were addressed through constitutional reform, land reform, and law reform; in Colombia they have been addressed through transitional justice processes, and a peace agreement that mandated land reform; and in South Sudan constitutional and law reform were used to establish gender-equality principles in matters relating to land ownership and inheritance. In Rwanda, land reform that formed part of the post-genocide recovery processes resulted in a participatory and community-led land registration system that protects marginalised categories of women and girls, such as widows, unmarried women, and those in non-legal marriages (UNEP et al., 2013).

The extent to which reform processes result in meaningful progress on women's land rights depends largely on women's ability to mobilise in strategic ways, and to build alliances, in order to advance their demands in relation to land. For example, Colombian women's organisations, in alliance with others, successfully framed the content of the transitional justice law and the subsequent peace process to secure gains in women's access to land through restitution mechanisms.

Likewise, advancing women's land rights requires addressing power dynamics and decision-making across multiple levels and spaces. These might include a focus on national, regional and subnational levels; on a range of institutions, such as national ministries, land commissions, and forestry committees; and on statutory and customary institutions.

Advances in women's land rights often provoke strong resistance, mainly because of their redistributive potential and the threat they pose to men's economic interests at various levels. For example, in Kenya, although women's effective mobilisation resulted in strong constitutional and policy commitments to women's land rights, these were diluted in subsequent legislation, and the new rights contained in the latter have largely not been upheld by justice institutions, resulting in little change for women on the ground (as shown in Castillejo 2022b). In many contexts, customary norms regarding inheritance and land undermine formal rights that women gain through reform processes.

2.3.2 International support and women's land rights

International support to post-conflict land-reform processes has tended to adopt a technical approach, often seeking to superimpose formal models of individual land-titling onto informal rules and political settlements that continue to reproduce structural inequalities. Such an approach generally fails to take account of local norms and practices related land ownership and use; address core issues of justice and redistribution; or substantively shift gendered inequalities in land use and access.

International engagement should instead begin from a context-specific understanding of structures of land use and ownership; how these

are experienced by different groups of women; how they are disrupted by conflict; and the challenges, opportunities and entry points that this situation presents for advancing women's land rights. It is particularly critical that international support takes account of both formal and informal rules and norms related to land and how these relate to each other. For example, formal, informal, and hybrid legal institutions that adjudicate on land in Kenya are all 'underpinned (and undermined) by the same local power dynamics that control and ultimately prevent women from obtaining land, leaving all of these systems inadequate in ensuring women's access to land' (Harrington and Chopra, 2010:v).

Based on this understanding, international actors may advance a gender-responsive approach to land reform across a range of reform and change processes, with a focus on supporting meaningful redefinition of rules over ownership and control of land and natural resources, and on providing strategic support to women to advance their land rights in law and in practice. Critically, international actors need to engage beyond moments of reform to support long-term implementation of new rules at various levels and through a wide range of institutions; to identify and address resistance; and to support norm change.

The WPS agenda has potential to provide an enabling normative framework for such engagement, provided that those working on WPS do not remain in their sectoral or organisational silos to engage with processes and actors involved with land-related reforms. The participation pillar underlines the importance of women's participation in all aspects and levels of decision-making, which includes reforms and governance related to land and natural resources, such as, ensuring women are represented in land-reform commissions. The relief and recovery pillar

includes the objective of strengthening women's contribution to economic recovery, which should involve strengthening access to and control over land and natural resources. The protection pillar includes addressing women's safety and security using natural resources during conflict, as well as the protection of women activists making demands in relation to land and natural resources. Women's involvement in preventing conflict might include women's contributions to resolving grievances related to natural resources and environmental challenges.

3   Analysis

3.1   'What works' for advancing women's influence and gender-equality goals in reform processes

3.1.1   Strategic support to women's mobilisation

Analysis of how international actors support women's influence and advance gender-equality goals within post-conflict reform identifies some key success factors. Central among these is the importance of sustained and politically informed support for women's mobilisation across various levels and spaces.

