AGENCY FOR
PEACEBUILDING

ADVANCING THE WOMEN, PEACE & SECURITY AGENDA IN IRAQ, LEBANON, LIBYA AND TUNISIA

Evaluation report

February 2025

ABOUT THE AGENCY FOR PEACEBUILDING

The Agency for Peacebuilding (AP) is a think-and-do organisation committed to bridging the gap between research and practice in peacebuilding. AP aims to contribute to more peaceful and just societies by preventing and transforming violent conflict and creating spaces for dialogue and cooperation across divides. AP is the first Italian organization specialising in peacebuilding. This allows us to occupy a unique role in the European landscape: on the one hand, we interpret and synthesise relevant topics for the benefit of Italian agencies and institutions working on peace and security; on the other, we highlight experiences, capacities, and resources specific to the Italian system, which can contribute to the resolution of violent conflict.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Cover photo credit: Participants in an awareness raising session on UNSCR 1325 held in Sinjar, Iraq (YBDO; 2022).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of the final evaluation of the efforts that Un Ponte Per (UPP) and its network of partners—all of them civil society organizations (CSOs) based in Iraq, Italy, Lebanon, Libya or Tunisia—implemented to contribute to the advancement of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, from 2021 to early 2024.

The three projects implemented during this period—which included "Women Challenging War" (2021), "Women Waging Peace" (2022) and "Women Peacebuilders in Action" (2023-2024)—responded to important and well-known challenges. While the WPS Agenda was created 25 years old, with the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, its embrace in the MENA region has been slow and fraught with challenges. This is clear in the pace at which countries started adopting National Action Plans (NAPs) on WPS. NAPs—which were devised as national policies that formalized a state's commitments to implementing UNSCR 1325—started being adopted in 2005. By 2014, 48 countries had adopted a NAP: 23 in Europe, 13 in Sub-Saharan Africa, 7 in Asia and the Pacific, and only 1 in the MENA region. And if the period ushered in by the Arab Springs led to an acceleration in the region's embrace of the Agenda, the situation of women has remained overall fragile, their engagement often limited to the private sphere, or to issues that are considered appropriate for them—issues that rarely, if ever, include peace and security.

In the face of this, UPP and its partners sought to implement three key strategies. The first focused on experience-sharing and networking events. Under this strategy, partners were brought together for regular meetings, which served as opportunities to share relevant experiences about their work on peacebuilding and women empowerment. In 2023, regional meetings also became an opportunity to plan and strategize together. The second key strategy focused on raising awareness of the WPS Agenda through a localization approach. In the first project, the focus was on transferring knowledge from expert organizations to lesser experienced ones. In the latter project cycles, a locally focused approach was adopted: partners were given funds to realize activities in their areas of operation, usually training events benefitting additional cadres of potential champions. The third and last key strategy looked to support capacity-building and mobilization: these included actions to accompany the additional target groups engaged in training workshops, and support their mobilization on peacebuilding and reconciliation.

In terms of **effectiveness**, these strategies were effective, although challenges encountered during implementation—some internal to the projects, some external—also limited their impact.

On the positive side, the evaluation found that, thanks to the projects, the bases for a network were successfully built. A record of regional interactions and events attests to the fact that partner organizations have come together regularly and effectively. By creating a network, partners were then able to share (and learn from) each other. The network also created trust between the partners, whose knowledge was certainly strengthened. And knowledge led to increased capacity and confidence for engagement on the WPS Agenda.

This network has remained informal, a process that did not stop it from evolving—in terms of partnerships, scope and thematic focus. Informality, however, meant that growth was not accompanied by an evolution in governance structures, which represented a first challenge. The lack of a clear agreement on how funds were to be allocated, or how and when new members should be invited into the group created different expectations among members CSOs, and occasionally some resentment.

The main challenges, however, were given by the projects' limited resources and short funding cycles. The overall project budgets were always small. The funds that were received by project partners were even smaller. On top of this, there were long periods that passed between the approval of grants. This created a situation where the network became dormant and inactive for many months. Then, once grants were approved, there would be a rush to complete activities. External factors also represented a constant challenge, as multiple internal and regional crises erupted, which affected (but never stopped) the implementation of specific activities.

In terms of **impact**, the cumulative effect of these activities, and the results achieved through the projects, produced some level of impact. In particular, where partners conducted training sessions for members of their communities, or with potential peace champions, this helped to create a new level of beneficiaries, who themselves were then activated and mobilized to take part in peacebuilding efforts. Localization was the key to the success the partners had in achieving this level of results in their respective countries. Thanks to the projects, several partners were also able to launch advocacy efforts, which represented additional avenues for potential impact. In Iraq in particular, the projects allowed the partners to start engaging with stakeholders and within platforms working on the WPS Agenda, to get activated and take part in collective consultative and decision-making processes.

