

# UN Action Plan: Advancing Women's Participation in Post-Conflict Reconstruction

The post-conflict transition offers the United Nations (UN), its development partners, and post-conflict states a critical window of opportunity to mainstream gender in four areas of post-conflict reconstruction: governance and political systems, economic recovery and environmental sustainability, justice and the rule of law, and security sector reform. Ten priority actions, with specific recommendations, can advance these goals.

## Post-conflict governance

### *Promote women's equal participation in peace negotiations and in all levels of post-conflict governance*

Research shows that women's meaningful participation in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction is correlated with an increased likelihood that peace agreements will incorporate gender provisions and that peace will be more durable.<sup>1</sup> Women bring different perspectives to formal negotiations, collaborate with civil society groups, and voice local concerns that can increase the legitimacy of peace talks and foster local ownership of reconstruction efforts. Effective strategies are needed to boost women's political participation and their role in constitution-making processes, which establish the framework for inclusive governance. Women's increased political participation is associated with more equitable policy outcomes and a reduced likelihood of renewed conflict.<sup>2</sup> Yet women have historically been excluded from formal negotiations.

Mechanisms designed to advance women's inclusion—such as **quotas and recruitment campaigns for women in all sectors of post-conflict governance**—have been shown to significantly increase women's political participation.<sup>3</sup> In post-conflict countries with legislated quotas, the share of women in parliament is more than twice that in countries without such quotas.<sup>4</sup>

**Thus, post-conflict states and the UN ought to mandate a 50 percent quota for women in negotiations and consultations on peace and reconstruction and create inclusive negotiating spaces to ensure women's meaningful participation. States transitioning from conflict should also appoint women to national and local governance bodies at all levels,**

**and women should be included in constitution-making processes, which are an important entry point for advancing women's rights.**

### ***Support women's civil society and grassroots initiatives***

Women's civil society and grassroots initiatives are at the front lines of peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts, engaging in critical work that sets the foundation for lasting peace and stability. In post-conflict governance, these organizations form coalitions across party lines, lead advocacy campaigns to encourage women to vote, and advocate for women's priorities in the constitutional reform processes.<sup>5</sup>

Investing long-term, flexible funding in women's leadership and civil society initiatives that are building grassroots support and expanding women's capacity to run for office can enable more women to participate meaningfully in political processes and assert their political authority. **The UN, member states, and donors should earmark financial support for grassroots actors as part of the UN Secretary-General's target for gender-specific interventions to constitute 15 percent of total peace and security funding, and coordination among donors should be strengthened.** Additionally, **rapid financing mechanisms should be promoted**—such as the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund—that can quickly deliver vital funds to women's civil society organizations in the crucial post-conflict period.<sup>6</sup>

## **Economic recovery and environmental sustainability**

### ***Prioritize climate adaptation and gender inclusion simultaneously***

Violent conflict and climate change disproportionately affect women's livelihoods and food security. Women have fewer resources than men to cope with environmental disasters, and they often work in climate-vulnerable sectors of the economy.<sup>7</sup> For example, close to four in five women in paid work in post-conflict contexts work in agriculture. Integrating women's economic empowerment with climate change adaptation can contribute to more sustainable and gender-responsive post-conflict reconstruction.

Effective strategies include setting benchmarks to ensure that post-conflict investments and assistance integrate climate adaptation, environmental sustainability, and gender inclusion **through gender - and climate-sensitive budgeting and planning. Building the capacity and expertise of women in climate-smart agriculture and clean energy**—through training, workshops, and the adoption of modern farming techniques and tools such as improved seed varieties and soil conservation techniques—can also add resilience to climate-vulnerable sectors and communities.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Bolster women in economic recovery and community-driven development***

Violent conflicts often destroy household assets and livelihoods, as well as public infrastructure and services,<sup>9</sup> making economic recovery central to post-conflict reconstruction. Women are critical to economic recovery efforts, yet women's work remains undervalued and under-resourced due to widespread discrimination in the distribution of assets and in access to resources and markets. Promoting women-led businesses can boost economic growth, create jobs, and foster inclusive prosperity.<sup>10</sup> Addressing barriers to women's entrepreneurship is critical. Closing gender gaps in access to technologies, credit, and resources contributes significantly to women's productivity.<sup>11</sup>