Such support begins with a recognition that women are often already working in politically smart ways to influence reform processes. External actors can enhance and amplify this work by strengthening women's political, technical and operational capacities that are relevant across issues and sectors; and by supporting women to develop their strategies and expand their networks. International actors too often, perhaps inadvertently, supplant or override these. In Colombia international assistance has been most effective, however, where it has supported women's groups to advance locally driven processes of empowerment and reform (as illustrated in the Colombia case study, Rocha-Menocal, 2022).

It is important that international support for women's activism is both flexible and long term, recognising that strong women's movements may take time to form and must adapt to changing contexts and priorities. For example, in Kenya, women's successful engagement with constitutional reform built on a history of women mobilising, building alliances and

reacting to shifting political opportunities (Domingo et al., 2016). It is also important that support for women's mobilisation is related to real opportunities for influence afforded by the changing conditions of conflict, and connects women to wider processes of change.

Women influence reform processes from multiple sites and at many different levels. This includes women in politics, government bureaucracies, legal institutions, CSOs, academic institutions, media, and the private sector, operating at national, regional and community levels. International actors need to understand women's actions across diverse sites and levels, and support these actions to connect and build upon each other to achieve greater impact. For example, as Tamaru and O' Reilly (2018) document, effective coordination among women in elected office and civil society can be a critical factor in influencing constitutional reform processes. It is also important to engage with other types of actors, beyond gender activists, whose work can contribute to advancing gender equality in reform processes, such as political party representatives, constitutional lawyers or human rights and environmental groups, or indigenous rights activists. Indeed, UN Women (2017) documents how building strategic alliances beyond the women's movement can be critical to influencing reform from different locations.

International support for women's mobilisation needs to be based on an understanding of the politics of local women's movements (see for instance Jimenez et al, 2021). This includes understanding how women's mobilisation relates to wider political and social cleavages, interests and groupings, and the extent to which leading

women's organisations that seek to define gender-equality problems and priorities represent broader constituencies of women. Support to women's organisations also needs to adopt an intersectional lens, identifying how different groups of women experience intersecting forms of marginalisation and have differing priorities and interests in relation to reform processes, and how they may require different types of international support in order to have their voices heard. Critically, support needs to engage with national, subnational and local women's mobilisation and seek to strengthen connections between these levels.

3.1.2   Support for women in decision-making roles across reform processes and at key junctures

Across diverse contexts and types of reform processes, the importance of women's participation in significant numbers in decision-making roles is very clear. Women's participation in decision-making is central to the WPS agenda and is often a focus of international engagement. For example, international agencies frequently support demands for women's inclusion in peace negotiations, constitution-making bodies and parliaments. In some cases, however, international commitments to support women's participation are side-lined in order to accelerate a deal between elite men. For example, in Somalia, while some UN agencies promoted women's rights within constitutional reforms, ultimately the UN endorsed an exclusionary process that led to the 2012 constitution that did not meet women's demands (Tripp, 2016).

International support for women's participation tends to focus on political and security-related reforms, which have been the more directly addressed to date within the WPS agenda, with less emphasis on women's engagement in reforms in areas such as economic governance or natural

resources. In practice, however, women can use various reform processes to further gender-equality goals and it is therefore important to support women's participation in all processes that form part of a transition from conflict. For example, in Colombia women have engaged across peace, transitional justice and land-reform processes in ways that further their rights to land and land restitution, while also addressing other aspects of the gendered experience of conflict, including displacement and conflict-related sexual violence (see Rocha-Menocal, 2022).

It is critical that support focuses not only on women's participation, but also on their ability to influence decision-making and advance gender-equality goals within different reform processes. This can be done, for example, by framing demands for gender equality in relation to wider political goals or cultivating alliances and coalitions within and outside reform processes. Women face a range of obstacles in translating their presence into influence in reform processes, including hostility toward their inclusion; perceptions of women as token members of decision-making bodies; barriers to building coalitions; side-lining of women's demands in favour of more powerful groups; and a range of structural barriers such as those related to education and language (Tamaru and O'Reilly, 2018). To be effective, support for women's participation and influence must address such barriers.

Support for women's participation and influence needs to go beyond the moment of reform. It is important that women participate in early discussions about which reforms are prioritised and how reform processes are organised. They also need to be supported to participate in mechanisms that oversee the implementation of reforms, and to anticipate challenges, especially given that gender-equality elements of reform are frequently resisted or deprioritised in implementation.