Overall, the projects' impact, as just described, has been positive, but also limited. And the limitations are primarily to be understood in terms of scope and in terms of partners. In both cases there were internal and external factors that accounted for them. The projects' impact was limited, first and foremost, because

the contexts in which partners operated were complex and deeply affected by multiple crises. And the projects did not operate at a scale where they could alter the effects of these crises. Impact was also affected by the partners' missions. Partners that saw the WPS Agenda as part of their mission were effectively motivated to mobilize. Those that did not were altogether more difficult to motivate.

Finally, in terms of **coherence,** the projects wanted to focus on how the implementation of the WPS Agenda could be strengthened in each country. In this respect, they had external coherence, and this was further consolidated by the partners' decision to focus on the participation pillar of UNSCR 1325, which provided ample flexibility in terms of the design of specific initiatives. External coherence was linked to partners' motivation to engage on the WPS Agenda, however, and this was not always the case. In Tunisia, for instance, the partner's knowledge was increased, but engagement did not follow. Lastly, internal coherence was high in the first project cycle, but it strained in the last two. While the localization process provided opportunities for ownership on paper, the implementation of specific activities that had to different significantly from one partner to another, and from one country to another, proved challenging under this criterion.

In conclusion, the efforts of UPP and its partners were extremely relevant for the challenges CSOs generally, and WLOs specifically, face in trying to influence the extent to which, and how, the WPS Agenda is implemented in their own countries. The informal, transnational network of CSOs that was created thanks to the projects was an effective vehicle for creating much-needed exchanges and the transfer of skills and knowledge from organizations that had already been working on the WPS Agenda for years, and organizations that were new to it. Several key results were achieved beyond these, but the extent to which the projects had impact was ultimately tied to the national contexts, and the desire of partners to be engaged on the WPS Agenda—or not.

Overall, there is much value in what the projects were able to achieve. They showed a new and original way in which the implementation of the WPS Agenda could be supported. And they fed a strongly felt desire for transnational exchanges and cooperation. In light of this, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Continue with the localization strategy, but within clearer objectives and priorities.** Giving ownership to partners, and allowing them to decide and then implement activities that made sense for the communities they served, was an effective strategy, which should be continued.

2. **Invest in establishing some governance protocols or mechanisms.** While the network remains informal, it should nevertheless have some clearly defined processes through which collective decisions can be taken.

3. **Focus on activating actors who are new to the WPS Agenda.** To the extent that the many CSOs remain excluded from, or unaware of, the Agenda, then such mobilization efforts should be continued.

4. **Continue supporting regional exchanges.** There remains a strong appetite for such exchanges, as they represent critical moments of reflection and opportunities for networking.

5. **Expand the network only when resources allow it.** Beyond clarifying the procedures and rules by which new members could be welcomed into the network, the latter's expansion should be tied to available resources.

6. **Leverage the role of Italian stakeholders.** Italian institutions can play important roles in the target countries. In such situations, it could be valuable to establish a policy dialogue with these institutions, dialogue that could then be useful for advocating changes to how the WPS Agenda is being implemented.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AP	Agency for Peacebuilding
CSO	Civil society organization
DAK	Yazidi Women Empowerment Organization
FFP	Fighters for Peace
LLAO	Libyan Legal Aid Organization
MAECI	*Ministero per gli affari esteri e per la cooperazione internazionale* (Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation)
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NAP	National Action Plan
NCLW	National Commission for Lebanese Women
PPM	Permanent Peace Movement
UN	United Nations
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
UPP	Un Ponte Per
WAP	Women's Action for Peace
WILPF	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
WLO	Women-led organization
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WRO	Women's rights organization
YBDO	Youth Bridge Development Organization
YPS	Youth, Peace and Security

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of the final evaluation of the efforts that Un Ponte Per (UPP) and its network of partners—all of them civil society organizations (CSOs) based in Iraq, Italy, Lebanon, Libya or Tunisia—implemented to contribute to advancing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, from 2021 to early 2024.

The evaluation was designed and implemented under the "Women's Action for Peace" (WAP) project, which aimed to support an informal, transnational network of CSOs working on the WPS Agenda, so that they could continue strengthening their skills and knowledge for peacebuilding and advocacy, supporting awareness raising around the Agenda in their respective communities, and successfully engaging policy- and decision-makers. UPP led these efforts, working with partners in all the target countries. These included: Fighters for Peace (FFP), Permanent Peace Movement (PPM) and the national chapter of the Women International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in Lebanon; the Yazidi Women Empowerment Organization (DAK) and the Youth Bridge Development Organization (YBDO) in Iraq; Association Lina Ben Mhenni in Tunisia; the Libyan Legal Aid Organization (LLAO) in Libya; and *Centro Studi Difesa Civile APS* in Italy.