Women must not only benefit from sustainable post-conflict reconstruction but also engage meaningfully as planners, decision-makers, and implementers in all sectors of the post-conflict economy, particularly in climate-vulnerable sectors such as agriculture, energy, and infrastructure. Gender-sensitive, community-driven approaches—such as the **formal consultation of women in economic decision-making and community control of planning and resources**—are valuable for promoting inclusive development.<sup>12</sup> **The UN could set a requirement to have 50 percent of consultation participants around its economic recovery programs be women.**

## **Justice and the rule of law**

### ***Prevent and respond to violence against women***

Conflicts, crises, and global pandemics inhibit women's access to basic services and justice. During the post-conflict period, many women continue to face threats of insecurity, injustice, and violence. Globally, the UN estimates that one in three women will experience sexual or gender-based violence, with rates sometimes twice as high in fragile settings.<sup>13</sup> Reconstruction needs to prioritize efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women.

Ensuring women's access to justice and law-enforcement institutions is critical, and transitional justice mechanisms such as truth commissions and reparations programs must be informed by gender expertise. Additionally, post-conflict transitions offer openings to repeal discriminatory laws and introduce gender-responsive legal reforms to better protect women's rights and promote gender equality. For instance, evidence shows that, on average, the presence of a law against domestic violence corresponds to a 3.7 percent lower rate of it.<sup>14</sup>

Laws and policies must also be complemented by services in post-conflict communities—including help lines, medical care, and psychological support, among others—to reach survivors and create safe spaces for women and girls.<sup>15</sup> Peru, for example, has rolled out all-women justice centers across the country to reduce gender-based violence.<sup>16</sup>

**The UN and other field actors should commit to safeguarding protection budgets to ensure they are not cut first or disproportionately. UN member states can furthermore**

**ensure that peacekeeping missions receive full protection budgets.** Security Council members can also commit to reporting requirements on sexual and gender-based violence in mission and situation reports, as well as inclusion of such violence in terms of reference for relevant sanctions experts.

### ***Invest in grassroots justice actors in post-conflict settings***

In post-conflict settings, grassroots justice actors—such as unions of informal sector workers, civil society justice defenders, paralegals, and other community leaders—can create trust and establish channels of communication with survivors who have been denied access to justice, especially in cases of serious human-rights violations.

**The UN, its development partners, and post-conflict states can offer vital support** to amplify and legitimize the collective action of women grassroots justice actors and ensure women have opportunities to influence post-conflict justice processes **by providing funding and physical meeting spaces.**

### ***Appoint gender advisors and ensure gender parity in truth commissions***

Women have historically been excluded from international criminal tribunals, truth commissions, and other transitional justice institutions. Promoting women's leadership in transitional justice processes allows women judges, lawyers, and community leaders to actively adjudicate cases and participate in the administration of justice. Inclusive justice mechanisms increase the likelihood that women will come forward (especially in cases of sexual violence) and further gender-sensitive justice.<sup>17</sup>

**Appointing and funding positions for gender advisors and mandating a 50 percent quota for women in truth commissions, reparations programs, and other post-conflict transitional justice mechanisms** is crucial for enhancing women's access to justice after conflict and integrating a gender perspective into laws.

## **Security sector reform**

### ***Increase women's participation in the security sector***

Women's participation in the security sector contributes to greater operational effectiveness, accountability, and local ownership.<sup>18</sup> In post-conflict contexts, women in the security sector bring attention to issues of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence.<sup>19</sup> Evidence from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone shows that women who were victims of such abuse were more likely to report incidents to a female officer than to a male officer.<sup>20</sup> As of May 2020, women comprised approximately five percent of the UN military and 15 percent of police personnel, compared to three percent and ten percent respectively in 2015.<sup>21</sup>

Measures to address gender bias and bolster women’s meaningful participation in security sector reform are crucial. Women are often excluded as a result of the male-dominated culture of security sector institutions and because of difficulties in recruiting and retaining women security providers (police, military, corrections, and immigration services, among others). Transcending gender inequalities requires strong leadership and long-term commitments at the political level.