3.1.3   Supporting women to navigate political dynamics and informal spaces

Meaningful support for women's engagement in post-conflict reforms should be based on an understanding of how shifting political and power dynamics shape possibilities for women to access and influence such reforms. For example, a UN report on Gender, Climate and Security (UNEP, UN Women, DPPA and UNDP, 2020) identifies how shifts in norms and rules about land and natural resources during conflict can create entry points to advance women's economic empowerment and participation in decision-making. Likewise, Domingo (2022) describes how the balance of power between actors in a conflict shapes the extent to which transitional justice can contribute to transformative change for women.

It is important to recognise that bargaining and decision-making about post-conflict reform may take place in informal spaces, or through informal male networks, to which women have little or no access. Support for women needs to help them to access and navigate such informal spaces and networks where possible, as well as to cultivate alternative informal spaces for bargaining and decision-making that are more accessible for women. This can involve connecting women to learn from others in doing this; supporting women to develop strategies to address and overcome such informal patterns of exclusion; or influencing powerful actors within these informal spaces to engage with or support gender-equality goals, including by framing these in relation to their interests, or as a matter of reputational risk if they do not.

3.1.4   Engaging across multiple reform processes

Different reform processes in post-conflict contexts are interconnected and together form part of wider processes of transition. It is important that international engagement understands and addresses this interconnectedness, including recognising how gender-equality achievements in one area of reform can advance progress in others.

In some cases, reforms are sequenced, with higher-level political processes laying the ground for more technical reforms to follow. For example, peace processes often outline roadmaps for constitutional reform, security-sector reform or transitional justice. Likewise, constitutional reforms may lay the ground for legal and justice-sector reform, governance reforms, or economic and resource-related reforms. It is therefore important that international actors support women's participation in any initial political agreements to help ensure that women can influence both these agreements and other reforms that follow. For example, in South Sudan the 2018 peace agreement established a roadmap for the development of a permanent constitution, while the inclusion of significant gender language in this peace agreement sets a precedent for engendering this future constitution (see Tindall, 2022).

In other cases, parallel reform processes in different sectors can provide opportunities to advance a given gender-equality goal. For example, women's land rights can be advanced within constitutional reform, transitional justice processes and justice-sector reform, as well as directly through land reform, as seen in the examples of Colombia and Kenya. However, because of the frequently siloed nature of international engagement, international actors

often fail to recognise the interrelated nature of different reform processes and the potential for advancing gender-equality goals across these. Moving beyond thematic silos to advance gender goals requires international actors to use any influence they have to undertake an integrated analysis, in order to understand the interconnections and potential of different reform processes; develop strategies to promote gender equality across all support to post-conflict reform; support women to participate in 'joined-up' ways across multiple change processes; and build coalitions on gender equality with actors involved in a variety of reform processes.

The WPS agenda can be a valuable framework for doing this, with the four pillars of WPS potentially providing entry points for engagement on a variety of reform processes. However, this requires a broadly defined and joined up approach to WPS that can be a basis for commitments and coordination to advance gender equality across multiple reform processes, at various levels, working from diverse spaces and with a wide range of actors.

3.2 Sustained support for implementation

3.2.1 Implementation challenges

Post-conflict institutional reform can involve a radical rewriting of the formal rules, creating a gap between new rules and the reality of existing gender-discriminatory laws, institutions and practices. Effective strategies and actions at multiple levels to implement reforms; the establishment of oversight and redress mechanisms; and work to shift social norms can all be critical to helping close this gap. Very often, however, this is not done and gender-equality reforms are not meaningfully implemented.

A major barrier to implementation of gender-equality reforms is resistance across many levels. This may include resistance by power-holders to establish the necessary laws, policies and institutions for implementation and oversight; duty-bearers' resistance to enforce new rules; and communities' resistance to new rights for women. Resistance is often particularly strong in the area of land reform, because its redistributive potential threatens existing economic interests. For example, in the case of Kenya, constitutional and policy commitments to women's land rights were watered down in legislation, while the resulting laws have largely not been upheld by justice institutions and have been undermined by male power-holders at all levels (Castillejo, 2022b). Likewise, in South Sudan, while constitutional and law reform established gender-equality principles in matters relating to land and inheritance, women's access to land remains reliant on political networks, kinship and family networks, and informal land practices (Deng, 2016). In both cases customary norms regarding inheritance and land use undermine women's new formal rights.

