

Women, peace and security

Defending progress and responding to emerging challenges

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Edited by Lisa Sharland and Genevieve Feely

Introduction

Genevieve Feely

This is the third year ASPI's International Program has run its annual series on women, peace and security on *The Strategist* to coincide with International Women's Day. Each year, the focus of the contributions has shifted—for example, this year there was a strong emphasis on Australia's engagement in the Pacific and emerging global challenges such as cyber security, health security and resource management. Considering Australia's endeavours to 'step up' in the Pacific and an increasingly uncertain and contested strategic environment, articles like these provide insightful guidance for policymakers.

Writing for this year's series, NATO Secretary-General's Special Representative for WPS Clare Hutchinson looked to Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* to find an explanation for why gender equality has never been achieved—'It's jam every *other* day: to-day isn't any *other* day'. It's never jam (or gender equality) today. Other articles have sought to unpack how to make sure we get jam today.



Able seaman boatswains mate Olivia Fels at the forecandle onboard HMAS Brisbane, alongside Fleet Base East: Department of Defence.

Alison Davidian put our region's approach to managing natural resources and the effects these industries have on women in the spotlight. She suggests that mining companies can do better when negotiating access to land and that a more equitable distribution could be achieved by rooting policies and development programming in the WPS agenda.

The role of women in conflict was also examined further in this year's series, with debate over how best to deal with the return of female combatants and supporters. Helen Stenger and Jacqui True unpacked this issue, saying there's a need to recognise women's agency in supporting terrorist groups but also to understand that women's roles can't simply be reduced to the choice between victim and perpetrator. As the Australian approach continues to evolve, they argue it requires a more nuanced understanding and response.

On the operational side, Australian Navy captain Stacey Porter looked at how and why it's important to operationalise WPS in combat zones and offered real, pragmatic examples of gender integration boosting military effectiveness. Vanessa Newby similarly looked at how WPS is operationalised through the deployment of female peacekeepers, highlighting the vital role women can play in making operations more effective, but also noting that UN peacekeeping is the sum of its parts and that changing its culture requires a change in the military culture in contributing countries.

Elsewhere, we turned to more emerging security trends. Betty Barkha looked at the nexus of the youth, women and climate agendas, highlighting the increasingly important role of youth in implementing and fighting for these agendas. Jacqueline Westermann looked at the intersection between gender and climate insecurity in the Pacific, arguing that Australia needs to more meaningfully engage on this issue and support local initiatives.

The consideration of health security and cybersecurity was new this year. Sara E. Davies analysed how lessons from the implementation of the WPS agenda in local communities could be adapted to global health governance for more equitable changes to hierarchical health security structures. ASPI's Lisa Sharland and Hannah Smith delved into the cyber sphere, arguing that not only do Australia's security agencies and the private sector need to increase the number of women working in cybersecurity, but they also need to ensure they are integrating gender perspectives and more diverse thinking into the design and development of technology.

At the end of last year's series, Lisa Sharland [looked at four ways](#) Australia needed to improve its approach to and implementation of the WPS agenda: an increased focus on the domestic dimension of the WPS agenda; sustainable funding and accountability; inclusion of WPS at the core of formulating foreign affairs and defence policy on international security; and greater recognition of the need for a diversity of voices on this issue. Australia will be releasing its second NAP on WPS in the coming months. In this context, these four suggestions continue to offer valuable guidance.

Building on these suggestions, in this year's series, Miki Jacevic offered detailed advice on the creation and implementation of effective national action plans for WPS, emphasising the importance of inclusiveness in developing these plans. Sue Harris Rimmer looked specifically at the opportunities for Australia's second NAP in the context of the Pacific pivot. She considered how to best align our actions in the region with our commitments to the agenda while pursuing our engagement there in the spirit of true partnership and respect.

Next year, the 20th anniversary of the first UN Security Council resolution on WPS will be a key milestone for taking stock of the achievements that have been made and what still needs to be done. Louise Allen traced key moments in the development of the agenda over the past two decades, but noted that the current lack of political will presents a significant obstacle to the WPS agenda. Elise Stephenson analysed the representation of women in international affairs in Australia's public sector, noting that we have never had gender equality in this field, and that as we draw closer to this key anniversary we need to question whether the structures in the current system are truly conducive to achieving parity.

Importantly, the series this year reminded us that we can't afford to be complacent. Negotiations at both the [Commission on the Status of Women](#) in March and at the [Security Council](#) in April reflect some of the challenges facing the agenda, with efforts to roll back previously agreed language and wavering support among some traditional allies. In the face of these normative challenges, there's an ongoing need to share lessons and to analyse and understand how women contribute to peace and security and why diverse gender perspectives need to be factored into Australia's approach to foreign policy, defence operations and national security.

The editors would like to thank all contributors to this year's series and encourage submissions from female contributors to *The Strategist* throughout the year on this topic and on other international security issues.

Female foreign fighters and the need for a gendered approach to countering violent extremism

Helen Stenger and Jacqui True, 7 March 2019



Image courtesy of the US Navy.

Who would have thought that the most significant force promoting transformation in gender roles would be terrorism? Surprisingly, the treatment of returnees from territories formerly held by Islamic State ('foreign terrorist fighters', in UN parlance) is heightening all the gender issues—our unconscious biases and forms of discrimination—that have long been criticised in countries like Australia and at the [United Nations](#).

As the territory controlled by IS has shrunk, many of its members have been captured by Kurdish forces and put into [improvised camps](#). As well as male foreign fighters, inside the camps are many female foreign fighters with young children who want to go back to their home countries. The situation in the camps is dire: there's little or no [medical treatment](#) and no education for the children. The environment is toxic given the high number of IS affiliates that are still highly radicalised. Women, men and children are left in these circumstances with little prospect of rehabilitation, which renders them vulnerable to recruitment or deeper radicalisation.

The repatriation of nationals to their home countries depends more on political will than on actual laws, and the strength of that will varies greatly across countries. Western countries are generally more reluctant to allow the return of foreign fighters. For instance, the [United States](#) has said that US-born IS members won't be permitted to re-enter the US, and [Australia](#) and the [UK](#) are seeking to revoke the citizenship of dual nationals affiliated with IS. [France](#) and [Germany](#) have indicated that they might take back children but not their mothers, which is also [Russia's strategy](#).

Even if they're repatriated, the treatment of the women remains a complex issue. Gender stereotypes continue to render female terrorists not 'actual' terrorists. Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, for example, have been [found to be more lenient](#) with female returnees, demonstrating the gender bias of viewing women as inherent victims rather than perpetrators. Similarly, in Canada, a woman who attempted to travel to Syria to join IS was stopped, but she was not investigated. She [carried out an attack](#) a year later.

That mindset started to change in late 2017 in some countries.

Now, across Europe, women are treated as possible perpetrators and are subject to [risk assessment and prosecution](#). There's virtually no [sensitivity to the potential coercion and violence that many female IS members](#) experienced or to the difficulty of escaping from the caliphate once recruited. Although it's vital to acknowledge that women may orchestrate and perpetrate violence, it's equally important to understand that women's roles are not confined to the binary choice between victim and perpetrator.

Women and girls can be simultaneously victims of sexual or gender-based violence, recruiters, fundraisers and perpetrators—and IS understands that. It has become adept at manipulating gender relations—both women's empowerment and their enslavement—to its strategic [advantage](#).

The female foreign fighters who are trapped in the camps in northern Syria have also been using gender stereotypes to try to advance their agendas. When interacting with journalists, they provide a simplistic narrative of being an 'IS bride' or 'just a housewife', underlining their innocence. These narratives fit well with the assumed political agency—or the lack of it—of women involved in violent extremism, particularly Muslim women.

Yes, IS and its affiliates have systematically targeted teenage girls for recruitment, which has been compared to '[child sexual exploitation and grooming](#)'. And as we learned in our research on Libya, women left 'on the shelf' have also been targeted for recruitment. But we need to appreciate the complexity of the context and not accept narratives of victimhood. Women have played an integral part in IS's state-building campaign. They have unique roles in inculcating ideology and some have facilitated atrocities against local communities, including the sexual slavery of [Yazidi women](#).

The entire context needs to be assessed in determining the appropriate treatment of returnees—including one factor that is frequently overlooked. When framing women as perpetrators, we may ignore the sexual and gender-based violence [they were subject to](#). Those experiences need to be processed; however, considering the devotion to the cause, and the shame and stigma that attaches to victims of rape and sexual abuse, it's questionable whether they will ever come forward or be believed.

Yet the trauma that many of these women experienced urgently needs to be addressed in state rehabilitation and reintegration interventions, not only for the sake of the women, but also because trauma may render them vulnerable to re-radicalisation and thus represents a security threat. As hard as it is to recognise, being a perpetrator or assisting with the perpetration of egregious crimes doesn't preclude a female IS member from having endured violence or from being a victim.