In this context, the Agency for Peacebuilding (AP) was brought onboard the project to lead the design and completion of the evaluation. This represented a key learning activity, meant to support a reflection on what worked in the implementation of previous projects on the same theme—and what did not—and to make recommendations to shape ongoing and future efforts by UPP and all of its partners. Indeed, the goal of the evaluation has been to identify lessons learned to inform future efforts by UPP and all project partners to support women participation and empowerment on peace and security in the five countries. The scope of the evaluation thus included three projects that UPP implemented between 2021 and 2024, all with the same goal and group of partners, and all with the financial support of the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (*Ministero per gli affari esteri e per la cooperazione internazionale*, or MAECI).

The present report thus includes the findings from the evaluation. These are organized around three key criteria: effectiveness, impact and coherence. Additional sections describe the methodology used, a brief context background and an overview of the three projects. Finally, lessons learned, conclusions and recommendations for future actions are presented.

METHODOLOGY

The goal of the evaluation was to identify lessons learned to inform future efforts by UPP and all project partners to support women participation and empowerment on peace and security in the five target countries (Iraq, Italy, Lebanon, Libya and Tunisia). The evaluation's specific objectives were:

- To assess the projects' effectiveness and impact;

- To map the overarching project logic (or theory of change), including the main strategies employed by the implementing partners, and validate their contribution to impact; and

- To identify lessons learned and recommendations, related to the project, which can support future peacebuilding efforts in Iraq, Italy, Lebanon, Libya and Tunisia.

Table 1. Evaluation criteria and lines of inquiry

Criterion	Lines of inquiry
Effectiveness	What has been the project's theory of change? To what extent did the project achieve its expected results? What challenges did the project face and how were these addressed?
Impact	To what extent have CSOs supported through the project become more empowered? What is the contribution to impact made by the project? Did the project have any unexpected results (positive or negative)? What factors (internal and external to the project) have hindered or favoured impact? What lessons learned can inform the implementation of similar efforts in the future?
Coherence	To what extent do CSOs and stakeholders feel that the project was effectively aligned with national women empowerment policies? How did the project take into account and respond to the differences between contexts of implementation, and between implementing partners?

The evaluation methodology was participatory and theory-based. Participatory refers to how AP worked with staff and stakeholders from UPP and partners to identify lines of inquiry and priorities. Theory-based means that questions related to impact and effectiveness were framed in relation to the projects' theories of change. Evaluation activities included in-depth interviews with representatives from the project partners and participants to key activities, and a review of project and external documents. The evaluation did not encounter particular challenges. The sources of data were limited, yet they reflected the scope of efforts implemented under the project.

CONTEXT BACKGROUND

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda is 30 years old. Created in 2000 with the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, the Agenda was meant to transform the role of women in peace and security, giving them not only a seat at the tables where decisions were made, but also influence to shape those decisions. The WPS Agenda was universally embraced, generating resources and opportunities that allowed CSOs, governments and donors to make gains on all four pillars of UNSCR 1325–protection, prevention, participation and recovery. In many ways, the years from 2000 to 2020 marked the start of a golden era for women empowerment and participation programming, and positive effects soon followed. These included, for example, an increase in the number of elected women parliamentarians in many countries, and the creation or consolidation of a new wave of women-led organizations (WLOs) and women rights organizations (WROs).

If the WPS Agenda was advancing globally, its embrace in the MENA region was slower than in other regions and fraught with challenges. This is clear in the pace in which countries started adopting National Action Plans (NAPs) on WPS. NAPs–which were devised as national policies that formalized a state's commitments to implementing UNSCR 1325–started being adopted in 2005. By 2014, 48 countries had adopted a NAP: 23 in Europe, 13 in Sub-Saharan Africa, 7 in Asia and the Pacific, and only 1 in the MENA region (Iraq)[1]. Not only were Plans not being adopted in Arab countries as quickly as they were being adopted elsewhere: the national contexts across most of the region also continued to resist projects and initiatives that focused on women empowerment and participation. Only with the advent of the Arab Springs did the situation change. Popular movements from Tunisia to Syria–movements in which women often played an important role–toppled long-standing dictatorships and jump-started democratization efforts that finally allowed women to participate in civic and public life with more freedom than ever before.

The period that started in 2011 was characterized by waves of popular unrest and political upheaval, which created many opportunities for women participation. In countries like Tunisia, for instance, the fall of longtime dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali led to the liberalization of the civil society sector: thousands of CSOs were funded in just one or two years, including several WLOs and WROs representing a new, younger generation of Tunisian activists. New, rejuvenated civil society movements were launched also in Lebanon and in Iraq following the popular protest movement of 2019. Women's collective action was

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[1] "NAP Monitoring Site", WILPF (Accessed on 17 February 2025).

galvanized in Libya following the fall of that country's longtime dictator, Muhammad Ghaddafi. In Syria, women found new opportunities in several of the areas liberated from the control of Bashar al-Assad's Syrian Government. In several countries, women-led movements were able to score important successes in passing new legislation to protect women's rights.