Resistance is also seen in other areas, such as women's political participation and transitional justice, where reforms can pose a significant threat to elite male interests. As the Domingo (2022) highlights, the degree to which reparations agreed as part of transitional justice processes have redistributive intent, or address impunity, often determines the level of resistance to them. It is noteworthy that the progressive elements of the peace process in Colombia, including in relation to reparations and restitution, are in practice overshadowed or undermined by high levels of violence, killings and forced disappearance of human rights activists, trade unionists, journalists and other CSO activists. In the case of South Sudan, elite resistance to the establishment of the

transitional justice mechanisms agreed in the 2018 peace deal agreement means that progress has been negligible.

Insecurity is another important reason why women are unable to access new rights resulting from reform processes. This can be seen in Colombia, where ongoing patterns of violence and displacement, including violent resistance by local power-holders and non-state armed actors, undermines the implementation of land reparations (Rocha-Menocal, 2022). Even in contexts where there is no longer any significant conflict-related violence, women exercising new rights, for example by claiming land or seeking political office, can face family or community violence.

Beyond resistance and insecurity, there are other factors that undermine implementation of reforms to advance women's rights. These include the fact that gender-equality elements of reform may not be a priority for governments dealing with complex change processes and multiple demands, and that women may not have the access or influence required to push for implementation of these elements. Moreover, legacies of conflict may have weakened capacity to implement reforms, whether through increased political instability and corruption, lower levels of female literacy, or damaged physical infrastructure. In many cases, a lack of adequate oversight and accountability mechanisms means there is no means to hold duty-bearers to account for implementation. In addition, for women to realise rights from reform in one area may depend on additional reforms in other areas. For example, reforms to justice systems and family law, including customary justice institutions, can often be necessary for women to realise a range of new rights.

Crucially, formal advances in women's rights often need to be accompanied by shifts in gender norms, for example regarding women's public, economic and family roles, or the acceptability of violence. Formal rules seldom result in changing the practices of institutions, communities and individuals without accompanying work to challenge and change discriminatory norms, which is invariably a long-term endeavour.

3.2.2 Strengthening international support for implementation

International engagement in post-conflict reform tends to focus mainly on the moment of reform, in some cases viewing its enactment as an 'end point' that will automatically result in benefits for women on the ground. There is a need for more sustained, and more thoughtful, international support for the implementation of reforms related to gender equality at diverse levels. This includes support for the development of policies and laws required to fulfil the aims of the reforms; for the development of operational and technical capacity and political will in institutions responsible for implementation; for establishing accountability and oversight mechanisms needed to hold duty bearers to account and provide redress; for longer-term efforts to shift norms and attitudes to become more supportive of women's new rights; and, critically, for women activists to work for the realisation of new rights that have been achieved through reform.

Support for implementation needs to begin with a recognition that new formal rules do not necessarily result in meaningful change for women, and that whether and how these are implemented will be shaped by wider power interests and ongoing bargaining over the political settlement, as well as by existing gender norms. Indeed, support for implementation requires a constant investment in understanding changes in context, as well as flexibility to respond to

emerging challenges or opportunities. Based on this understanding, international partners should seek to identify how best to foster conditions that enable implementation, identify and address potential sites of resistance, and support women's mobilisation for implementation.

Given that meaningful implementation of reforms is a lengthy process, such support requires longer time horizons than are typical in development and peacebuilding programmes. For example, in relation to constitutional reform, International IDEA argues that international actors should avoid setting an artificial timeline for when a constitution-making process is complete, arguing that 'any assumption that a referendum followed by the enactment of a constitution marks a conclusive transformation of conflict into a political contest within rules misunderstands the nature and difficulties of transitions' (International IDEA, 2011:11). Rather, there should be a greater focus on implementation of new constitutions and building the capacity of new democratic institutions.