[Experts](#) agree that we can't arrest our way out of the problem of jihadist radicalisation; the grievances may become inflamed and transferred to the next generation. Effective, gender-responsive rehabilitation measures need to be in place—for children, for men and for women. This involves repatriating the returnees—which [could require](#) amendments to legislation—and incorporating a gendered perspective into all aspects of rehabilitation.

We cannot push the problem over the border. Terrorism is a transnational threat and one that can't be understood without considering its pervasive gender dimension, especially how terror organisations [exploit social constructions](#) of masculinity and femininity.

Women and men should be treated as equally likely to commit violence, but treating them equally may not mean treating them the same in all instances, given the gender differences in roles, recruitment strategies, treatment and experiences in terrorist groups like IS. Rather, our responses need to acknowledge the context and incorporate the impact of possible trauma and the complex roles women play in a terrorist group, as well as recognise their agency.

For print readers, the original post with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/female-foreign-fighters-and-the-need-for-a-gendered-approach-to-counter-violent-extremism>.

Women, peace and the theory of jam

Clare Hutchinson, 8 March 2019



Image courtesy of NATO.

I often reflect on how privileged I am to carry forth this work and the responsibility of promoting and advancing the WPS agenda, to make it visible.

We all stand on the shoulders of great women—Mary Lee, Mary Colton, Catherine Helen Spence, Vida Goldstein—women who have set in motion the wheels of change.

So in this context I would like to talk to you about women, peace and security—about women’s equality, and the jam!

Lewis Carroll wrote in his magnificent tome, *Through the Looking-Glass ...* the White Queen said to Alice: ‘The rule is, jam to-morrow and jam yesterday—but never jam to-day.’

‘It must come sometimes to “jam to-day”,’ Alice objected.

‘No, it can’t,’ said the Queen. ‘It’s jam every *other* day: to-day isn’t any *other* day, you know.’

And that is the story of gender equality. It’s never jam today.

UN Security Council resolution 1325, adopted in 2000, highlights the disproportionate impact conflict has on women and men and advocates for stronger inclusion of women in all areas of security.

Seven resolutions since then make up the normative framework that has become the WPS agenda. They advance the importance of women’s political participation and the need for enhanced prevention tools and strengthened protection mechanisms for women and girls, especially from sexual violence.

WPS is about making the invisible visible. It’s about opening spaces and dislodging obstacles to women’s participation in the decisions around conflict and peace. WPS has changed the narrative of conflict, to reflect a broader thinking, a more nuanced approach to peace and security.

We know that sustainable peace cannot be achieved without women's security and equality. We know that the treatment of women in any society is a barometer where we can predict other forms of oppression.

We know that countries where women are empowered are vastly more secure. We measure the rise in violence through the decrease in women's rights and shrinking spaces for women's voices.

We know all this and yet we still struggle to implement the very basics of the resolution. We still struggle to translate the essential nature of WPS.

For NATO, the adoption of UNSCR 1325 represented a significant political shift in the understanding that there needs to be a better-balanced approach between horizontal and vertical approaches to security.

In 2007 we developed the first NATO policy and action plan on WPS. Last year we revised and updated this policy and action plan to take into account new developments and changes in the international landscape.

Our new policy reaffirms our commitment to the overarching WPS principles reframed through the lens of integration, inclusiveness and integrity.

Integration brings to life gender equality through the immersion of gender perspectives into all our policy and doctrine—making abstract constructions a reality.

Inclusiveness brings to the forefront the participation of women and the increased number of women as staff and in national forces—in particular, in leadership roles.

We know we have an obligation to turn our words into actions. And leadership is essential if we're to overcome these challenges. Therefore this is also about making the WPS agenda inclusive so men take responsibility too.

Integrity aims to address head on systematic abuse based on inequality, including through the adoption of standards and codes of conduct, especially on sexual exploitation and abuse and in operational settings.

So, we have robust policies and strong commitment, but commitment is only as good as the actions taken. There are many more actions we must take. It's time to take advantage of the global attention and to further edge into the closed spaces that have often denied women access and opportunity.

Next year will be the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325. This is a good time to take stock, to reflect and assess. It's time for us, as a global community, to be bold in our assessment and courageous in our vision for the next chapter of this journey.

While there's greater global awareness on women's empowerment and gender equality, there's still a resistance to acceptance that the principles of WPS are central to the security discourse. In high-level policy discussions about significant security challenges and stabilisation efforts, gender considerations often take a back seat to 'more pressing' concerns.

Too often gender equality and women's rights fall victim to political expediency, so we should stand firm on the issues that can move us globally from fragility to stability.

There's also persistent failure to recognise the ongoing victimisation of women in conflicts and the marginalisation of women in peacebuilding. Women continue to be excluded from playing a role in defining security and maintaining, restoring and defending stability.

Today's global threats are complex and multi-faceted. Terrorism, transnational crime, drug trafficking, cyber threats, hybrid warfare, climate change and mass migration have complicated the security environment in unprecedented ways.

But we still do not see the connective tissue that binds WPS to these emerging challenges. The proliferation of divisive mandates has created an architecture of competing priorities that have plagued the WPS agenda and reduced its potency.

WPS has been in lock-down for too long. The steadfast grip of the traditional realm of WPS—women as only peacemakers—has meant rejection of new and emerging areas that are so relevant and important for this agenda.

Everything has a gender perspective, everything is linked to WPS. Countering violent extremism and countering terrorism, cyber security, defence and deterrence, energy security and climate change are all WPS issues. We must recreate the conditions for WPS to be integral to all security and we must refrain from creating silos of competing interests, especially within the WPS community.

The old guard must make way for the new.

We have to revitalise the agenda—which often means letting go of the familiar.

The concentration on gender parity alone has become an impediment to the agenda. We need to recognise that it is not only pushing the boundaries on parity; we need to make sure that we anchor the vision of sustainable peace to the inclusion of women in all our activities.

To genuinely advance gender equality, there's an urgent need to increase the numbers of women and reverse the longstanding imbalance on gender. But we must recognise that numbers alone can only go so far and we must be vigilant in also promoting the integration of gender perspectives into all our functions and enabling the participation of women and their protection.

Gender parity is so much easier to measure and therefore so much easier to understand. Results on gender parity can be seen directly. Gender parity is actionable and achievable. Gender mainstreaming is the difficult cousin. It is for this reason, within the framework of WPS, that gender parity initiatives gain more support.

But do not assume that gender parity will serve as a surrogate for gender equality and therefore respond in total to WPS requirements. It's only in balancing the issues of parity and participation that equality can be efficiently and effectively actioned.

Additionally, the fragmentation of the agenda towards protection versus participation is damaging.

The treatment of sexual violence as an issue that requires only protective and preventative solutions is limited and insufficient. Sexual violence, whether or not commissioned as a tactic of war, stems from fundamental gender inequalities.

Sexual violence is a WPS issue.

Achieving gender equality requires a change of mindset. It's a process of change and transformation, for which we need sharper, more focused tools like mandatory training, partnerships and coalitions and creating accountability to measure effect.

Changing mindsets means we have to dismantle the structure of power that has long marginalised women. We must address the danger that is pervasive patriarchy.

There's a danger that we are just changing the players and not the game.

However, with all that said, I believe the time is right for change. WPS has demonstrated its potential; now it's time to put this truly into action.

Change requires bold steps, and courageous decisions, without which nothing will happen.

So as we look towards the future, let's be bold. Let's be courageous and let's make today the day we have jam!

This piece is an edited version of the keynote speech given to ASPI's WPS Masterclass on 13 February 2019.

For print readers, the original post with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/women-peace-and-the-theory-of-jam>.

The Pacific pivot and Australia's second national action plan on women, peace and security

Susan Harris Rimmer, 15 March 2019



Edited image courtesy of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Australia has played a [key role](#) in promoting the United Nations women, peace and security agenda, including during its two-year term on the UN Security Council (2013 and 2014). We have the potential to play a leading part again ahead of the 20-year anniversary of [Security Council resolution 1325](#) in 2020.

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet is running consultations now on [Australia's second national action plan](#) (NAP) on WPS, to be released by mid-2019. The departments of Defence and Foreign Affairs and Trade have key responsibilities under the [current plan](#).

The first NAP was linked to our campaign for Security Council membership with the slogan 'Australia: We do what we say'. We now need to extend this legacy and speak to the priorities for the region set out in the [2017 foreign policy white paper](#). The new slogan should be 'We listen to local women's voices'. We should focus on Pacific nations and align our actions with our commitments as a member of the UN Human Rights Council.

