



Key Findings

Inaugural Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP)

Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Study Group Meeting (virtual)

June 10-11 (Asia/Oceania) | June 9-10 (North America)

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security was passed in 2000. Two decades later, WPS has developed into a major global security agenda. As of April 2021, 92 countries or 47 percent of UN member states have adopted a WPS national action plan (NAP). Regional organizations such as the European Union and Pacific Islands Forum have also developed action plans for implementation. In 2017, ASEAN issued a joint statement promoting the WPS agenda. Acknowledging this progress, the WPS Study Group was convened and for its first meeting sought to encourage academics, researchers and policymakers of CSCAP member committees to identify challenges and opportunities in the adoption of National and Regional Action Plans on WPS and other related issues in the Asia Pacific. The meeting was also intended to provide a venue for CSCAP member committees to appraise past and present work and share ideas about future activities.

The two-day virtual meeting was attended by over 40 individuals representing different CSCAP member committees from Australia, Canada, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Lao PDR, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, the United States and Vietnam. Individuals from academia and research institutes also joined the discussion. It was structured into two sessions. The first session focused on “Definition and Scope of Respective Women, Peace and Security Initiatives” based on presentations from 10 CSCAP members and other participants. The second session was dedicated to examining specific “WPS Institutional Mechanisms, Including National or Regional Action Plans” from CSCAP member committees where WPS NAPs are in place, namely Australia, the United States and Indonesia.

The key findings from this meeting are described below.

1. Defining the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

One of the main themes discussed in the meeting was how the WPS agenda is understood and translated into policy and practice. The WPS agenda consists of four main pillars: Participation, Protection, Prevention, and Relief and Recovery. There was a consensus that ensuring gender equality in all these pillars was important and no participant disagreed that women mattered in achieving peace and security. However, there were clear differences in approaches among and within countries. For example, the development or lack of WPS NAPs reflect principled positions. Some governments believe the WPS agenda requires a stand-alone action plan. Others think it should instead be actively linked with pre-existing national development plans and processes to meet the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda or national gender equality commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which pre-date the WPS agenda. Representatives from countries without a NAP pointed out that the absence of a NAP does not indicate a lack

of support for WPS, but rather their own interpretation of how to ensure that the goals and visions embedded within the WPS pillars are successfully integrated in all areas of life. However, it was also pointed out that states may not want to engage with the language and specific mechanisms entailed in implementing a WPS NAP due to concerns around external scrutiny into domestic affairs or a desire to keep particular political issues and forms of conflict off-limits. There were also differences in the scope and relevance attributed to state and civil society actors in implementing WPS. In some countries, the core implementing agencies are from the security sector. Other countries emphasized the importance of broader ownership and civil society–led implementation of WPS. Relatedly, WPS can be implemented in domestic laws or as foreign policy, or both. There was a strong message in the discussion about progressively bridging the implementation of WPS at home and abroad. Last, the discussion emphasized not limiting WPS to traditional definitions of armed conflicts as inter and intra-state violence. Rather, it must be increasingly broadened and integrated with disaster risk reduction, COVID-19 pandemic response, prevention of violence by and in extractive industries and in natural resources management, and in humanitarian emergencies.

2. Strengths and Limitations of NAP Implementation

Based on the presentations on NAPs in several country cases (Australia, US, New Zealand and Indonesia), key strengths and limitations were identified. Among the consistently raised factors for success is that WPS NAPs require champions from all sectors of state and society. Mechanisms that improve the legitimacy of WPS NAP processes are independent reviews and strong civil society participation. The promotion of ownership among a broad cross-section of society, including through online consultations, was seen as critical for capturing issues that are not automatically included in state agendas but matter to everyday peace and security. To this end, different countries have employed mechanisms to ensure participation and representation, including collecting disaggregated, qualitative and quantitative data, and through localization processes that enable local governments to implement WPS differently in response to communities’ distinct needs. Still, it was noted that there is a great variety in the metrics employed for success and levels of awareness within and across state bureaucracies, which hampers effective NAP implementation.

WPS implementation can change focus and adapt to emerging needs and pressures. WPS does not have to be “fixed” or “static,” and instead can be reformulated or contextualized in light of emerging security issues. Therefore, rather than refer to a homogenous WPS agenda, it is more accurate to consider the proliferation of WPS *agendas*. The WPS agenda – both globally and domestically – has been successful when it is responsive to different security issues and adapted to national or local dynamics.

Common limitations and concerns include the perennial problem of adequate and sustained resourcing such as through gender-responsive budgets, barriers in institutionalization of WPS goals, lack of coordination among different implementing agencies and stakeholders, and WPS as a “compartmentalized” issue. Women still tend to be represented as victims or clustered as “vulnerable groups” *only* without attention to the intersectionality of gender, racial, class and religious inequalities. Such narrow representations deny women’s agency, particularly in terms of their existing roles and capacities to prevent conflict and build peace. Effective NAP implementation is limited when international and domestic issues of violence against women are not actively bridged. Countries cannot champion WPS overseas to the neglect of past and

present gender inequalities and violence domestically. Last, it was noted that WPS action plans are silent on demilitarization and addressing the challenge of scaling down the global arms trade.

3. National and Regional Prospects for WPS

After discussing the different meanings and mechanisms involved in WPS, the meeting reflected on national and regional prospects for implementation. It was noted that the WPS agenda has shown that while there are different goalposts for different countries, regional challenges require regional cooperation. Countries adapt their WPS agendas (or lack thereof) to speak to their specific political and historical contexts. At the same time, in the case of the Asia Pacific and among Southeast Asian nations, there are clear shared security concerns. In promoting WPS regionally, several participants noted that WPS needs to speak to and be integrated across all themes of ASEAN's three community pillars. Because ASEAN has already defined its 2025 Blueprint, WPS can be more actively pushed in developing the post-2025 agenda and with a stronger focus on addressing emerging security issues among ASEAN member states. Additionally, WPS must be closely implemented with respect to sustainable development.

Within ASEAN, there are promising signs that the work of regional women's groups or networks will bear positive outcomes, especially via distinct regional mechanisms. A key example raised was the [ASEAN Women for Peace Registry \(AWPR\)](#), which has been striving to advance a Regional Action Plan while navigating strong fears about external influence and deeply rooted claims to state sovereignty among member states. Nevertheless, ASEAN++ mechanisms have been highly supportive of the WPS agenda as indicated by recent joint statements. Women's regional networks such as the AWPR are also slowly building the reputation and expertise to support ASEAN on advancing efforts at the Track-1 level. This strategy has entailed rethinking how to leverage "non-political" concerns for WPS and for maneuvering to find "entry points" via the language or agendas of disaster risk reduction, cybersecurity, or other nontraditional security issues.

4. Conclusions

CSCAP participants expressed strong interest in developing plans to continue promoting knowledge and awareness of the WPS agenda via the Study Group. There was also support for facilitating cooperation and resource sharing, and to assist in finding common WPS issues and sites for collaboration. More work is needed to assess how different regional actors can support one another in their WPS efforts and for developing a regional action plan for ASEAN.

This document was prepared by Dr. Maria Tanyag. For more information, please contact Dr. Crystal Pryor (crystal@pacforum.org). The findings reflect the view of the organizers; this is not a consensus document. This event was funded [in part] by a grant from the United States Department of Defense. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the author[s] and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of Defense.