Critically, international support for implementation of reforms must involve long-term and flexible partnerships with women's organisations at multiple levels. For example, this can include support for women's CSOs to lobby for implementation, for women lawyers to use litigation to claim new rights, and for community groups to support women to make claims and realise their rights in practice. The example of Colombia (see Rocha-Menocal, 2022) illustrates how women's engagement, mobilisation, activism, and collective action over decades, with strategic support from international actors that amplified women's voices, has made women's organisations key allies in advancing implementation of the peace accord in the face of significant challenges.

3.3 Implications for international actors: politically informed approaches to WPS support

The findings of this study confirm the merits of two interconnected but distinctive qualities that would make for more effective international support to gender-equality goals in conflict and transition settings. The first relates to the kind of knowledge, analysis and *ways of thinking* that enhances the effectiveness of international actors in supporting intended change processes. The second relates to the use of this knowledge and how it is applied in the practice of international support, namely, *ways of working*.

This draws on recent thinking in international development support regarding different ways of generating and using deep knowledge and analysis about the political economy of context, about the politics of reform and socio-political and economic change, and how this knowledge should inform international practice, including in conflict-affected situations. This includes thinking critically about the role of international actors in support change processes. While these themes are not new, since around 2010, some of this thinking has been expressed in such approaches as 'thinking and working politically' (known as TWP), problem driven, iterative and adaptive approaches' (PDIA), and 'doing development differently' (DDD).[2] All of these are based on the view that top-down and pre-defined approaches to supporting change processes that do not derive from the context result in flawed practice and poor results, and all stress the need for constant and ongoing context-specific political analysis

Common to these approaches are the following features: recognising that it is critical to

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2   Rocha Menocal (2014); McCullough and Piron (2019); Laws and Marquette (2020) among others.

understand and engage with the political economy conditions of a given context; moving away from pre-set assumptions about how change happens, to focus on change processes as they exist in context; working in flexible and adaptive ways to respond to context-specific constraints and opportunity structures; prioritising local ownership and supporting locally driven change agendas. This inherently involves understanding and navigating the power dynamics that enable or constrain intended change processes, and essentially integrating politically informed *ways of thinking* about and *ways of working* with the political complexities of both context and the intended change process that is being supported.

In recent years there has emerged a body of work that specifically applies this thinking to gender programming, but what this looks like in practice remains under-documented. This is even more the case regarding the local dynamics of how the WPS agenda could be applied (Domingo et al., 2014; O'Neil, 2016; Castillejo et al., 2019; OECD, 2020).

It is important to underline that this critical thinking regarding the practice of international development actors is not new. Working in politically informed ways is also not new. However, in recent years the need for international development actors to think and to work in politically informed ways is now more clearly articulated and documented. And this is true now of gender programming and the WPS agenda.

3.3.1 'Ways of thinking'

It is therefore now more widely accepted that a deep understanding of the political, social and economic situation is critical to informing international programming design and underlying theories of change. This also includes understanding the political economy of

the specific change process that international engagement aims to support. An applied political economy lens contributes to identifying key blockages and enabling conditions to help advance intended change, including in connection to other related reform and change processes. It can help identify strategic interconnections with change processes in other sectors, and how these might be mutually reinforcing.

Building up relevant knowledge to inform international support also requires learning from locally grounded experiences and perspectives, as well as investing in understanding the longer-term history of the issue in question. What explains previous blockages to change and resistance? What is different now? Analysis needs to also address the power dynamics incentives and interests relating to the change process, and how these shape locally driven agendas, or resistance to change.

There are likely to be different and competing views regarding any change process. Thus, understanding the politics and political preferences of different national and subnational stakeholders is fundamental, as no process of fundamental change or reform is politically neutral. This is true for most governance and development work, and thus also for the advancement of gender-equality goals, and of WPS objectives.

There is likely to be disagreement among women's movements, gender activists, feminist political leaders and women in decision-making roles with regard to their preferred choices on process and strategy. For instance, tactical choices about which coalitions to foster, or which trade-offs to accept in prioritising certain change objectives over others, are issues that are often the subject of heated discussion among activists and political actors in all contexts. This is particularly so in

conflict-affected settings where the zero-sum logic of strategic choices may seem especially stark. This is seen in choices about transitional justice, for instance, where different victims', human rights or women's organisations might have fundamental disagreements on priorities and tactics even among themselves, let alone in relation to perpetrators of violence who may maintain strong leverage in peacebuilding processes (Domingo, 2022).