We have also commenced the 'Pacific pivot', which Prime Minister Scott Morrison [announced](#) in November 2018. While the 2017 white paper laid out a long overdue step-up in engagement with the Pacific, it was China's increasing influence in the region that lent a [sense of urgency](#) and scale to the [Pacific pivot](#) announcement.

The announcement includes \$2 billion of new funding for infrastructure, and \$1 billion for enticing Australian businesses to invest in the region, adding five new diplomatic missions, enhancing labour mobility opportunities and creating an 'office of the Pacific' with whole-of-government oversight.

These goals must be pursued in a spirit of true partnership. Pacific researcher Tess Newton Cain [points out](#) that Australia's announcements often fail to strike the right tone of respect and partnership.

The second NAP provides an opportunity to model a respectful partnership. One event with clear implications for WPS is the Bougainville referendum. The date of the poll is [still uncertain](#) (but likely to be 17 October 2019). The women of Bougainville have [much at stake](#) in this referendum and deserve a clear voice and material support for their participation and personal security. Their views on [justice](#) for past violations also need to be heard.

Australia should announce that the second NAP will include deep in-country consultations with women's organisations and peace workers in the Indo-Pacific region about the NAP and about their views of threats to peace and security. Further options for Bougainville include sending a high-profile all-women observer delegation or funding a [women's situation room](#).

Precedents for such an exercise can be found in other countries. The UK approach is to adapt WPS principles to the context in nine focus countries: Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Libya, Myanmar, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Syria.

In the first UK NAP, UK non-government organisations led in-country consultations in the focus countries and reported back to the Foreign Office. In the second NAP, the Foreign Office was given the lead on in-country consultations. It reports annually to parliament on the activities undertaken and results achieved in each of the focus countries. The current NAP commits the UK to a partnership approach:

We will strengthen existing links with local organisations, including women's rights organisations, building their capacity and ensuring that our work is based on local leadership and needs. Where partners face specific risks on the ground, including gender-based vulnerabilities, we will apply existing risk management processes to mitigate these.

Australia should set focus countries (such as Myanmar, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Philippines, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Bougainville, East Timor and Indonesia) and release context papers for each (along the lines of the [ASEAN WPS dialogue paper](#), for example).

Australia should conduct in-country consultations where participation from regions to capital is funded. The government should also:

- appoint a special envoy on WPS, such as former minister Julie Bishop, or use the role of ambassador for women and girls to ensure WPS is a key priority and focus and reflects the consultations in high-level diplomacy
- expand on Australia's ASEAN WPS initiative and host a regional women's conference to ensure Pacific women's voices feed into the global advocacy efforts leading up to 2020 and the 20th anniversary of resolution 1325
- incorporate the rights of Indo-Pacific women and their organisations as central pillars of Australia's diplomatic efforts
- fund Australian NGOs to work with local partners
- provide an annual report to parliament on activities and results in focus countries.

Australia's diplomatic posts should explore risk-management strategies for local peace organisations and implement strategies for [human rights defenders](#) as set out in Human Rights Council guidance.

The benefits of such an approach would be better outcomes for women in conflicts and disasters, as well as in post-conflict transitions. It should also lead to better forecasting of issues, particularly around scheduled events such as elections or referendums. Most importantly, we might listen and learn.

For print readers, the original post with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-pacific-pivot-and-australias-second-national-action-plan-on-women-peace-and-security>.

Managing our resources: women, mining and conflict in the Asia–Pacific

Alison Davidian, 20 March 2019



Image courtesy of [Sekundo](#) on Flickr.

The extraction and exploitation of oil and mineral deposits have become increasingly possible across Asia and the Pacific. Rapid industrialisation and technological developments have led to new large-scale mines, as well as discoveries of ore deposits throughout the region. New technologies also mean that extraction can take place in sensitive, remote and unstable environments—the same environments that are often sites of recent or ongoing conflict.

Trade in minerals and other commodities has played a central role in funding and fuelling some of the world's most deadly [conflicts](#). The Asia–Pacific region is already home to several conflicts driven by the exploitation of [natural resources](#). As demand for key commodities such as nickel and copper grows, the region is likely to face an increasing number of disputes in the coming decades.

While resource-driven conflicts affect entire communities, women are affected in unique ways. [Studies](#) show that women are more adversely affected than men by extractive industries. A gender bias exists in the distribution of costs and benefits in extractive industry projects, in which benefits accrue mostly to men in the form of employment and compensation, and costs fall heavily on women.

Women's traditional roles and responsibilities mean that they're highly dependent on the environment for their survival and welfare and thus particularly affected by the environmental impacts of extractive industries. For example, when miners change water flows or pollute land, women have greater difficulty finding water and food. Women who lose their traditional livelihoods are unable to meet the needs that the land once supplied, or to offset that loss with compensation.

The close links between the mining industry and conflict are well documented. In the past two decades, global investment in mining has increased considerably, corresponding to a spike in [conflict associated with mining](#). When struggles for control over mineral wealth turn violent, women are differentially affected. They may suffer from sexual and gender-based violence, which in mining contexts can come from security guards, police or military protecting mining companies, as well as from local actors in the conflict.

In addition, the destruction of civilian infrastructure reduces access to health, education, food and water, placing a greater burden on caregivers—more often than not women. The legacy of this violence endures long after a peace settlement is signed. In fact, in many post-conflict communities, we see violence and insecurity continue or even increase for women, facilitated by widescale impunity and the absence of effective justice systems.

Women's participation rates are higher in artisanal and small-scale mining, which tends to occur in poorer and remote areas. The proportion of women involved in that subsector [varies across the region](#), from 10% in Indonesia to up to 22% in Papua New Guinea. The informal and often illegal nature of artisanal and small-scale mining often means that women are more susceptible to human rights abuses, sexual and gender-based violence, and health risks. Those vulnerabilities are heightened in conflict settings.

Women's rights to natural resources, land and productive assets are strongly linked to their security and resilience. Yet they have largely been prevented from effectively placing their natural resource needs on the political agenda. This begins with marginalisation from peace negotiations and extends throughout the peacebuilding process. And it continues to occur despite the growing body of [evidence](#) showing that including women in peace and security processes improves the effectiveness of those processes.

Through targeted programming, women can seize opportunities to engage more sustainably in the use of natural resources and begin to influence decision-making over the control of the resources. This requires promoting women's participation in formal and informal decision-making and governance related to the management of mining projects as well as creating a legal and policy environment in which women are able to access land and credit.

Mining companies must work with communities, including women, to negotiate access to land and land use and keep the communities informed of ongoing activities, managing their expectations and concerns. Investing in these kinds of efforts can help to ensure that benefits from natural resources come back to communities and to address grievances linked to natural resource rights, access and control, which are often [catalysts for violence](#).

As our region grapples with the responsible management of natural resources, it's critical that our policies and programming are rooted in advancing the women, peace and security agenda. As we face the growing challenges of the 21st century, from climate change to conflict, we can't afford to exclude the perspectives and skills of women. We need women and men, working together, to build resilient and peaceful societies that benefit all.

For print readers, the original post with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/managing-our-resources-women-mining-and-conflict-in-the-asia-pacific>.

The WPS agenda is almost 20, but it's not time to celebrate yet

Louise Allen, 22 March 2019



Image courtesy of UN Women on Flickr.

Next year, the United Nations women, peace and security agenda turns 20, and with that will come high-level commemorations to mark this important anniversary. However, 2020 can't be viewed only through a celebratory lens, as fundamental challenges continue to plague the agenda.

Women's civil-society organisations working on peacebuilding, conflict prevention and gender equality remain drastically underfunded, even though investment in gender equality is a [proven conflict-prevention strategy](#). Women human rights defenders are [increasingly targeted](#), while the international community remains largely silent. Of most concern, women also continue to be locked out from formal peace processes.

In 2015, ahead of the 15th anniversary, there were three high-level UN peace and security reviews, [a global WPS civil society survey](#), a series of high-level events and numerous consultations around the world with women in civil society. For the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security in New York, which I headed at the time, the year involved sustained advocacy alongside colleagues from around the world. A record number of member states and regional organisations spoke at that year's open debate on WPS at the UN Security Council.

While 2015 was a year of heightened activity and attention and brought some key gains and commitments, some of the progress was short lived and, in some quarters, the momentum that had been built dissipated soon after the anniversary year ended. It was a stark reminder for us to remain vigilant.

In 2016, we started seeing an improvement in how the Security Council considered gender in crisis situations. In 2015, less than 40% of crisis decisions by the Security Council made any reference to WPS. That was a clear sign that, despite it being an anniversary year for the agenda, the Security Council and UN leadership didn't see WPS as relevant in times of crisis or in peace operations and processes. By the end of 2017, [98% of such decisions included WPS references](#).

