



COUNCIL FOR SECURITY COOPERATION IN THE ASIA PACIFIC

Fourth Meeting of the Study Group on Women, Peace and Security (WPS)

March 20-21, 2023 (Hawaii)

The fourth meeting of the Study Group on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) was held in Honolulu, Hawai'i, in a hybrid in-person/virtual format. It built on the previous CSCAP WPS Study Group meetings held [June 2021](#), [September 2021](#), and [June 2022](#). This meeting was attended by individuals from academia, military, and research institutes representing CSCAP member committees from Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, Canada, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand, the United States, and Vietnam. Topics included armed forces' implementation of the WPS agenda; regional approaches to WPS in ASEAN, the Pacific Islands, and Africa; the root causes of gender inequality; the importance of transforming gender norms; and the need for gender balance in defense and security narratives, security research, the media, and in organizations such as CSCAP. Study Group participants also used findings from previous meetings to draft a WPS Study Group Memorandum. Key findings from this meeting are described below.

Update on WPS implementation

Experts analyzed implementation of WPS from an armed forces' perspective, particularly the United States, NATO, New Zealand, and Australia. While there is a consensus on the significance of WPS objectives, the presenters emphasized the variety of perspectives among nations on WPS and its implementation. For instance, the US, New Zealand, and NATO focus on defense implementation, while Australia has added a focus on affairs at home (Home Affairs was included for the first time in Australia's second NAP, which is rights-based and focused on systemic change). There are other topical differences. In the US, understanding of WPS rests on external operationalization and internal institutionalization of the agenda. For NATO, the allies have placed gender equality at the center of its newest strategy. NATO's is ultimately a human security approach to WPS, though there remains debate within the security community about the appropriateness for international security more broadly. For New Zealand's defense forces, the focus is shifting to ways to integrate a gender perspective into military operations with cultural empathy and regard for human rights. Australia's second WPS National Action Plan (NAP) (2021-2031) included a Gender Peace & Security Mandate 2020-2030. The NAP centers on four outcomes: supporting women's meaningful participation and needs in peace processes, reducing sexual and gender-based violence, supporting resilience, and demonstrating leadership and accountability in WPS. Australia's [Defense Gender, Peace and Security Mandate](#) further lays down

six lines of effort: policy and doctrine; education and training; personnel; mission readiness and effectiveness; international engagement through defense diplomacy; and, governance and reporting. However, some looming concerns for Australia include the Australia, United Kingdom, and United States (AUKUS) partnership; aid to civil power; cybersecurity; and retention of Australian Defence Force personnel, all of which require closer inspection for ensuring continued implementation of the WPS agenda.

The mere presence of women in the military does not necessarily translate into greater reflection of WPS principles within the armed forces. Moreover, traditional security issues such as nuclear deterrence, alliances, and strategic rivalries have typically left little space for WPS discussions. The experts noted that it is crucial to center the voices of women to promote a broader understanding of WPS, thereby deepening the significance and effectiveness of the WPS agenda. Suggestions included increasing the number of gender focal points, recruiting gender advisors in the armed forces, developing NAPs that address WPS goals in light of the context-specific role of military in different societies, and most importantly, ensuring the implementation of WPS from policy to practice with adequate budgetary support.

Regional approaches to WPS

Participants discussed regional approaches to implementing the WPS Agenda, including the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action (RPA) and WPS in the Pacific Islands and Africa. ASEAN's RPA launched late last year and provided matrices for realizing the four pillars of WPS based on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 – participation, prevention, protection, and relief – while also outlining measures for their implementation and monitoring. There is a need to continue discussing the RPA in light of women's localized role in conflict prevention, peacemaking, and violent extremism, rather than focusing on the raw number of women in the security sector/military. In the Pacific Islands, the existence of a WPS plan does not necessarily indicate meaningful engagement of women in society. Likewise, indigenous solutions representative of the WPS might not be recognized as such for not "speaking the language" of WPS. There is a need to reconcile the informed enactment of the agenda with "speaking the language" of WPS. Africa's example emphasized the importance of consultation (top down and bottom up), the importance of flexibility and safe places for negotiating a regional plan, and the enduring problem of gender norms impacting parental care work. In Africa, countries experiencing more instability often saw the development of regional plans as a useful vehicle for their WPS concerns, as this could help bypass national roadblocks to WPS implementation. Overall, incorporating measures to ensure accountability of actors engaged in the drafting and implementation of the RPAs will help strengthen localized and contextualized plans for achieving the WPS agenda in different socio-cultural settings.