At the same, changing conditions that might result from peacebuilding and other reform processes might also generate new potential synergies and windows of opportunity resulting in CSOs, government officials, and others in public office being able to reposition themselves regarding different options. In Colombia, for instance, the changing legal and political conditions for transitional justice options – through constitutional court rulings, different iterations of transitional justice legislation and ultimately the peace agreement – created an evolving context of shifting political choices, and new opportunities for voice and agency among women activists and leaders in public office. WPS and other international support was found to be effective in the degree to which programme staff were able to keep on top of these changing conditions, and adapt accordingly.

Finally, understanding context-specific dynamics relating to the connections between formal and informal rules, how networks of patronage and political loyalties are constituted, and what are the spaces where most decision-making and political negotiation *actually* takes place, strengthens international actors' capacity for politically informed analysis and action. It helps set out the political options and opportunity structures for gender activists, whether in civil society or in public office, their potential allies and their

opponents. It should also prompt international actors to reflect on their own role and the nature of their interaction with these informal spaces.

This brings to the surface political considerations of the relationship between foreign policy, security and development goals and interests of donors and other development partners, and choices regarding which change processes to support and potentially wider security interests. This has been identified as especially relevant for WPS programming that operates in the context of highly securitised and polarised discussions about transitioning from conflict.

These ways of thinking require programme staff to acquire or draw upon a range of specialised analytical and knowledge skills. This includes integrating as a matter of course thinking about the political and power dimensions that are relevant to intended change objectives in programming, both in relation to the given issue, and in relation to wider political economy developments and other sectors. Currently, political knowledge and understanding of power dimensions related to any change process is not systematically cultivated among donor staff. This is certainly true outside governance cadres. Rather, political knowledge across different thematic issues and the gendered experience of how these issues play out, often depends on individual rather than organisational analytical capabilities (Domingo et al., 2014).

Technical knowledge remains crucial, as is evident for instance in the cases of land and constitutional reform in Kenya (Castillejo, 2022b). But this knowledge needs to include understanding the political consequences of technical choices, as they may have redistributive impact, which may in turn reinforce resistance to reform among key stakeholders. Understanding the political

consequences of technical choices is also important in terms of predicting implementation challenges resulting from the wider political context at national and subnational levels, and related dynamics of resistance to change.

3.3.2 'Ways of working'

Politically informed knowledge does not necessarily translate seamlessly into politically aware 'ways of working' in international programming and implementation practice. Recurrent themes in how to integrate this knowledge into practice include the following, according to practices that have been documented in relation to gender programming, such as through evaluations, or reviews of donor practice some of which may be internal (see, for instance, experiences of UN Women practice in Colombia and Kosovo, in Domingo et al., 2013).

Investing in long-term relationships at multiple levels as noted above requires core and flexible funding support to national partners (Domingo et al., 2014). Such support can contribute to enabling locally driven agendas on gender norms, shaping change objectives, and defining political choices on process by recipient or beneficiary organisations. This also requires a degree of appetite for risk to work with local actors, such as grassroots women's organisations, religious leaders or traditional institutions, if these are not the international agencies' typical partners, and to provide flexible funding that goes beyond tightly planned projects.

Politically informed practices can also include using donors' political leverage to support progress on normative agendas of gender equality and women's rights, especially when these encounter robust resistance in practice. In all the countries reviewed for this research, formal gender-

equality gains on paper have been important, but implementation is problematic for different political, conflict-related and socio-normative reasons. International actors can contribute to addressing these implementation challenges through their own strategic engagement with the context. In Colombia, for instance, visible support by embassy or donor staff to human rights activists or women activists in conflict-affected regions in the country was reported to have saved lives (Pantuliano et al., 2018). Political support can also help facilitate, as relevant to context, strategic coalitions and alliances, including among unlikely partners. This may include supporting networks across multiple levels – from subnational, national to global. For instance, WPS support through the NGO Working Group on Women Peace and Security at the UNSC level can give voice to national CSO activism and national actors at the global level, such as supporting reform champions in public office or journalists, to give visibility to ongoing country-level experiences of conflict-related violence, and failure to secure progress on commitments undertaken under constitutional and peace agreements, and to monitor the work of the UNSC on following up on WPS commitments (as in the case of South Sudan). Politically smart framing of gender issues, demonstrating their relevance to the interests of power holders, at multiple levels, can be an important way to build support and overcome resistance.