Changes of such momentous scale created opportunities also to advance the WPS Agenda. Projects to promote women empowerment and participation sprung up ever more frequently, across most MENA countries. These projects brought the region on pace with what had been happening across the world. They created new centres of expertise on the WPS Agenda. New processes to adopt NAPs were launched almost immediately after the Arab Spring. They did not always proceed quickly, nor with the same pace in all countries. In Iraq, Lebanon and Tunisia, however, these processes were eventually successful.

As already mentioned, Iraq was the first country in the region to adopt a NAP, in 2014. At the time of writing, the country was on its second Plan, which covered the period from 2021 to 2024. Iraq's NAP focused on a total of six pillars: the canonical four plus ones on social and economic empowerment, and on legislation and law enforcement. Furthermore, the Iraqi plan was approved both at federal level, by the Iraqi national government, and by the Kurdistan Regional Government, underscoring the broad-based support the policy enjoyed. Around the Plan, institutions and CSOs also came together to create a system to facilitate exchanges and consultations. Tunisia adopted its NAP, the country's first, in 2018, covering a four-year period (2018-2022). The focus of Tunisia's Plan has been on the protection pillar, although increasing women's political participation has also been a key objective. The Plan was developed by the Ministry of Women, Family, Children and Seniors, but CSOs were also involved in consultations. Lebanon adopted its NAP, also the country's first, in 2019, covering the period from 2019 to 2022. The adoption of the plan took a long time, but its development was based on broad consultations: the process was led by the National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW), which relied on the support of a technical advisory board composed of government ministries, CSOs and relevant UN agencies. The Lebanese Plan's focus has been on ensuring the participation of women in decision-making at all levels.

The NAPs are an indication of the progress made by activists and groups supporting an ever-greater role for women in decision-making processes. Yet, key structural challenges have remained. This can be seen most vividly in the case of Libya. The country went through a process of liberalization in the immediate aftermath of Ghaddafi's fall. Initial steps were also taken to move the nation along a path of democratization. Civil strife quickly ensued, however, destabilizing nascent movements and institutions. The country was thus quickly locked into a new cycle of confrontation and violence, which impacted heavily on the role of women and WLOs. Whereas progress could be seen in other countries in the MENA region,

in Libya there was barely any. Prominent women activists were even targeted directly for their advocacy, and the space for civil society became heavily restricted. A NAP, while discussed at different levels, has never been adopted.

More in general, the situation of women remains fragile, their engagement often limited to the private sphere, or to issues that are considered appropriate for women—issues that do not include peace and security. Women in Iraq, Lebanon, Libya and Tunisia are routinely exposed to gender-based violence. Their participation in political or civic processes is regulated by institutions and norms that are male-dominated, and thus give little consideration to their voices or priorities. And while NAPs were approved in all these countries, their renewal is proving very slow and far from assured.

Indeed, while much progress has been made in relation to the WPS Agenda since 2011, there remain large gaps and needs. To begin with, while the processes of developing NAPs have given rise to consultative processes in many countries, these are not generally very inclusive. Participation often remains limited to large and established CSOs, normally based in capitals or large cities. Expertise can be similarly concentrated in specific cities and also in specific countries. Lebanon, for instance, has seen a larger share of WPS-themed projects (and also peacebuilding projects): as a consequence, the country has a larger cadre of specialists than what one can find in Iraq or Libya. Governments and CSOs have started to work together, but collaboration has remained squarely focused on technical issues: the content of NAPs, and progress towards agreed commitments, remains hostage to political processes that are, more often than not, deaf to the recommendations and priorities of CSOs. Lastly, the space for civic engagement has been under constant threat, in particular in the last five years, and even in countries, like Tunisia, which had liberalized the work of NGOs. And financial resources, never particularly generous, are now thinning, threatening the capacity of WLOs and WROs to continue operating. All these needs have justified continued efforts to advance the WPS Agenda in the MENA region.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECTS

Un Ponte per (UPP) has been working to support women's participation and leadership in the Middle East and North Africa for many years now. From 2021 to today, UPP's efforts have been implemented under three different projects, all supported by the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (*Ministero per gli affari esteri e per la cooperazione internazionale*, or MAECI). The three projects are:

Women Challenging War (WCW). This project was implemented from March to December 2021. The main goal of the project was to contribute to the implementation of the WPS Agenda in Iraq, Italy and Lebanon. The project's specific objectives also included: the strengthening of relationships and exchanges of best practices across countries and partner organizations; and support to the implementation of NAPs in the three countries. The project had two main results: (1) Empowerment of women and CSOs in the three countries, and (2) Increased participation (and acceptance) of women in decision-making processes through advocacy. Partners included: Fighters for Peace (FPP), Permanent Peace Movement (PPM), Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF Lebanon) in Lebanon, and Yezidi Women Empowerment Organization (DAK) and Youth Bridge Development Organization (YBDO) in Iraq, and UPP and *Centro Studi Difesa Civile APS* in Italy.

