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Women Count for Peace and Security: A Story of Collaboration in the Philippines

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On 31 October 2000, United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, the first Women, Peace, and Security resolution, was adopted by the United Nations Security Council. The resolution mandated UN member states to increase women’s participation in decision-making in matters that relate to peace and security, particularly in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconstruction. Years after its adoption, however, implementation was slow and scattered and hardly changed the invisibility and marginalization of women in decision-making on matters of peace and security, where women have a unique perspective on keeping and making peace and have a historical tradition of doing so. This essay shows how collaboration among UN member states and agencies, government, and civil society accelerated the implementation of the groundbreaking resolution in the Philippines.

On 31 October 2000, the groundbreaking United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, the first Women, Peace and Security resolution, was adopted by the United Nations Security Council. The resolution mandated UN member-states to increase women’s participation in decision-making and peacebuilding processes, prevention of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict, and promotion of a gender perspective in peacekeeping, peacemaking, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconstruction. UNSCR 1325 expanded what the Beijing Platform for Action called for in 1995, that is to increase women’s participation in conflict resolution at decision-making levels and protect them in situations of armed and other conflicts, including situations of foreign occupation. The resolution, in effect, reaffirms the vital role women play in these various aspects of peace work and the importance of their full participation and involvement in efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. The resolution also recognized the undervalued contributions and underutilized capacities of women to end conflict, and make, build, and rebuild peace, and the sustainability of peace and security efforts when women take a full and active part in them.

Implementation Gaps
Key actors identified for the implementation of the resolution were the UN member states and UN entities. Seven years after its adoption, however, only seven (7) National Action Plans (NAPs) to implement the resolution were adopted. These included the NAPs of Denmark, UK, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, Spain, and Austria (WILPF, 2016).

NAPs are documents that detail the actions a government is taking to fulfill its commitments under UNSCR 1325 and the ensuing WPS resolutions; translating these commitments into national and local policies and doable, time-bound, and measurable programs and activities (UN Women Asia-Pacific, n.d.).

Peacewomen (2007) posited that seven years after its adoption, the issue of sex and gender-based violence in conflict remained alarming. It also reported that despite the growing recognition and

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understanding of the importance of women’s involvement in peace efforts, the gap in implementation remained serious, citing the dismally low level of women’s representation and participation in peace operations and decision-making. However, Peacewomen also posited that collaboration between UN Members States and civil society can advance the implementation of 1325.

UN agencies have consistently underscored the importance of building partnerships with civil society organizations. They acknowledge that:

CSOs represent a variety of organisations through which citizens associate with one another. They are comprised not only of NGOs, but also trade unions, community-based organisations and people’s movements. Known as the ‘third sector’, these groups operate alongside and interact with the state and play a valuable role by articulating and defending the rights and interests of citizens (GSDRC, 2002).

This paper supports the above proposition that progress in implementation of UNSCR 1325 will be achieved when UN member-states and agencies and civil society collaborate, using the case of the Philippines as illustrated below:

**Women, Armed Conflict and the Philippines**

Before the adoption of the Philippine National Action Plan on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, the Philippines was host to two of the longest-running armed conflicts in the world: the 53-year old conflict between the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the Communist Party of the Philippines -New Peoples Army (CPP-NPA) that has killed tens of thousands of people, and the war in Mindanao that is estimated to have killed more than 150,000 people and displaced two million people (Project Ploughshares, 2018). Clan wars in the North or “rido” in the South also occasionally erupt, taking lives. These wars are a series of retaliatory acts that have left thousands displaced or dead. In Mindanao alone, the police estimated more than 180 deaths per year from these acts of violence (reliefweb, 2009). All of these conflicts were waged for reasons linked to land ownership and territorial boundaries, injustice, prejudice and
discrimination, political marginalization, poverty, inequalities, lack of access to government’s social services, and political rivalries, among others.

These conflicts have disproportionately impacted women. Women from armed conflict areas who participated in many trainings and consultation workshops that this writer co-organized have reported intense feelings of fear for the lives of their spouses and children. They shared in small group meetings experiences of sexual abuse and the decision not to report such to authorities for reasons of culture and fear of stigmatization. Some women reported being married off to their perpetrators, keeping mum about victimization to protect the family honor. They spoke about economic dislocation and loss of homes and livelihood or the heightened responsibility of providing for members of the family when men leave their communities as the consequence of war. They spoke of the deplorable conditions in evacuation camps when displaced, especially for the pregnant, menstruating, or lactating. Cramped living spaces in these camps made them vulnerable to sexual assaults. They also described the difficulty in accessing social services, particularly health services, from these evacuation centers (Nario-Galace, 2013).