Politically informed ways of working also include, as noted above, the ability to spot opportunities across thematic and sector programmes, which can advance WPS goals in mutually reinforcing ways. For instance, national actors, such as FIDA in Kenya, or diverse women's organisations, victims' associations and others in Colombia, will as a matter of course be working across different change processes (constitutional reform, land reform or transitional justice) to the extent to which these advance

their organisational and strategic objectives. They consistently commend the ability of donor agencies to spot cross sectoral or thematic synergies and support them accordingly. In the case of Colombia, this is recognised as depending in some cases to the individual analytical skills of international staff being aware of these cross-thematic synergies, rather than organisational systems ensuring politically smart coordination across sector support.

Capacity of international development actors to work in politically informed ways

The capacity within international development organisations to work across sectoral or thematic issues is often constrained by funding structures, organisational silos and the division of labour across government departments in the donor country, or at multilateral agency headquarters. Thus, strategic engagement with national partners that works across sectors and parallel reform or change processes tends to be exception rather than the norm.

In head offices, silos may be further reinforced when funding is allocated to different government departments, which in turn respond to competing political and organisational incentives. There are challenges relating to how departmental interests might align or conflict across, for example, ministries of defence, international development departments, trade departments and foreign policy positions. While foreign policy might be shaped by commitments to norms and values, in practice different interests and calculations motivate decisions in other relevant departments, which might be more concerned with securing trading advantages for domestic industry than with human rights objectives. These differences in strategic priorities may be more or less salient in different conflict-affected settings, reflecting context-specific conditions, and the nature of geo-political, security and economic links with the donor government.

WPS Framing and National Action Plans

The merit of the WPS agenda is that – although it is still evolving – it provides a normative framework to advance gender equality and apply a gender lens to international engagement in conflict settings that is situated at the UNSC (which is charged with ensuring international peace and security). How these norms translate into national frameworks is expressed in National Action Plans (NAPs). But there is a need to engage much more critically and in politically informed ways with how the WPS is owned and interpreted across different government departments – both within donor and aid-recipient countries.

In many peacebuilding contexts the WPS agenda is treated as peripheral to both the main business of government and to most international development programmes. In addition, even when support to peacebuilding is informed by the WPS agenda, the work is siloed, so that goals and strategies are not integrated across WPS pillars and a fragmented WPS lens applied only to some parts of the peacebuilding landscape.

This state of affairs, in turn, highlights the continuing challenges in elevating the impact and effectiveness of WPS interventions. First, there is a need for WPS programming to be better equipped to respond in an agile fashion to unfolding opportunities and challenges related to the wider political economy of conflict, peacebuilding and transition dynamics (UN Women, 2021; Erturk, 2020). Second, WPS has been criticised as being too siloed in terms of its own pillars (prevention, participation, protection and recovery). And third, WPS programming continues to be viewed as often quite disconnected from the wider politics of peacebuilding support and interventions (Swaine, 2017; Ni Aolain and Valji, 2019; Davis and True, 2019).

4 Conclusion

This study on how to advance gender equality within post-conflict reforms identified several overarching lessons for international actors supporting change processes in post-conflict contexts, and particularly those working on WPS.

A central lesson relates to how international actors can best support women's organisations and movements. Effective support begins with a detailed understanding of how women's movements and agendas relate to wider political economy dynamics and interests. Drawing on this understanding, international actors can help enhance and amplify the work of women activists and their organisations by supporting them to develop their agendas and capacities, strengthen their alliances, and access decision-making spaces. Doing this requires providing sustained funding, strategic support and operational support to a range of women's organisations working at multiple levels, given that the development of strong women's movements takes time. It also requires flexibility, so that support can be adapted to enable women to respond to changing contexts or emerging opportunities.