Women Waging Peace (WWP). This project was implemented from July to December 2022. The main goal of the project was to contribute to the implementation of the WPS Agenda in Iraq, Italy, Lebanon, Libya and Tunisia. The project's logic was the same as the one described for the WCW project. The specific objectives included: the strengthening of relationships and exchanges of best practices across countries and partner organizations; and support to the implementation of NAPs in the five countries. The project pursued the same two main results: (1) Empowerment of women and CSOs in the three countries, and (2) Increased participation (and acceptance) of women in decision-making processes through advocacy. Partners included: Fighters for Peace (FFP), Permanent Peace Movement (PPM), Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF Lebanon) in Lebanon; Yezidi Women Empowerment Organization (DAK) and Youth Bridge Development Organization (YBDO) in Iraq; Association Lina Ben Mhenni in Tunisia; Libyan Legal Aid Organization (LLAO) in Libya; and UPP, Centro Studi Difesa Civile APS and *Rete Italiana Giovani Pace e Sicurezza* in Italy.

Women Peacebuilders in Action (WPA). This project was implemented from June 2023 to January 2024. The main goal of the project was to contribute to the implementation of the WPS Agenda in Iraq, Italy, Lebanon, Libya and Tunisia. The project's logic was the same as the one described for the WCW and

WWP projects. The specific objectives included: the strengthening of relationships and exchanges of best practices across countries and partner organizations; and support to the implementation of NAPs in the five countries. The project pursued the same two main results: (1) Empowerment of women and CSOs in the three countries, and (2) Increased participation (and acceptance) of women in decision-making processes through advocacy. Partners included: Fighters for Peace (FFP) and Permanent Peace Movement (PPM) in Lebanon; Yezidi Women Empowerment Organization (DAK), Youth Bridge Development Organization (YBDO) and DOZ International in Iraq; Association Lina Ben Mhenni in Tunisia; Libyan Legal Aid Organization (LLAO) in Libya; and UPP and *Centro Studi Difesa Civile APS* in Italy.

All three projects shared a common vision, and a common logic—as will be shown later. They formed, as such, a cohesive programme, which could be evaluated as a coherent intervention.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

Effectiveness

Under this criterion, the evaluation sought to assess the extent to which the projects achieved their expected results. The evaluation also looked at any challenges encountered during implementation in an attempt to understand whether and how they affected results. This said, assessing the projects' effectiveness required a detailed description of expected results, going beyond the two that had been identified in the proposal design phases. To do this, the implementing partners were engaged in a process to design an overarching theory of change for the three projects, one which also included a detailed description of the actions implemented and the assumptions that could have affected the achievement of results. This section therefore starts with presenting the projects' theory of change, before looking at the achieved results and the challenges.

Overarching theory of change (and strategies)

At the onset of the evaluation, an effort was made to develop a comprehensive and detailed theory of change, which could capture the logic of the three projects. These were designed in continuity with each other, so they already shared many common elements, including the goal and main expected outcomes. However, the partners had never engaged in a process to develop a clear theory of change that could link planned actions to expected results, and results to impact. Thus, having this process as part of the evaluation had a double effect: first, it provided a key analytical framework through which to better assess the project's effectiveness; and secondly, it served as a useful reflection exercise, engaging implementing partners in a fruitful conversation about strategies and assumptions.

The theory of change behind the three projects proved to be coherent and clear. This is presented as a diagram in the following page. However, a brief description of the different elements is hereby also provided, as these elements were the focus of the evaluation's validation.