The recognition that all crises and conflicts have gendered elements is a positive development that can be attributed to the collective push in 2015 for context-specific implementation of the WPS agenda.

Then came 2017 and the US-led cuts to peacekeeping budgets. The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security was among the organisations to [raise the alarm](#) that [gender posts were being disproportionately cut and downgraded](#). That came less than 18 months after the Security Council adopted [resolution 2242](#), its eighth WPS resolution, which among other things called for the systematic deployment of senior gender advisers to provide strategic gender advice throughout all phases of missions and processes.

In 2017, [language in the mission mandate for Afghanistan](#) relating to women's rights and participation and girls' education was removed under the guise of streamlining the mandate. Fortunately, those provisions were reinserted in the 2018 version of the mandate following significant advocacy from WPS civil-society organisations and key council members. The removal of gender roles and WPS references in mandates showed how fragile gains are and how easily gender provisions will be cut for cost saving or political expediency.

A study commissioned by UN Women found that [women's participation increases the likelihood of a peace agreement lasting 15 years by 35%](#). That finding is systematically referenced by WPS-friendly governments as evidence of the agenda's importance. Despite all the positive statements, women continue to be absent from peace negotiations. Peace agreements also remain devoid of gender provisions.

We only have to look at the past four months to get a grim picture of how exclusive talks continue to be. [Libyan women were largely missing](#) from high-level peace talks held in Italy in late November 2018. [Yemeni women were sidelined from the January 2019 talks](#) in Stockholm, and Afghan women were excluded from the closed US–Taliban talks in Doha. Over the past few years, [Afghan women have repeatedly warned](#) of the dire consequences that closed-door talks with the Taliban could have for women's rights.

Last year, the [UN secretary-general reported](#) that 2017 was the first time in two years that most of the signed peace agreements that the UN had helped to broker lacked any gender references. Expressing his concern at this downward trend, he called for a redoubling of efforts to promote gender-inclusive processes and agreements. The question remains: how has this backsliding been permitted, given that so many national governments now align themselves with the WPS agenda, have implemented national action plans and support the proliferation of regional women mediators' networks? It seems that WPS continues to be sidelined in favour of other political priorities.

The WPS agenda was established as a result of a groundswell of advocacy from women activists around the world demanding equal access to peace and security decision-making. Nineteen years later, the fight to ensure women's participation has yet to be won, but women peacebuilders haven't given up. In 2020, the resilience and determination of conflict-affected women should be celebrated.

Essential elements of the WPS agenda are being roadblocked due to a lack of political action. It's time for states that call themselves friends of the agenda to draw a line in the sand and cease supporting talks that exclude women.

For print readers, the original post with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-wps-agenda-is-almost-20-but-its-not-time-to-celebrate-yet>.

What makes for an effective WPS national action plan?

Miki Jacevic, 25 March 2019



Image courtesy of the [Institute for Inclusive Security](#).

For the past 20 years, I've worked on turning the promise of [UN Security Council resolution 1325](#) on women, peace and security into reality. In my experience, developing WPS national action plans (NAPs) is one way in which we can translate policy commitments that matter into actions that make a difference. Since the first NAP in 2006, 80 countries have adopted NAPs with specific national and local objectives. Over the past decade, I've helped close to 40 nations create, implement and evaluate their NAPs. While it's hard to establish a causal link, 90% of countries with a NAP have decreased their gender gaps and 60% have grown more peaceful according to data from the World Economic Forum.

While this data is important, I can testify to the benefits of the *process* of developing a plan in different contexts. First, creating a NAP forces an unusual set of government actors to work together—it isn't often that interior and defence ministry officials gather in the same room with social development or women's affairs officials.

Second, in most countries, civil society drives the agenda and plays a critical role in its implementation; for example, an NGO leader from Erbil currently coordinates the cross-sectoral taskforce that oversees the Iraqi NAP.

Third, by pushing implementation to the local level, NAPs facilitate the recruitment of more women into local police forces and other government institutions. Currently, more than 100 local action plans are bringing municipal and district governments together with local security and justice providers to mainstream gender into their operations.

Finally, NAPs are vehicles to engage government actors at various levels with ordinary people to build trust and communication about stability and security issues. As my friend Precious Dennis said in Liberia, 'We want to use this NAP to teach people that we can now turn to the police to provide us with protection, not to run away from their past abuses.'

Still, some challenges remain as we move towards improvements. Inaugural plans focus heavily, sometimes exclusively, on intragovernmental processes that promise little meaningful change outside bureaucracy; many include vague pledges, without clarity about intended results.

For some governments, creating a NAP becomes a check-the-box exercise without any real commitment to implementation. And even when there's a commitment, the action is often impaired by operational challenges—lack of staff capacity, lack of effective mechanisms to engage civil society and, most often, lack of resources to implement proposed activities. Many NAPs don't build in the capacity to monitor implementation or explain change in the lives of ordinary people, and so don't achieve a high impact.

Through my practical experience, in the UN [global study to implement resolution 1325](#), we identified four elements that create a high-impact NAP: an inclusive design process and an established coordination system for implementation, strong and sustained political will, identified and allocated implementation resources, and a results-based monitoring and evaluation plan.

An inclusive design process ensures that the various government ministries and agencies responsible for the NAP are represented in both its creation and its implementation. This includes every ministry involved, as well as civil society. In my own native Bosnia and Herzegovina, one member nominated from each ministry involved was given explicit roles and responsibilities.

The political will of the institutions involved determines whether the NAP will be more than a check-the-box exercise. The commitment of high-level government officials is important, but it's often mid-level civil servants who determine the success of a NAP's implementation. In countries affected by conflict, buy-in and ownership shouldn't be limited to the federal level; provincial and local governments must also be committed. From Sierra Leone to Kenya, from Farah Province in Afghanistan to Mindanao in the Philippines, I've seen scores of such committed men and women work hard to apply a NAP for change.

Results-based monitoring and evaluation takes implementation-focused monitoring and evaluation a step further. It includes a framework or matrix linking one step to the next, assigning responsibilities to lead and supporting agencies for implementing actions, and reporting on measurable qualitative and quantitative indicators.

Developing indicators in the design phase can make implementation much easier. In several countries I've worked in, government officials and civil-society representatives often report that using SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) indicators allows them to translate intended results into concrete actions with specified results.

Over the past few years, I've intensified advocacy to move away from the default format for most NAPs, which reflects the 'four Ps' of resolution 1325 (participation, protection, prevention, and post-conflict relief and recovery). One core lesson is that, to translate the resolution's (and its seven enforcing ones') transformative potential, we can't plan simply according to the pillars, as many activities overlap and intersect. It's much more effective to focus on strategic areas of substantive change—for example, to reform the security sector, to prevent violent extremism or to increase gender perspectives in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Several recent NAPs, notably those of the UK, Canada, Finland and Bosnia, use this format.

Several other important lessons:

- Develop an outcome-based logic framework that explains how the aggregate outputs contribute to the desired changes.
- Use indicators already established for other reports; for example, Sustainable Development Goal 16.7 speaks directly to the development and implementation of NAPs.
- Don't create a 'fog of indicators'. Don't create too many, and be careful about what you decide to count.
- Include qualitative indicators that can track transformative change.
- Ensure steps to analyse data, reflect, learn and apply; if done wisely and with appropriate support, monitoring and evaluation is much more than just an accountability tool.
- Report and disseminate; often, even when we have good NAP results to report, there are no means to disseminate stories of impact and difference.

For print readers, the original post with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/what-makes-for-an-effective-wps-national-action-plan>.

Connecting the dots: climate change, WPS and youth

Betty Barkha, 28 March 2019



Image courtesy of School Strike 4 Climate on Facebook.

Impacts of climate change have been recognised (through empirical and scientific evidence) as a [threat multiplier](#) in international peace and security. Unanimous adoption of UN Security Council [resolutions linked to peace and security](#) are a clear indication that they remain a global priority. However, there's still some [controversy](#) among member states about recognising climate change as a major security threat.

Evidence connecting [climate change and conflict](#) remains limited but has evolved greatly over the past few decades. That evidence, combined with collective action, has been motivating people across the globe to come together to demand accountability. The most recent example was the [School Strike 4 Climate](#), in which [thousands turned up](#) to support more than [55 separate](#) events in Australia alone. It also demonstrated the importance of engaging young people in discussions about security issues.

Worldwide, [four times more people](#) are displaced by extreme weather events than are displaced by conflict. In 2018, [282 natural disasters](#) were recorded globally. In 2016, [24.2 million](#) new displacements were caused by natural disasters. China, India and the Philippines had the highest absolute numbers, but small island states were shown to have suffered disproportionately once population size was taken into account.