International actors supporting gender equality in post-conflict contexts need to engage over the long term, since the change processes that they seek to influence are complex, slow and non-linear. Specific reform processes (e.g. land reform or constitutional reform) may emerge from political bargaining about how conflict will end and what a new political settlement should involve. Moreover, as reforms take place, new processes of negotiation and contestation emerge regarding whether and how reforms will be implemented. At all stages – from initial bargaining over what the political settlement will look like, through formal reform processes, and as implementation unfolds – there are opportunities to advance gender-equality agendas. At all stages there will also be resistance to gender-equality agendas. Supporting reforms that result in meaningful change for women therefore requires international actors to engage early and remain engaged following the 'completion' of the reforms to provide ongoing support to implementation.

A major challenge to effective support for gender equality in post-conflict reforms is the frequently siloed nature of international engagement. As this study has shown, different reform processes are highly interconnected and together form part of wider bargaining processes that shape transitions from conflict. It is clear that progress in gender equality in one reform process can create opportunities in another; that various reform processes can be used to advance a particular gender-equality goal such as women's economic empowerment; and that sources and forms of resistance are likely to be similar across different reform processes. Moreover, the same groups of women activists frequently mobilise across a range of processes to advance their rights. Despite this, international engagement with these reform processes tends to be organised by sector. This results in missing opportunities to develop connections and synergies, and build on progress across various processes. This calls for a more joined up approach that is based on detailed analysis of how different reform processes relate to each other and the implications of this for work on gender, and that involves international actors coordinating across thematic areas to promote gender-equality goals through multiple reform processes.

The WPS agenda could be invoked and deployed more effectively by different stakeholders through creative engagement *across* different political opportunity structures as these emerge – at the global, national and subnational levels. Women activists and allies in gender equality, including in public office, may already be using the WPS agenda in this way both in specific country contexts, and in different international forums and organisations, such as at the UN. Change processes are often the result of women's and feminist activists' strategic engagement at multiple levels, but this paper has focused on what international actors can do to improve own capacity to support women's political influence, and to use the WPS agenda to better effect across sectors and themes. Politically informed ways of thinking and working provides some insights into how to improve support to WPS work. This includes investing in gender-aware political economy analysis that can inform support which is grounded in a deep understanding of context, and the specific blockages and opportunity structures that affect the prospects for change. The available evidence shows that smart politics underpins effective social and political mobilisation for gender-equality gains, but there is a need for more investment in documenting international support for advancing WPS within specific change processes in order to inform more effective efforts. Moreover, international actors will need to invest not only through funding, but also in the necessary political capital to address their own organisational political economy constraints and enablers in order to enhance their capacity to mobilise more strategic connections across sectors, and government departments to advance the WPS agenda.

The WPS agenda has potential to be a valuable framework for such coordinated action across reform processes. The four WPS pillars are relevant to a range of change and reform processes in post-conflict contexts, including those related to politics, legacies of violence, and women's economic empowerment. In conflict-affected countries, NAPs can provide a framework for shared commitments and coordination by national and international actors to integrate gender equality into a range of change and reform processes, as well as a framework for coordination across sectors to do this. Bilateral donor countries' own NAPs can be a mechanism for engaging and coordinating various departments – including those working across diplomacy, development and defence – to advance gender equality in post-conflict change and reform processes. In order for the WPS agenda to play this role it is important that it is interpreted broadly; that silos between the four pillars of WPS are broken down and that the WPS pillars are used strategically for action across a range of national reform processes; that there is broad ownership of the WPS agenda and NAPs at national level; and that NAPs themselves are broad, overarching, and flexible plans, within which strategies and activities can be adapted to respond to emerging challenges and opportunities.

Finally, the study identified the weak evidence base on effective ways of working to advance gender equality in reform processes. In many contexts some international actors are in practice working in ways that take account of complex political economy dynamics and respond to shifting opportunity structures in order to promote gender equality within post-conflict change processes. Often, however, these politically 'smart' approaches are ad hoc – emerging as staff within these organisations respond to changes in context or new entry points – and are therefore largely invisible and provide no lessons on which others can draw.

There is therefore a strong need to document the different approaches that international actors use to advance gender equality across a range of post-conflict reform processes, in order to develop a robust evidence base that can be a building block for strengthening work in this area.

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