



Women, Peace and Security in Australia and the SDGs

By Susan Hutchinson

Last week, Devpolicy hosted the [Australian launch of the Women, Peace and Security Index](#). The index has been developed by the Georgetown University Institute for Women, Peace and Security in partnership with the Peace Research Institute of Oslo. It ranks countries based on [three dimensions](#): women's inclusion, justice and human security. Each of these dimensions is of interest to development practitioners. But all too often, the broader community of humanitarian and development practitioners fail to connect to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. However, this is slowly changing.

When the Australian Government launched its [National Action Plan \(NAP\) on Women, Peace and Security](#) in 2012, a broad range of civil society organisations expressed frustration about how little the bureaucracy had accounted for their expertise in this space. The Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) brought together some key stakeholders to ensure that mistake was not easily forgotten. With the Australian National Committee for UN Women,

Australian National University's Gender Institute, and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, they established an [Annual Civil Society Dialogue on Women, Peace and Security](#). The aims of the Dialogue were to:

1. Showcase the contributions of civil society;
2. Facilitate effective dialogue between civil society and government;
3. Elevate the national discourse on WPS; and
4. Support shadow reporting on the NAP.

The Dialogue and Civil Society Report Cards were described as good practice in the UN's [Global Study on the implementation of UNSCR 1325](#). High level participants from development NGOs included CEOs such as Tim Costello of World Vision Australia, Julia Newton-Howes of CARE Australia, Jo Hayter of the International Women's Development Agency, and Archie Law of ActionAid Australia.

This year, the engagement has taken a different form. The [Australian Civil Society Coalition on WPS](#) ran localised [roundtables](#) in each capital city and one at the Triennial Conference of Pacific Women, to discuss women's understanding of peace, and their understanding of security. The primary aim was to engage a more diverse set of women in WPS discussions. A recurring theme of [these discussions](#) was domestic implementation of WPS.

The WPS Index is a new tool to track sustainable peace through inclusion, justice and security for women. It also provides a unique opportunity to assess domestic implementation of the WPS agenda, especially because one of its indicators of security is intimate partner violence. Other datasets exist on the relationship between women's rights and international peace and security, for example [WomanStats](#): the ground-breaking database that includes both quantitative and qualitative data and allows users to interrogate the source of the data and compile bi-variate and multivariate scales of their own. The WPS Index is much simpler to access and communicate, but is also less transparent in terms of the data sources for each of its indicators. Furthermore, in its high threshold for consistent data inputs it loses much of the texture required for the advancement

of the WPS agenda in the most needed contexts, such as fragile states and countries in the Pacific.

By utilising indicators from the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the WPS Index takes an important step toward streamlining monitoring, evaluation and accountability to other global commitments. This is an important lesson as Australia develops its next NAP, especially because the monitoring and evaluation framework of the current NAP is broadly seen as its biggest failing.

However, in so doing, the WPS Index magnifies the early failings of the SDGs to integrate concerns of the WPS agenda. The key barriers to implementing the Millennium Development Goals (which preceded the SDGs) were conflict and instability, so advocacy efforts were applied to ensure a goal on peace and security was included in the sustainable development framework. However, the resulting Goal 16 is largely focused on governance issues rather than peace and conflict. Goal 16 is one of a handful of goals in which all the targets are gender neutral. These initial failings of the goal were largely a consequence of the decision not to have the new framework overlap with the mandate of either the Security Council or the Peacebuilding Commission. But the relationship between development and security remains.

The Security Council resolutions on WPS specify the importance of [women's participation in conflict prevention, mitigation, management, resolution and recovery](#). That participation includes activities such as peacekeeping operations, security sector reform, transitional justice and negotiation of peace agreements. [SDG Target 16.7](#), calls for “responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.” It goes some way to addressing the participation pillar of the WPS agenda. The indicators for that target count positions held in public institutions, disaggregated by age, sex, disability and population group; as well as perception of inclusive decision making. However, it doesn't count participation in security institutions such as the police and the military, data on which is incredibly difficult to attain. The WPS index appears to not use the indicators for SDG 16.7 in their inclusion dimension, which covers women's

education, economic and parliamentary participation, but still does not look at women's inclusion in diplomatic corps, police or the military.

[Devpolicy's launch of the WPS Index](#) provided an excellent opportunity to constructively and critically discuss these issues, including the importance of data in tracking and maintaining accountability for global and national commitments to WPS. The Index itself will be a valuable tool for both academic and policy discussions. But the discussions on absent data and indicators not present in the Index are of equal value to critical discourse and a deep understanding of women's security and the international peace agenda.

About the author/s

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Susan Hutchinson is a specialist in conflict and development, primarily working on issues of women, peace and security. She has served in the military, federal public service and in the NGO sector. Susan developed the Annual Civil Society Dialogue on Women, Peace and Security and the Annual Civil Society Report Cards on the Implementation of Australia's National Action Plan. She is a member of the Australian Civil Society Coalition for Women, Peace and Security and is currently undertaking a PhD at the ANU's Coral Bell School.