An [Oxfam report](#) indicates that people in low- and lower-middle-income countries are five times more likely to be forced from their homes by sudden-onset weather disasters, such as floods and storms, than are people in developed countries.

This also means that extreme events such as droughts, floods and sea-level rise will make some places uninhabitable way before a crisis is declared. For example, people in Bangladesh, India and the Philippines are displaced in their millions every time a typhoon or flood strikes. In Bangladesh alone, around [15 million people](#) are expected to be displaced as a result of climate change and natural disasters by 2050. Small Pacific island states are responsible for [approximately 1%](#) of global carbon emissions, yet bear the burden of its impacts. [Atoll nations](#) such as Tuvalu, the Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia are at risk of losing their territories. Where will all these people go? And how will that affect regional and global peace and security?

International [peace and security](#) agendas have mainly been centred on armed conflict. The constantly changing geopolitical environment has paved the way for various challenges that require the attention of the Security Council. The adoption of resolution 1325 on women, peace and security is still considered a landmark win, not only for the women's movement but also for peacebuilders. Next year will mark its [20th anniversary](#), but considerable challenges remain in the implementation and localisation of the core pillars of resolution 1325 (prevention, protection, participation, and peacebuilding and recovery). The [lack of integration](#) between the political–military and socioeconomic pillars in international peace and security agendas has been detrimental to women. The WPS agenda is a [work in progress with significant potential](#) to take proactive and pragmatic action for long-term sustainable solutions to global peace and security challenges.

Similarly to the WPS agenda, the [youth, peace and security](#) (YPS) agenda legitimised and recognised the contributions of young people in peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and international peace and security. Security Council resolution 2250 identified five priority pillars: participation, protection, prevention, partnership and disengagement.

While most international frameworks have been developed with good intentions, there has been (and remains) a [gap in the YPS agenda's application](#). There has always been a disconnect between technical texts, national action plans and implementation at the community level. It becomes crucial to establish, finance and consistently support mechanisms that prioritise the pillars of peace and security. Meaningful engagement that's accessible, consistent, intergenerational, gender inclusive and gender sensitive must be the key in implementing agendas and action plans.

Today, young people are demanding that their voices be heard, as the consequences of climate change threaten to affect their lives the most. They recognise that drastic and significant action must be taken now if the world is to avoid catastrophic climate change. In the past few years, we've seen a tremendous increase in young people engaging constructively in sociopolitical campaigns and amazing the world with their creative and innovative solutions. Examples include [young human rights defenders](#), [young women in activism](#) and the [Pacific Climate Warriors](#). The School Strike 4 Climate, a movement ignited by 16-year-old [Greta Thunberg](#) of Sweden, which gained great global momentum and brought [ten of thousands onto the streets in more than 120 countries](#) on 15 March, shows that young people will no longer be bystanders and are demanding action and accountability.

There are definite [complementarities](#) between the WPS and YPS agendas, particularly in the participation and involvement of young women. As the focus falls on accelerating action on peace and security agendas, attention must be paid to the intersecting areas that can be covered by such a framework.

Australia's commitment to international cooperation and to advancing a holistic peace and security agenda could be a trendsetter, and potentially one that inspires other nations to follow. As emphasised [earlier in this series by Susan Harris Rimmer](#), 'These goals must be pursued in a spirit of true partnership.' This also means being cognisant of climate commitments and working towards [just, equitable and low-carbon](#) energy transitions. If we're to progress strongly with the peace and security agenda, we need to be able to break away from silos and work together. Now, more than ever, we have to believe that we're better together.

For print readers, the original post with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/connecting-the-dots-climate-change-wps-and-youth>.

Shaping operational outcomes: views from an ADF gender adviser

Stacey Porter, 1 April 2019



Image courtesy of the [Department of Defence](#).

It might surprise you, but we in the military aren't usually very good at singing our own praises. However, in my opinion, the Australian Defence Force is a world leader in recognising that people's different roles are affected by societal aspects such as access to justice, the economy, health care, education and security, and that those roles and aspects must be considered across the full spectrum of our military operations, actions and activities (OAs). While the ADF has a very strong commitment to operationalising gender, we struggle with *how* to implement a gendered perspective and *why* it's necessary.

The ADF's commitment to the integration of gender is aptly illustrated by its 10 full-time gender adviser positions, three of which are located at Headquarters Joint Operations Command (HQJOC) and dedicated to the integration of gender into OAs.

In addition, through the ADF operational gender adviser course, some 135 ADF and three civilian Defence personnel are qualified gender advisers. The course is strongly focused on the operational, rather than strategic or tactical, integration of gender perspectives. Students learn how to conduct a gender analysis, amend operational documentation to incorporate a gender-specific focus and advocate for gender in general. This year, we've opened up the course to international students, making it an invaluable vehicle for the growth of regional and global defence diplomacy and capacity-building.

The course teaches participants that gender analysis is the linchpin of the gender adviser's modus operandi, but I think we still haven't cracked what gender analysis can provide for us operationally. How do we make gender analysis more operationally relevant, particularly to mission commanders and planners and in intelligence analysis?

Gender analysis is still maturing at HQJOC, where I'm responsible for mainstreaming the gender perspective right across the headquarters as the senior gender adviser. In my view, and drawing on my experience as a deployed gender adviser in Afghanistan in 2016 and 2017, we need to assess each mission from a civilian-centric, theatre-of-operations perspective that includes examining the relationships between armed conflict, the roles of women and men, and factors that we've traditionally overlooked, such as climate change.

While there's limited consensus on the correlation between climate change and armed conflict, studies suggest a causal link between food insecurity and armed conflict, so it's no shock that in our region there seem to be more frequent natural disasters that require complex humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations. Such challenges often involve deeply gendered roles and differing impacts on men and women, requiring different responses.

We saw this firsthand in Operation Vanuatu Assist 2017, in which we needed to maintain safety in displaced persons camps. Including local men in lift/carry and distribution tasks gave them a sense of usefulness and empowered them to play a role in ongoing distribution efforts. Women were engaged to identify distribution problems, and that highlighted a need for separate laundry facilities. This shaped camp planning arrangements, with the result that both men and women contributed to safety and were equally involved in decision-making.

As gender advisers, we're required to look more closely at the root causes of instability in an area of theatre (be it conflict, post-conflict, peacekeeping, or relief and recovery operations) and the ways that resources can be more effectively used to promote the long-term stability of that area, with an emphasis on women. In essence, gender analysis should help us focus on specific actions rather than broad cultural judgements. For example, instead of merely informing command that a certain culture is matriarchal, we should instead be thinking about how narratives of women as mothers may reinforce the roles that women play instead.

Another challenge is to determine *how* to integrate gender instead of focusing on *what* integration of gender is. In my view, one of the best ways to do this is to ensure that our OAAs have gender injects or gender-focused lines of operations. Awareness training in Gender 101 is all well and good, but until it's practised on exercises by our troops and assessed for its military effectiveness it will never be mainstreamed.

Last year, for example, I participated in a Swedish exercise called Viking 18, in which one of the key themes was the protection of civilians, incorporating issues of gender, sexual violence, humanitarian assistance, mass migration, internally displaced persons and human rights. One important lesson for me was the emphasis on a whole-of-government, civilian–military–police approach and how that collaboration will *never* be perfect. We'll never have precisely the same agenda and, as a community of like-minded advocates for women, peace and security, we need to accept that and work out how we can deliver our individually important but disparate strategic aims, while ensuring that duplication doesn't get in the way of the principles we all believe in.

Obviously, one of the best ways to win people over to the 'way of gender' is to give pragmatic examples of how the integration of gender can boost military effectiveness and lead to better operational outcomes. We've struggled with this in the past, particularly because little work has been done on measures of progress and effectiveness.

Our challenge is *how* we demonstrate progress and effectiveness in order to show *why* the gender perspective is so important. For our sailors, soldiers and aircrews, this is through storytelling. We must take more advantage of our deployed gender advisers and give them airtime to tell their real-life stories, because in my world of operations the only way to win the masses over is to give them the answer to 'So what?'

Fundamentally, there's a basic argument for the gender agenda that we can use every time.

The ADF is concentrating its focus on our regional neighbours in 2019 and beyond, particularly in the Southwest Pacific, Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific. It's no secret that the take-up of the integration of gender has been fairly patchy in our region due to differences of culture, society and religion, among other things. However, it's clear that WPS dialogues and discourses give us a common grounding and a basis for discussion with which we can develop our non-kinetic regional relationships. Talking WPS is a no-brainer and precisely why so many of our major OAAs this year have a strong, strategically directed, focus on WPS.