Thematic discussion on sustainable WPS implementation

Several issues related to implementation were highlighted as essential to the sustainable application of WPS principles. It was noted that even though women-led processes are essential and need strong support, only 32% of peace agreements signed in 2021 included gender provisions. Similarly, given the ways in which climate change will become the background to which all peace negotiations are held, there is a need to increase women's participation in combating climate change, with an emphasis on preventing climate change from becoming another way to reinforce gender inequality. Equally important is considering the religious and ideological roots of gender inequality. Among nations with a predominant religious culture, the role of women may either be restricted, or women might not be considered a crucial part of decision-making processes, even during conflicts or conflict resolution. A comprehensive and context-bound understanding of WPS implementation in diverse socio-cultural environments is therefore necessary.

Within the orbit of care work, social norms stereotype care work as a woman's responsibility, limiting her constructed role to domestic spheres that are largely unpaid. Some countries have taken the step in the right direction, such as the Philippines (compensation/minimum wage for stay-at-home mothers at monthly 2000 pesos), Mexico (defines domestic employers as employers to enable social protection schemes), and Spain (enacted a law in 2006 to open formal home care services). However, unpaid care work and domestic work in most other countries have caused widening gender inequality, preventing women from participating in or returning to the labor market and to obtain decent work; creating increased dependency on men and increased exposure to domestic violence; and passing on women's vulnerability and poverty to their children. The World Bank's definition of empowerment as "the process of increasing individual or group capacity to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes" needs a more holistic definition that includes supportive community, i.e., women's sense of security in society such that they can reach their full potential. Overall, it was noted that a new generation of feminists, including men who are comfortable leading a pro-feminist life, can accelerate women's leadership and support gender-responsive budgeting by their governments.

Gender balance in security topics and media

The Pacific Forum Gender Tracker revealed an increase in women's participation in security-themed events through virtual programming. In-person events appear to have a higher barrier to entry, potentially due to limitations around travel, budgets, time, etc. While women's interests were inclined toward WPS and soft security topics, men's interests were skewed to hard security (e.g., strategic and nuclear policy) topics, and men tended to attend less when the percentage of women speakers was higher. Experts noted that men-only panels (or "manels") lend weight to the false assumption that women lack expertise in hard security fields. The speakers highlighted that diversity brings better results, new experiences, and perspectives to the table. For example, the engagement of women in disarmament and nonproliferation arms control is vital to discussion on peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Yet less than half of the NAPs on WPS include specific mentions of disarmament and nonproliferation arms control, despite its importance for the

realization of the WPS agenda. Of all the forums on arms control and disarmament, only 32% of delegates are women, and the number drops to 20% in smaller forums. In this regard, education and training can be enablers for meaningful participation of women in WMD nonproliferation diplomacy.

Media represents the power of discourse and is vital to WPS agenda, but media representation remains a gender-inequal field where women are disproportionately underrepresented as experts, eyewitnesses, or reporters. Women make up only 24% of people interviewed (including eyewitnesses) and 20% of experts interviewed by the media, highlighting the need for meaningful engagement of women in these spheres. True progress in the discourse on peace and development will only be achieved with equal and meaningful representation and inclusion of women and their views in the media. Moreover, media should be included in the WPS agenda because of the voice and visibility it lends women.

CSCAP memo drafting

Several suggestions were made for what to include in the Memo, such as recommendations from civil society organizations from the Asia-Pacific; an emphasis on localizing and contextualizing WPS policies; a need for full funding of the WPS RPA and other policies in the spirit of the WPS agenda; an emphasis on recognizing women's complex, intersectional identities; the necessity to recognize women's unpaid care responsibilities; an emphasis on increasing women's meaningful participation in peacemaking, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and in all levels of government and leadership; a focus on the root causes of gender inequality; strategic regional issues on WPS to understand the unique issues, contexts, and strategies; and a linkage to the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda.

Conclusion and key takeaways

The fourth meeting of the CSCAP WPS study group ascertained that certain enduring challenges to implementing WPS agenda remain unresolved. These include broader gender norms such as who carries the burden of unpaid work and the myriad difficulties that gendered economics bring for women. Despite setbacks such as the loss of 100 million women globally to femicide, it is essential to recognize that empowerment is an internal process, driven by factors such as self-awareness, experience, education, and support from society, family, and friends. The challenges to empowerment can in part be addressed by resolving issues related to ideological, religious, and other causes of social inequality. We therefore need to reevaluate social norms, emphasize context-specific WPS implementation, develop a holistic understanding of women's empowerment, and promote shared values that see women as equal stakeholders and indispensable partners toward security and peacebuilding. The memo the Study Group participants drafted reflects key findings of the past four study groups and aims to provide concrete, actionable policy recommendations to regional, national, and subnational policy makers and stakeholders on how to effectively and sustainably implement the WPS agenda in the Asia Pacific.