But armed conflicts also saw women transcend victimization. They perform roles to ease the consequences of war and to lend support to each other. They have facilitated dialogues with government officials and organized livelihood projects or educational sessions for children whose schooling was disrupted by the conflict. They have helped in keeping order and promoting sanitation in evacuation camps. They have reached out to armed groups appealing for cessation of hostilities. They have provided counsel to the emotionally wounded and the mentally affected, among other peace and humanitarian initiatives.

Adoption of the Philippine NAP on 1325: Collaboration at Every Level
The consequences of the war and the role women play and can play to mitigate its effects, make and build peace are the impetus for the crafting of the Philippine National Action Plan (PNAP). The story of the PNAP is a story of collaboration and partnership. In late 2006, Mavic Cabrera-Balleza of the International Women’s Tribune Center based in New York reached out to then Sulong CAHRIHL (SC) Director Miriam Coronel-Ferrer to check whether SC as a national human rights network was interested in promoting awareness and advancement of the UNSC resolution. Coronel-Ferrer reached out, in turn, to the Center for Peace Education-Miriam College’s Associate Director Jasmin Nario-Galace. The three women from these three civil society groups—women’s rights, human rights, and peace—forged the next steps to promote 1325 in the Philippines. They approached the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (now Philippine Commission on Women or PCW) who suggested approaching the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace process (OPAPP). The result was an agreement between civil society groups and two government agencies to do a peoples’ consultation to check if the development of a NAP on 1325 was merited. A Preparatory Committee composed of government and civil society members was organized to facilitate the multi-sectoral, inter-island consultations.

Seven consultations were held between 2007-2009 in various parts of the country where participants narrated experiences of conflict, expressed their vision of peace and security, and detailed pathways to achieve this vision. Participants were community women; women from human rights, peace and women’s rights organizations; national and local government officials and workers; members of the academe, military and police; and indigenous peoples, among others.
From these consultations emanated the National Action Plan on 1325. The PNAP was adopted by the Philippine government on 1 March 2010 via Executive Order 865. Coronel-Ferrer described the process as collaborative politics that helped put together in one document the sentiments various sectors have on armed conflict, their vision of peace, and the concrete strategic actions that can be taken to achieve peace and security in the Philippines.

The government formed the National Steering Committee on Women, Peace and Security to oversee the implementation of the NAP. It named civil society as partners in the endeavor. The civil society groups that led the consultations formed their own network, the Women Engaged in Action on 1325 (WE Act 1325) to assist the government in meeting the action points laid out in the NAP.

**Implementing the National Action Plan on 1325**

Momentarily left on its own as the government worked on its other priorities, the Center for Peace Education (CPE) approached the United Nations Development Program to publish the Philippine NAP. Its publication and formal launch paved the way for collaborations between civil society members wanting to assist in implementing the plan and foreign missions in the Philippines, such as the Royal Norwegian Embassy, DFAT Australia, the British Embassy and the Canadian Embassy. From the time of the consultations to the launch of the NAP and the civil society network WE Act 1325, the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) has been a constant partner and collaborator. Other international organizations such as Conciliation Resources also gave much support to civil society’s implementation of the NAP.

The first NAP-WPS (2010-2016) had 14 action points and four pillars. Of these, WE Act 1325 largely focused on policy review; capacity building and training of various stakeholders; engagement with negotiators of ongoing peace processes; and advocacy to increase women’s participation in peacebuilding at national and local levels. These initiatives were done as a network, individually by members, or through bilateral and multilateral cooperation among members of the network (Maligalig, 2016).

These collaborations and partnerships made at various levels and fronts produced notable results, including the following:

**Localization of the Philippine NAP**

With the support of Norway and the GNWP, Local Action Plans (LAPs) were formulated in some municipalities in the country affected by various kinds of conflict: Real, Quezon; Calbiga, Samar; Tabuk, Kalinga; Cuyapo, Nueva Ecija; and various municipalities in the Province of Butuan. Provisions of the NAP were adopted as local legislations through local multi-sectoral planning that involved, among others, local government officials, the security sector, community women, the religious, indigenous peoples, and members of the academe. LAPs included the allocation of seats for women in local special bodies, particularly peacekeeping and human rights mechanisms; funding for legal, economic, educational, and psychosocial support and spiritual services for women and girl survivors of conflict; and provision of emergency and livelihood assistance to children and women victims of armed conflicts (Maligalig, 2016).
The localization efforts also paved the way for the inclusion of women in age-old village decision-making platforms that traditionally did not include women. For example, the Matagoan Bodong Consultative Council, a Council of Elders in Northern Philippines, began to include women in the decision-making body, breaking what used to be a glass ceiling.