There's much work to be done, and it's an exciting time to be doing it. I find now, as a core member of joint planning groups, that people at HQJOC stop by to introduce themselves and establish communications when they post in. Fewer people now ask me to write up operational documents to integrate gender: they have a go at it themselves. I see fewer rolling eyes among audiences at predeployment briefings, and I think to myself, 'I love my job.'

For print readers, the original post with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/shaping-operational-outcomes-views-from-an-adf-gender-adviser>.

Challenges for female peacekeepers can come from within UN militaries

Vanessa Newby, 4 April 2019



Image courtesy of the [United Nations](#).

On 6 March 2019, Arizona Senator Martha McSally [gave testimony at an armed services committee hearing](#) that she had been raped by a senior officer while serving in the US Air Force. She said that she did not report it at the time for fear of retribution. While the sexual abuse of women by peacekeepers in host countries has generated significant policy changes in UN peacekeeping, sexual abuse within missions remains a little-discussed issue. It's one of several problems faced by female peacekeepers that come from the peace operations themselves, and not from the challenging environments in which they work.

Between 1989 and 1993, [just 1.7% of military peacekeepers](#) deployed by the UN were female. In 2001, the proportion of women in military posts serving in UN missions had increased to little more than 4%. Currently, the number of female soldiers serving in operations abroad is 2,930, [or 3.87% of all peacekeeping troops](#). Despite these low numbers, having women in peacekeeping missions is associated with success.

The presence of women in peace operations offers several benefits. First, in a security environment, it enables security precautions to be [applied to both female and male populations](#). Second, as women are increasingly able to patrol, their access to female members of the community in the area of operation is significantly better than men's. Also, because women can usually speak with both men and women, they access intelligence from all members of society and therefore obtain a more holistic view of the security environment. Third, in highly volatile security environments, the presence of women at checkpoints has been credited with promoting a less confrontational atmosphere.

In addition, access to women's networks enables female peacekeepers to consult with the non-elite sectors of the population who may have very different requirements for an equitable peace. This can help in developing a more representative solution at the mediation table.

It's important to note, however, that women are not only effective in 'women-only' spaces. Research has found evidence of women's effectiveness across all aspects of security; for example, in Liberia, the [women-only police unit in the UN mission](#) (UNMIL) demonstrated competency in riot control.

Women in peacekeeping currently face [three main challenges](#): ‘the exclusion of and discrimination against female peacekeepers; the relegation of female peacekeepers to safe spaces; and SEAHV [sexual exploitation, abuse, harassment and violence] of female peacekeepers’.

Exclusion and discrimination can take many forms, but a key constraint is that national militaries frequently send combat units to peacekeeping operations. Indeed, at the UN mission in Lebanon (UNIFIL), European units have often deployed special forces, which usually don’t contain women. Another problem is that oftentimes militaries simply don’t have enough women in their armed forces to supply a gender-balanced force. Encouragingly, though, armed forces that have a higher proportion of women do tend to send more women.

These limitations don’t seem to apply as often to female police officers. It has been found that women serving in national police forces have the agency to apply individually, or are selected for peace missions, which is why in general we [see better representation of women in this area](#).

Exclusion can also come from force commander rotations. In 1992, the incoming force commander at the UNIFIL mission explicitly forbade women to undertake frontline military roles. Despite [protests from female soldiers across UNIFIL](#), the policy remained in place for the duration of the force commander’s tenure.

A further constraint on the inclusion of women in peacekeeping, and in the peace process more generally, has been the distorted narrative on women from UN headquarters. As [Laura Shepherd has noted](#), women are sometimes schizophrenically written about as victims in need of protection or superheroines capable of representing all women. Neither of those characterisations sufficiently captures the reality of women’s lives or the structural constraints they experience in particular environments.

Male colleagues’ [perceptions that women are in need of protection](#) can lead to their relegation to safe spaces, which prevents them from taking on certain roles. This experience was noted by peacekeepers in the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force mission in Afghanistan, where male colleagues tried to prevent women from speaking to men in the villages they patrolled. In some missions, women have been prevented from leaving the base, while their male colleagues are free to do so, in the name of security concerns.

Research has also found that female soldiers are [also less likely to be deployed](#) to missions in countries that have low levels of development and/or have experienced higher levels of violence, especially sexual and gender-based violence. As these countries are logically in greater need of gender sensitive peacekeeping, this practice appears counter-productive.

As noted above, SEAHV is a further problem for female peacekeepers, though it’s unclear whether the threat comes more from within militaries themselves, or from the environment in which they operate. Sexual violence within militaries has been attributed to what is termed a ‘warrior syndrome’ that promotes hypermasculinity; but it’s hard to know the actual number of victims. A [Rand report in 2015](#) found that fewer than one-third of attacks within the US military were reported and 52% of victims who did report the incident faced retribution from senior officers for doing so. In the UNMIL mission, [17% of women listed sexual harassment](#) within the mission as the biggest impediment to completing their duties.

While there are unique advantages to female deployment in peace operations, as Claire Hutchinson [noted recently](#) at an ASPi workshop, the diffusion of the WPS agenda should focus on full participation. Increasing female representation in peace operations needs to be done using an approach that includes women in all aspects of military activity and which does not relegate them to specialised spaces, such as care-giving, support roles or as providers of gender-sensitive advice. Effective leadership in peacekeeping not only requires participation by both men and women but calls on a range of different skill sets from both genders.

Ultimately, UN peacekeeping is a sum of its parts—it’s not just a question of changing the shape of peacekeeping missions; changing the military cultures that constitute them is also essential.

Finally, it is well to remember that peacekeeping operations are vehicles for advancing local reforms, so performance on the ground does matter. Leaving a legacy that champions gender equality is essential to help promote reform in receiving states and their security institutions.

For print readers, the original post with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/challenges-for-female-peacekeepers-come-from-within-un-militaries>.

Do diseases know gender?

Sara E. Davies, 12 April 2019



Image courtesy of [Esparta Palma](#) on Flickr.

Diseases don't know borders. That maxim is often invoked to remind countries of their responsibility to deal with infectious disease outbreaks—to prevent, respond and contain. Sovereignty won't protect an economy or a health system from a novel infectious outbreak. The language and the scenarios that are commonly used—the 1918 Spanish flu outbreak is a popular one—seek to play, as Stefan Elbe says, the 'security card'. Scare politicians, scare their constituents, and hopefully they'll listen.

The idea that infectious diseases are a security problem hasn't escaped [controversy](#)—the HIV/AIDS awareness campaign is a good example. In 2000, the spread of the disease via peacekeepers secured the attention of the strongest security institution in the world and led to the first UN Security Council resolution on an infectious disease (resolution 1308). The entry point was maintaining international peace and security, and protecting the resources of troop-contributing countries—their soldiers—seemed the least controversial approach.

The resolution certainly gained high-level political attention and, arguably, financing unrivalled by any other infectious disease. But the language also cemented some damaging stereotypes about infection and sexual behaviour, and it did not direct the gaze to where it needed to be: the social and economic conditions that have led to young women (not just peacekeepers) facing the highest risk of infection from HIV.

Can claiming a 'non-traditional' threat like illness as a security threat be an act of emancipation or is security too embedded in a system that will not fight for the most vulnerable and powerless? Can we articulate a response to global health insecurity that doesn't create new marginalised groups, or further marginalise existing groups, because they carry the 'stigma' of infectious diseases that may be unjustly associated with their poverty, ethnicity, statelessness and/or gender?

In an [article](#) in *The Lancet's* recent special edition on women in science, medicine and global health, I argued with my co-authors, Sophie Harman, Rashida Manjoo, Maria Tanyag and Clare Wenham, that global health governance is struggling in its institutions, studies and leadership to embrace feminist research. Global health governance is the institutional response to public health issues that span international borders. Its success requires interstate regulation and cooperation, but it lacks a feminist framework of engagement.

The absence of feminist reflection on the policy and practice of the global health governance sector is evident in its [representation](#): 70% of all global health positions are filled by women, but only 25% of women hold senior positions related to global health governance. Feminist research seeks to not only identify but suggest how to transform the unjust and unequal social order.

In the article, we suggested four areas of engagement where the global health governance system could heed the lessons of feminist research and advocacy in international relations, especially the security sector: institutional reform, attention to intersectional representation and inclusivity, attention to political economy of participation, and knowledge production.

What does it mean to argue for a feminist research approach to global health governance? Quotas, reports and conferences build vital momentum to promote discussions about and changes in gender representation in global health governance. Global health security, whether we like it or not, provides that platform of awareness-raising and engagement.

When the women, peace and security agenda was adopted by the UN Security Council in 2000, the focus was on women's experience in war and conflict. Do women experience conflict and war differently? The past 20 years of research has been dedicated to exploring that question; [networks](#) have been assembled at the local, regional and international levels to answer it consistently and comprehensively. The process is ongoing, but it is building momentum and informing practice in [peacekeeping](#), [peace processes](#) and [conflict prevention](#). Have we asked a similar question consistently about infectious disease outbreaks?