The actions of UPP and its partners can be articulated in three broad key strategies. Key strategy 1 focuses on experience sharing and networking events. Under this strategy, led by UPP, partners were brought together for regular meetings, which served as opportunities to share relevant experiences about their work on peacebuilding and women empowerment. In 2023, regional meetings also became an
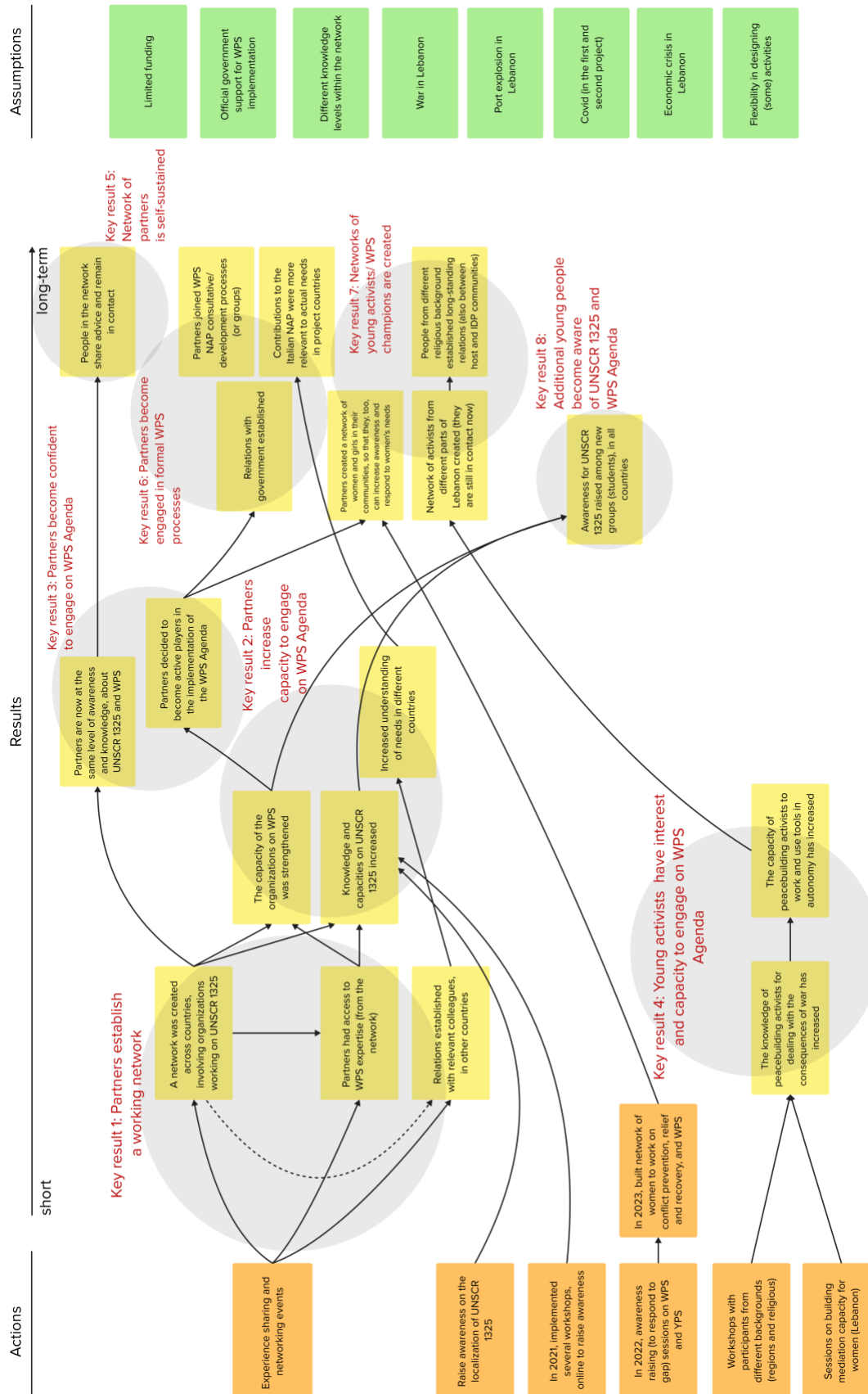
opportunity to plan and strategize together. Key strategy 2 focused on raising awareness of the WPS Agenda through a localization approach. In the first project, the focus was on transferring knowledge from expert organizations, like Lebanon's Permanent Peace Movement, to lesser experienced ones, such as DAK and YBO in Iraq, and also FFP in Lebanon. In the latter project cycles, a locally focused approach was adopted: partners were given funds to realize activities in their areas of operation, usually training events benefitting additional cadres of potential champions. Key strategy 3 looked to support capacity-building and mobilization: these include all actions meant to accompany the additional target groups engaged in training workshops, and support their mobilization on peacebuilding and reconciliation.

In the theory of change, the three key strategies are then meant to achieve a series of key results—eight in total—which, taken together, are expected to generate the project's intended impact. The key results are:

- Key result 1: Partners establish a working network.

- Key result 2: Partners increase their knowledge and capacity to engage on the WPS Agenda.

- Key result 3: Partners become confident to engage on the WPS Agenda.

- Key result 4: Partners become engaged in formal WPS consultations or platforms.

- Key result 5: An additional cadre of activists becomes aware of UNSCR 1325.

- Key result 6: Activists are mobilized and develop the capacity to engage on the WPS Agenda.

- Key result 7: Activists are networked and collaborate among themselves.

- Key result 8: The network of partners is self-sustained.

Lastly, four key assumptions in the theory of change have been identified, which could have affected the pathway to impact. The first assumption is that there is a difference in the levels of knowledge that partners have about the WPS Agenda, and that this difference is a positive factor, contributing to the projects' success. The second assumption is that there is civic space for partners to meaningfully engage in peacebuilding and reconciliation at the national level. The third assumption, linked to the second, is that the operating environment of non-profit organizations in all countries remains sufficiently free and secure. Finally, the fourth assumption is that there are adequate resources for implementing agreed plans and a level of flexibility within agreed commitments.