**Increased Women’s Participation**

Monitoring on women’s participation in decision-making processes made by civil society in partnership with GNWP and the government of Norway indicated a significant increase in the number of women in senior decision-making positions in the executive branch of government from 2010-2012 (WE Act 1325, 2012). WE Act 1325 (2014) also noted significant progress in the percentage of women in the security sector and peace negotiating teams from 2013-2014, while moderate progress was noted in the number and percentage of women participating in constitutional legislative reviews, including security sector reviews and reviews in the justice sector.

**Promotion of Gender Perspective**

The monitoring report made by WE Act 1325 (2014) in partnership with GNWP and with the support of the government of Norway also noted significant progress in the detailed breakdown of gender issues addressed in peace agreements. It also noted significant progress in the number of CSOs in task force/committees on UNSCR 1325 and 1820 and in the number and quality of gender-responsive laws and policies. Such increase was also observed in the number and percentage of pre-deployment training and post-deployment programs for military and police incorporating UNSCR 1325 and 1820, international human rights instruments, and international humanitarian law.

**Operationalizing the NAP in the Security Sector**

Partnership efforts between WE Act 1325 and GNWP paved the way for the operationalization of the NAP in the plans, programs, and activities of the Philippine National Police and the Philippine Army. Nario-Galace and Viar (2015) reported that various civil society-organized WPS trainings in the Police resulted in the incorporation of NAP provisions in its ‘PATROL PLAN 2030 or the PNP Peace and Order Agenda for Transformation and Upholding the Rule of Law. The Philippine Army, meanwhile, published and implemented several policy directives promoting gender equality in training assignment, utilization, career path and promotion of female military officers. More women members of the Army are now deployed as civil-military relations staff, working on community-based peace and development initiatives in conflict-affected areas. Both PNP and the Philippine Army integrated WPS in their Gender and Development Plan and Budget (Nario-Galace and Viar, 2015).

**Gender-Responsive Bangsamoro Law**

Supported by the UK Embassy in Manila and Conciliation Resources, WE Act 1325 members organized and conducted several consultations to know what women from communities wanted to be included in the law. Results of consultations were put together and crafted as lobby points. To ensure the integration of gender perspectives in the Bangsamoro law, advocacy trainings were organized to help women come up with strategies and activities to push for women’s meaningful participation in the Bangsamoro. These lobby points were taken to members of Congress and the members of the government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) peace negotiating teams.
We Act 1325 participated, organized, and co-organized several public actions to push for provisions in the law that will uphold women’s right to participation and leadership in decision-making and peace and security processes. The lobby points that WE Act 1325 pushed came from its consultations with thousands of community women affected by conflict. The efforts have not been futile. The document submitted by the BTC to the Office of the President contained language affirming women’s meaningful participation (Nario-Galace, 2015). The Bangsamoro Organic Law signed in July 2018 has provisions for the participation of women in the Bangsamoro Cabinet and other mechanisms (GNWP, 2019) as well as provisions for their meaningful participation in the conceptualization and implementation of development programs and projects.

Enhanced Capacities for Leadership and Participation
Women in communities affected by armed conflict were trained on skills necessary for meaningful participation. With support from the Australian and Canadian Governments, women were trained on advocacy, public speaking, conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and mediation skills. Capacities were also enhanced concerning political participation in the Bangsamoro, where women were trained on political platform development, winning elections, and resource mobilization. In the elections that followed the training, some of the women threw their hats into the election ring. Some won, some lost. But what really won was their ability to conquer their fears and demystification of the belief that only men belong to the public sphere.

Conclusion
The development and implementation of the PNAP in the Philippines saw partnerships and collaborations on all levels and fronts:

- Among women, human rights and peace organizations
- Among government agencies and civil society
- Across sectors of government and society
- Between government and civil society
- Among government agencies
- Between UN agencies and civil society
- Between UN member states and civil society
- Among international, national, and local civil society
- Among international, national and local civil society and local government units (LGUs)

The advancement of UNSCR 1325 in the Philippines was made possible through these partnerships. In 2006, when the three women from women, human rights, and peace organizations met in the cafeteria of a women’s college in the Philippines, Miriam College, UNSCR 1325 was just a resolution adopted in the United Nations. But when like-minded women and civil society organizations, and UN member states and agencies came together, the resolution turned from a piece of an international document into a national action plan, many local action plans, and lives that were forever changed for the better.
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