To illustrate the cost of overlooking feminist methodologies and insights in this area, let's turn to the case of tuberculosis. It's a disease that kills nearly two million people a year and infects the poorest, most marginalised and most vulnerable populations every year—one person can infect 15 people by a cough or sneeze. Given that these people are more likely to live in overcrowded places with poor sanitation, it's not hard to see why the disease still kills so many and why so many still receive no treatment.

The [debate](#) has always been over why men appear to have higher rates of TB infection than women, and why women appear to continue their drug treatment longer than men. The risk of HIV/TB co-morbidity is now changing this data—women's numbers are catching up. Are the numbers catching up or were they always there but hidden?

If TB mostly infects prisoners, drug users, sex workers, migrants and refugees, indigenous populations and impoverished communities, can we be sure that the patterns of infection—and the reasons why some people present themselves for treatment but others don't—are not gendered? As the [Global Fund suggests](#), we don't yet know for sure the reliability of data on women's infection and treatment versus men's because stigma, discrimination, time constraints and economic impoverishment are huge impediments to women seeking treatment, which is vital to first detect TB cases. Incorporating feminist research into the global health system demands that we re-examine the data available and search for the social and economic barriers to data collection, and to healthcare access.

Do women experience infectious disease outbreaks differently? The health field needs to lift its gaze to see how this question can be used to not just enforce existing power structures but emancipate actors and technical approaches. What comes next is promoting social justice in technical and economic programs in global health governance to answer this question.

The achievements of the WPS agenda provide an unparalleled example of how this can be done. The risk of co-optation by security structures and state hierarchy was as much of a risk in that arena as it is in global health.

Advocates for the WPS agenda at the international, regional and subnational levels have experience in creating local, national and regional networks that promote equitable changes to hierarchical security structures. They have also, through experience, learned the pitfalls and advantages of using security language and structures to empower and engage marginalised communities. The global health governance sector has much to gain from tapping into that knowledge, particularly in the areas of infectious disease prevention and response.

For print readers, the original post with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/do-diseases-know-gender>.

Women's leadership in international affairs: continuing the momentum

Elise Stephenson, 26 April 2019



Image courtesy of the US Department of State on Flickr.

It's been nearly 20 years since the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on women, peace and security, and we would expect to see an increase in women leaders globally in the diplomacy and security. By all accounts, women are increasingly playing influential roles in the realms of international peace and security—reaffirmed by the very visible leadership of Julie Bishop and Marise Payne as ministers of the foreign affairs and defence portfolios in Australia, not to mention the prime minister of our close neighbour New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern, whose leadership in the wake of the recent terror attacks in Christchurch attracted worldwide praise.

Yet the WPS agenda has been repeatedly criticised over the past two decades for focusing on helping 'other', externalised women. And, while the UN framework recognises the link between women and peace and security, women have rarely been at the most senior levels in multilateral negotiations.

Women in leadership roles in Australia's international affairs agencies—the departments of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Defence and Home Affairs and the Australian Federal Police—are deeply integral to our ability to deliver on the WPS agenda, and yet they're often overlooked. Examples of the oversight include the 2018 '100 Years of Mateship' campaign celebrating the relationship between Australia and the US that [failed to include any women](#), and even the naming of DFAT [meeting rooms for flowers rather than women leaders](#).

For the first 17 years of UNSCR 1325 (1990 to 2017), women made up only [2% of chief mediators of peace processes worldwide](#). A 2016 study of more than 7,000 ambassadorial appointments found that [women held an average of only 15% of ambassadorships globally](#). There are currently [only 11 women serving as heads of state](#), and women leaders across all spheres of international affairs are still battling to gain access to areas characterised as being [guided by norms of masculinity and occupied by men](#). Australia, despite being a ['strikingly culturally and ethnically diverse'](#) nation, exhibits little evidence of diversity among the senior leaders of its government agencies: most of them continue to be white.

This is a problem. With increasing threats of conflict on our doorstep, gender equality is not just nice to have and it's not just a side to the main meat of foreign policy. Higher levels of domestic gender inequality [are associated with](#) higher levels of interstate violence—and women leaders are often [key to preventing international disputes from escalating to armed conflict](#).

By all appearances, the field of international relations in Australia is at a critical juncture. Women are verging on parity in leadership in some of our core ministries for the first time in history. In the past year alone, women jumped from representing around 27% of **heads and deputy heads of mission in DFAT** to over 40%. But while women's increasing representation may send positive signals about gender equality in international affairs, **it is still not a substitute** for gender equality in international affairs.

Australian agencies show signs of progress for women leaders, but this is hampered by excruciatingly slow rates of progress in recruiting and retaining ethnically diverse leaders and selecting women for operational and security roles. Moreover, as I found in my research on senior leaders across Australia's international affairs agencies, discrimination, sexism and harassment continue to be a consistent feature at even the most senior levels.

The proportion of women representing the AFP overseas increased from **27% to 29% between 2017 and 2019**. The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands is a prominent example of using the deployment of women to strengthen operational effectiveness on the ground. Yet, as a mission involving a large contingent of Australians, my research found it was also one marked by pervasive male chauvinism and sexism. In Defence, just last year Australia's own Major General Cheryl Pearce was **appointed** force commander of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus. While she's the **first Australian woman** to command a UN peacekeeping mission, she is only the second woman globally to occupy that role. Home Affairs—a significant agency to the WPS agenda—currently has 47.5% of its overseas executive and senior executive roles filled by women. Yet, across these agencies, **women have continued to report** more instances of sexism, discrimination and harassment in their home departments than in their postings overseas, indicating serious difficulties in gaining (and retaining) representative international leadership in the first place.

Most of these departments have strategies in place to address the inclusion of women, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and people from the LGBTI community, prioritising diversity based on **improved functionality and better representation**. Yet sexism, racism and homophobia persist and the mould for the ideal international affairs representative is still based on the **male civil servant**, with a supportive wife and kids following behind.

Targets since 2015 have so far proved effective for DFAT in increasing the number of women in leadership. However, across the agencies, the best strategy is one that is consistent and that addresses underlying structural issues. As much as inclusion is a priority for DFAT secretary Frances Adamson, and was for former foreign minister Julie Bishop, it must continue to be a priority for the next leaders too.

With the 20-year anniversary of UNSCR 1325 just around the corner, it's a good time to consider whether structures have changed enough to support women leading in international relations. Children, and the unwillingness of some male partners to follow their female spouses overseas due to career concerns, as well as stereotyping and cultural and structural factors, continue to be key barriers.

And while having more women in leadership roles speaks volumes for our international affairs, particularly given its history as largely white, heteronormative and male-dominated, it also speaks to the fact that we still haven't achieved gender equality—equality of access to resources and opportunities, as well as freedom from discrimination, harassment and violence—in this sphere. It highlights that we've never had equal representation of women in international affairs. It's hard to imagine the reverse ever being permissible, and so we must now ensure that the positive gains made in supporting women leaders in international affairs continue long into the future.

Note: Data in this article is sourced from unpublished raw datasets from the agencies, as well as publicly available datasets, and interviews with over 70 women leaders and associated individuals in the departments of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Defence and Home Affairs and the Australian Federal Police. This research comprises part of the author's broader PhD study of women's leadership in Australian international affairs.

For print readers, the original post with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/womens-leadership-in-international-affairs-continuing-the-momentum>.

Gender and climate (in)security in the Pacific

Jacqueline Westermann, 14 May 2019



Image courtesy of the [Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade](#) on Flickr.

The Boe Declaration, signed during the 2018 Pacific Islands Forum, sent a clear message: climate change isn't a scenario of the future; it's a reality that's happening now and an existential threat to the people of the Pacific. Climate change will affect the economic, political and social relations of the region, from health, food security, urbanisation and displacement to humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and disaster risk reduction.

The small island states in the Pacific are dealing with the consequences of climate change already and can't afford to lose any more time. All of climate change's effects threaten the livelihoods of Pacific island populations. Greater resilience among the region's communities is needed to counter potential instability that can have repercussions beyond the region.

Engagement with Pacific island nations should be high on the Australian government's agenda, in line with the priority given to the Indo-Pacific and South Pacific in the most recent foreign policy and defence white papers.

The [2016 defence white paper](#) points to the issues associated with climate change in the Pacific. The prospect of state fragility and other security threats calls for Australian leadership in the region to counter the effects of climate change as a common security challenge.