Diagram 1. The theory of change behind the projects

Diagram 1. The theory of change behind the projects

Assumptions
- Limited funding
- Official government support for WPS implementation
- Different knowledge levels within the network
- War in Lebanon
- Port explosion in Lebanon
- Covid (in the first and second project)
- Economic crisis in Lebanon
- Flexibility in designing (some) activities

Results

long-term

Key result 5: Network of partners is self-sustained

Key result 3: Partners become confident to engage on WPS Agenda

People in the network share advice and remain in contact

Key result 6: Partners become engaged in formal WPS processes

Partners joined WPS NAP consultative/ development processes (or groups)

Contributions to the Italian NAP were more relevant to actual needs in project countries

Relations with government established

Key result 7: Networks of young activists/ WPS champions are created

People from different religious background established long-standing relations (also between host and IDP communities)

Partners created a network of women and girls in their communities, so that they, too, can increase awareness and respond to women's needs

Network of activists from different parts of Lebanon created (they are still in contact now)

Key result 8: Additional young people become aware of UNSCR 1325 and WPS Agenda

Awareness for UNSCR 1325 raised among new groups (students), in all countries

Key result 2: Partners increase capacity to engage on WPS Agenda

Partners are now at the same level of awareness and knowledge, about UNSCR 1325 and WPS

Partners decided to become active players in the implementation of the WPS Agenda

Increased understanding of needs in different countries

The capacity of the organizations on WPS was strengthened

Knowledge and capacities on UNSCR 1325 increased

Key result 4: Young activists have interest and capacity to engage on WPS Agenda

The capacity of peacebuilding activists to work and use tools in autonomy has increased

The knowledge of peacebuilding activists for dealing with the consequences of war has increased

Key result 1: Partners establish a working network

A network was created across countries, involving organizations working on UNSCR 1325

Partners had access to WPS expertise (from the network)

Relations established with relevant colleagues, in other countries

short

Actions

Experience sharing and networking events

Raise awareness on the localization of UNSCR 1325

In 2021, implemented several workshops, online to raise awareness

In 2022, awareness raising (to respond to gap) sessions on WPS and YPS

In 2023, built network of women to work on conflict prevention, relief and recovery, and WPS

Workshops with participants from different backgrounds (regions and religious)

Sessions on building mediation capacity for women (Lebanon)

Evaluation report — Advancing the WPS Agenda in Iraq, Lebanon, Libya and Tunisia

Results achieved

With the theory of change clarified, the evaluation moved to assess whether and how expected results were achieved. Under the effectiveness criterion, attention was given to key results 1, 2, 3 and 5. These are the short and medium-term results that, in the project's logic, should be achieved before the remaining ones are. In this respect, key results 4, 6, 7 and 8 are impact-level results and are, as such, discussed in the section on impact.

Starting with key result 1, the evaluation found that, thanks to the projects, the bases for a network were successfully built. A record of regional interactions and events attests to the fact that partner organizations have come together regularly and effectively. By creating a network, partners were then able to share (and learn from) each other's experiences. The network, as it is, also creates trust between them. This has the additional effect of leading some of the partners to initiate collaborations also outside of the projects (though not all of them).

Given the importance of this result, it is useful to focus on some of the elements that were identified as the strengths of the network, and those identified as its weaknesses. The following are the strengths mentioned by partner representatives:

- Interaction between partners is very genuine and open;

- Partners have different specializations and levels of knowledge, which has been appreciated as the premise for useful exchanges; and

- There has been an effective and engaging sharing of relevant experiences, with positive effects on partners, which were articulated both on a personal as well as an organization level.

Several partner representatives highlighted the last point, suggesting that it was one of the most appreciated aspects of the network. As one person noted, "Even during Covid we managed to have a big conference in Beirut and the Iraqis came and they brought Yazidi survivors. The conference was really great, and the exchanges were great". Speaking of the exchange events, another partner representative said, "For me going there, it opened a forum and the opportunity to get access to communities". The connection between Iraqi and Lebanese partners appears to be particularly strong, which is not surprising considering that they represent the oldest network members.

Turning to the weaknesses, the following were the ones most often mentioned:

- Partners have different approaches—some are feminist organizations (like WILPF), others (like FFP) work only with former combatants—which has complicated interactions at times;

- Partners have different motivation, and some have little interest in engaging on the WPS Agenda;

- Partners operate in very different civic spaces, some of which have shrunk considerably, leading to challenges that are very diverse from one partner to the next;

- Some partners are small organizations with limited operational capacity; and

- There is some internal competition, linked to very limited financial resources.

If the bases of the network were built, this network would remain informal. The network became active and operational when funding became available, but it turned dormant in the periods between grants. Decisions about objectives, strategies and activities were taken within proposal design processes that were focused not on the network, but rather on the definition of project activities and outputs.

This process did not stop the network from evolving. Over the years, the group of organizations brought together has grown, as has the scope of activities. What started as a three-country project now works in five countries. Partners have also grown in numbers and in diversity. Thematically, too, the project evolved: it started as a women empowerment project, with a focus on using the opportunities that the WPS Agenda created, then it came to include a link with the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda, and then the integration of a localization approach.