**Gender-sensitive assessments to identify political, cultural, and institutional factors inhibiting women’s inclusion within security institutions should be performed as part of national security policies and peace agreements. Good practices include adopting gender quota targets of at least 30 percent** – with the goal of reaching gender parity, appointing and mentoring women in high-level defense and security positions, mounting campaigns to recruit women to security institutions, developing policies and mechanisms to address gender-based discrimination in the workplace, and building capacity for integrating gender-sensitive approaches into reform efforts.

### ***Enhance the effectiveness, coherence, and predictability of UN support***

Clear and consistent directions from the UN to peace operations about the need to ensure women’s meaningful participation in security sector reform is vital for the UN and partners to effectively advance Women, Peace and Security (WPS). A review of the UN WPS Agenda demonstrates that language used in the resolutions largely associates security sector reform with the protection pillar of the agenda. **Future resolutions should explicitly recognize women’s active role in the political and service-delivery aspects of security and reiterate the language of Security Council Resolution 2538 (2020) specifically addressing the role of women as world peacekeepers.**<sup>22</sup>

Dedicated funding, monitoring, and reporting is needed to address the enormous gap between the expectations established by WPS resolutions and the paucity of resources—political, technical, and financial—made available to implement gender-responsive security sector reform. **Funding for these measures should be included as part of UN, member state, and donor efforts to achieve the Secretary-General’s 15 percent target for peace and security funds that explicitly promote gender equality.**

Developing baselines and indicators to monitor and report the progress and challenges of peace operations would support the implementation of the WPS resolutions throughout the security sector reform process. In addition, data on women’s representation in the security sector is currently insufficient to analyze their status in the security sector on a global scale. In this regard, member states and the UN should improve the collection and availability of information on the number and status of women in national security institutions as part of their efforts to track progress and promote accountability toward the implementation of Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the WPS Agenda.

### ***Build trust between security providers and local communities and engage male allies***

Local distrust of security institutions, arising from the atrocities perpetrated during conflict and weak application of the rule of law, is a major challenge during post-conflict transitions. Fostering local ownership and building trust between security providers and local populations—including women’s civil society organizations—are critical steps toward gender-sensitive security sector reform.

Priority actions include using community policing, dialogue, and accountability measures to build trust between security providers and local communities. Evidence from Liberia<sup>23</sup> and Sierra Leone<sup>24</sup> demonstrates how women-led civil society organizations can work with security providers to engage in dialogue with youth and policymakers and to inform the community about local security issues. **The UN and member states can strengthen security sector reform through commitments to develop gender-sensitized community-policing plans as an outcome of all police-related advisory work.**

Male allies are important for fostering gender equality and rejecting toxic masculinity. Male officers and senior military staff should receive mandatory training on gender issues and codes of conduct,<sup>25</sup> as well as on the development and implementation of action plans to promote gender equality—strategies that have been effective in Afghanistan, Liberia, and Montenegro.<sup>26</sup> Programs like these can advance gender equality through capacity development and greater awareness of gender issues in the security sector.<sup>27</sup> **UN special representatives, peacekeeping-mission leadership, and UN resident and humanitarian coordinators in conflict and post-conflict zones should also all undergo mandatory gender training prior to deployment and have their promotions and job evaluations linked to gender equality performance in their jurisdictions.**

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<sup>1</sup> True and Riveros Morales 2018; Jana, Werner, and Piia 2018.

<sup>2</sup> O’Reilly 2015.

<sup>3</sup> UNSC 2019.

<sup>4</sup> UNSC 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Tamaru and O’Reilly 2018.

<sup>6</sup> UN Women 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Bouta, Frerks, and Bannon 2005.

<sup>8</sup> FAO 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Justino 2011.

<sup>10</sup> GIWPS and the Rockefeller Foundation 2020.

<sup>11</sup> FAO 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Kuehnast, De Berry, and Ahmed 2006.

<sup>13</sup> UN Women 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Klugman 2019.

<sup>15</sup> UN OSRSG-SVC 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Kavanaugh, Sviatschi, and Trako 2019.

<sup>17</sup> WCLRF 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Bastick 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Bastick 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Bastick 2008.

<sup>21</sup> UNSC 2020.

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<sup>22</sup> UNSC 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Karim 2019.

<sup>24</sup> AWEPA 2006.

<sup>25</sup> Ansorg and Hastrup 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Ansorg and Hastrup 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Watson 2019.