One of the major aims of Australia's [2017 foreign policy white paper](#) is to increase cooperation with Pacific nations and to become more involved in disaster relief and preparation as the effects of climate change build. The white paper states, 'Australia will continue to strengthen the capacity of the Pacific, particularly low-lying atoll states, to respond to climate change.' It refers to a 'new deployment capability, Australia Assists', focusing on disaster assistance, and says that Australia aims to focus 'strongly on protection efforts for women and girls and people with disabilities because they are particularly vulnerable during conflicts and natural disasters'.

Experience from past natural disasters has demonstrated that women and girls are affected differently from men. Women and children are 14 times more likely to die or be injured during a disaster, [according](#) to UN Women Fiji. Climate change will also have an impact on women's livelihoods and daily tasks (for example, through effects on arable land and freshwater resources).

The Australian government already engages with the region through bipartisan activities and through the presence and actions of the ambassador for women and girls, [Dr Sharman Stone](#), who focuses especially on Pacific women's economic and political empowerment. Australia has also been assisting after disasters through humanitarian and disaster relief missions. Canberra also runs major funding and support strategies such as [Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development](#), which is a good step but lacks local partners in many of the small island states (currently, only eight countries have NGOs listed as partners).

Gaps remain in our understanding of the challenges that will arise with a changing climate and how they'll affect Canberra's relationship and engagement with the region. Missing in the debate is the nexus between gender, climate change and the region. We need to recognise that climate change in the Pacific will produce particularly insecure circumstances for women. UN Women Fiji has also [argued](#) that a better understanding of the links between climate change, disaster risk reduction and gender will be necessary for achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

Dilruba Haider, who specialises in disaster risk reduction, climate change and humanitarian actions at UN Women, [argues](#) that:

Women's lower socio-economic status, unequal access to information, health and assets, the extra burden of being primary care-givers, and the general inequities in everyday life, reduce their ability to cope with shocks. They also lead to further violations of women's rights and dignity, such as human trafficking, child marriage, sexual exploitation and forced labour.

As the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events increase with climate change, it's vital to include women's perspectives, experiences and unique knowledge in the debate, as Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN under-secretary-general and executive director of UN Women, [underlines](#): 'Through their experience as early adopters of many new agricultural techniques, first responders in crises, entrepreneurs of green energy and decision-makers at home, women offer valuable insights and solutions into better managing the climate and its risks.'

Some local initiatives are already showing successes, such as [Women's Weather Watch](#) and the engagement of Madame Salilo Enele Sopoaga, Tuvalu's prime minister's wife, who has been taking the lead on training and educating local women on crops and seeds to foster food security and has helped them establish home gardens as an alternative to working in the fields. Programs like these can assist women to adjust to changes in the environment and develop self-reliance and coping mechanisms for potential food shortages.

But the region can't do it alone. Australia should follow through and put some meat on the bones of the government's 'Pacific step-up'. Engaging more with local communities to take into consideration local experiences, knowledge and needs will be vital.

To enhance the effectiveness of Australia's contribution and ensure that it's done sustainably and respectfully, further research, particularly at the local level, will be required. Susan Harris Rimmer [argued](#) in her contribution to this series that those efforts need to be approached 'in a spirit of true partnership'. That research work needs to focus on understanding how climate change affects people to varying degrees due to their gender, age and ability, and also how they cope with it and develop resilience differently. The research needs to encompass all parts of local populations, which, as Betty Barkha argued in her [contribution](#), must include young people, who form the generation that will be most affected by climate change.

As UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres [highlighted](#) during his recent visit to New Zealand, 'I don't think there is any other region but the Pacific with the moral authority to tell the world that the world needs to abide by what the scientific community is telling us.' Listening to local voices will allow Australia to pinpoint where cooperation with the region, particularly the small island nations, can best address climate-change-related insecurities.

For print readers, the original post with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/gender-and-climate-insecurity-in-the-pacific>.

Cyber, technology and gender: what are we missing?

Lisa Sharland and Hannah Smith, 12 June 2019



Image courtesy of the US Military Health System.

The technology sector, in areas such as cybersecurity development and STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) in general, is overwhelmingly male. That gender imbalance inevitably limits diversity of thinking and means that cyber technology, both in its design and in the analytical output produced, are likely to mirror the biases that prevail in the world in which we live. And this brings consequences that will become more profound as time passes, particularly in the national security realm.

In March, Australian Signals Directorate chief Mike Burgess gave an [address](#) at ASPI outlining some of the work his agency has done to address threats to Australia's security. He noted the importance of the work done at ASD by women. Though they make up just over a third of the agency's workforce, it's notable that women fill 54% of management positions.

Yet the number of women involved in the cyber field overall remains incredibly low. It's estimated that the global shortage of cybersecurity workers is likely to reach 1.8 million by 2022, and governments and the private sector are missing out on a significant source of potential talent and diversity in thinking if they don't engage substantively in efforts to recruit women.

But hiring more women is not enough. There's another dimension that doesn't get mentioned nearly enough in the context of cybersecurity—and that is the role of gender perspectives. It's not enough to just have more women participating; there's also a need to consider the roles of men and women (and non-binary-identifying individuals) operating in the cyber domain.

There's considerable evidence that technology has a significant role in perpetuating inequality across society. Women are far more likely to be [victims](#) of cyber bullying and shaming through online platforms than men. A few weeks ago, 'a [female diplomat](#) faced a barrage of anti-abortion text messages from an advocacy group, disrupting a major UN summit on women's rights'. Incidents like this highlight the low threshold for gender-focused harassment. What's most problematic is that decision-makers can be harassed online by anyone with a computer, often anonymously.

The fact that women, [according](#) to a 2015 UN report, are 27 times more likely than men to be harassed online is simply a reflection of a [larger societal problem](#), now enabled by technology. Metadata and the information gathered for geolocation services can enable abusers to track partners or harass individuals through multiple mediums, meaning that technology acts as a less visible enabler for domestic abuse. Practical resources, tools and government responses need to consider these threats to women's security.

What's more, technology can be misused by the state as a tool to suppress women's rights. Saudi Arabia's mobile app [Absher](#) is an example of this. The app was developed by the Saudi government as a portal for citizens to access government services. However, alongside the ability to lodge licence applications and view documents, the app also allows male guardians to approve or withdraw permissions for women to travel internationally. While some have argued that this may have positive effects because lenient guardians can grant women more autonomy, it also demonstrates how technology can act as a tool to perpetuate violations of women's rights. It also raises significant questions about the [ethics](#) of platforms like Google and Apple that facilitate apps that can be used to oppress women.

In addition to misuse and abuse, there's also potential for technology to perpetuate existing biases—[particularly](#) in the domain of artificial intelligence. Male and female patterns of behaviour are often different, so more diverse thinking is required to prevent societal inequalities from being built into a machine's 'abilities' from the start.

Already there are concerns that AI and the devices that form part of the internet of things are being dominated by [women's voices in service roles](#) (like Apple's Siri and Amazon's Alexa). The machine-learning processes that many AI tools rely on may result in more discriminatory practices, if data and processes don't address some inherent biases that already exist in society, based on perceptions of what constitute traditionally feminine and masculine roles. Having more diverse participation in the cyber workforce is one way to reduce these risks, but it also requires more coherent policies that proactively address inequality in the platforms, from their earliest stages of development.

Much of what people do is based on assumptions, many of them unconscious. Female networks often function and communicate differently to male networks. Yet assuming that offline gender norms and perceptions carry over to online platforms can present a wider security risk when it comes to issues such as violent extremism and terrorism, because people's offline behaviour may differ from their behaviour in [online communities](#). The different ways that men and women use online platforms needs to be factored more comprehensively into analysis on issues related to terrorism, for instance.

The availability of information on various social media platforms also means there's a gendered element in the way information and individuals are manipulated. 'Honeypots' are not a new phenomenon in the world of intelligence. However, the use of such approaches through tactics such as ['catfishing'](#) (pretending to be someone you're not on social media) presents a complex security risk for governments, particularly when social media platforms, devices and apps leave crumbs of information about high-profile individuals for enemies to exploit. During a recent military exercise, NATO's Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence [targeted troops through fake social media pages](#) and was able to obtain intelligence on military operations, demonstrating how easy it can be for a hostile force to get information (for the price of US\$60).

Of course, the challenges presented by cyberspace and technology aren't new. As technology historian Melvin Kranzberg [noted](#) more than three decades ago, 'Technology is neither good nor bad; nor is it neutral.' It is a mirror that reflects the society in which it is used. That means that like the rest of our discussions about defence and national security, the conversation about women in cyber also needs to include consideration of their diverse perspectives in the development and use of technology. Otherwise, we are literally missing half the picture.

For print readers, the original post with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/cyber-technology-and-gender-what-are-we-missing>.

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ISSN 1449-3993

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Women, peace and security

Defending progress and responding to emerging challenges