The evolution in partnerships, scope and thematic focus has not, however, been accompanied by an evolution in governance structures, which is the main evidence for stating that the network remains informal. This is not necessarily a negative result. Building a network is a lengthy process, and a resource-intensive one. Considering the resources allocated to the projects, what UPP and its partners have done is therefore all the more remarkable. At the same time, the evolution has altered the original balance at the heart of the projects, and this has resulted in new challenges, which will be discussed below.

Turning now to key results 2 and 3, the knowledge of the partners has certainly been strengthened. For some, receiving this new knowledge had a deeply transformational, and impactful, effect which is further discussed in greater detail in the section on impact.

This result was particularly positive for the Iraqi partners, who joined the network with little to no prior knowledge of UNSCR 1325 or the WPS Agenda. For them, the project served as a unique opportunity

to catch up with other organizations. As one partner noted, "all partners were put on the same page" in relation to their knowledge of the WPS Agenda. Another partner representative added, "it was a good exchange to inform and train them, and also to receive their input from the start. Everyone was doing something that could be considered relevant [to the WPS Agenda], but they did not have the framework". For the Iraqi partners, this was the first project on UNSCR 1325 they had participated in. "We did not know anything", said the representative of one of these organizations, adding that "the project was an opportunity to be introduced to the WPS agenda, the details, and dig into the NAP of [different countries]".

Knowledge led to increased capacity and confidence for engagement. Again, the Iraqi partners represent the most vivid example of this change. They went from having nearly no knowledge to being actively engaged in regional and national consultative processes and platforms working on the WPS Agenda. Partners in other countries were also exposed to themes, related to the WPS Agenda, which were new and interesting to them. This is an aspect further discussed under the impact section of the report. This said, the project did not produce the same reactions in all partners, and some chose not to engage on the Agenda, for reasons that were primarily linked to their motivations.

Still, it is important to highlight that where partners gained knowledge that they found useful, they felt empowered to take part in WPS consultations and networks. This confirms the part of the projects' theory of change whereby the exchanges among partners (key strategy 1) produced increases in knowledge (key result 2) and in confidence (key result 3), and these changes in turn led to engagement (key result 4). Still, in Lebanon, partners were already engaging in those processes before the project. In Iraq they were not—and therefore the project's contribution is likely more significant for the Iraqi partners.

Challenges

Several challenges were mentioned, which affected project implementation. Most of these were successfully addressed, as demonstrated by the fact that all planned activities always took place, even during 2021, a year still affected by the limitations imposed by the COVID pandemic. However, the challenges put a low ceiling on what the project could do, and also caused some internal strains, which have affected how effectively the network has grown, especially in the last two project cycles.

The main challenges, mentioned by all partner representatives, were given by the projects' limited resources. The overall project budgets were always small. The funds that were received by project partners were even smaller. More often than not, there were not enough resources for organizations to

cover a paid position on their staff, to follow coordination. "We need more money", said one representative, adding that he could not "imagine a project of such importance and value, but the funds are only a few thousands. We should have more. Compared to the costs of war, what we get is nothing". This was a feeling echoed by others.

Linked to the challenge of limited resources was the challenge of the funding cycle. There were long periods that passed between the approval of grants. This created a situation where the network became dormant and inactive for many months, with very little contacts between the partners. Then, once grants were approved, there would be a rush to complete activities, sometimes in a window of no more than three or four months. Activities were all implemented according to agreed plans. Yet, the difficult funding cycle created a strain in the partnerships, and led to moments where coordination and communication could be difficult, as partners were asked to deliver activities very quickly, and as the lack of resources made it impossible to ramp up their operational capacity.

The governance of the network was also challenging. From the beginning, collective decision-making processes have been ad hoc and informal. These processes were never really formalized, as the network became active only when grants were approved—meaning that it was mainly engaged on project management and implementation. For the most part, the lack of formal governance mechanisms was not a challenge. Except when new partners were brought on board. This happened between the end of the first project and the start of the second, when the scope of the intervention was increased to five countries (adding Libya and Tunisia) and two new partners, and between the third project and the new one, where a new Lebanese partner was brought on board. The inclusion of these new partners altered the balance established in previous cycles. Again, activities were not affected, but an additional strain was put on the nascent network. Because processes related to the network's expansion were not structured, this made some partners feel that they did not have a say on the network's evolution. The inclusion of new partners has also affected funding allocations internal to the network, compounding the challenge of limited resources.

External factors represented a constant challenge. The last three years have been difficult for the entire Middle East and North Africa region. Lebanon has been mired in a social and political crisis since 2019—a crisis compounded by the Gaza war and the mounting escalation between Lebanese forces and Israel. Tunisia has also been going through a deep social and political crisis. The effect of these developments has been the shrinking of the operating environment for CSOs, which has affected all project partners. The complex and ongoing shifts in national and regional conflict dynamics also affected the way partners interacted with each other. Interactions were also deeply affected by the COVID pandemic, certainly in

2021 and to a lesser extent in 2022. The partners were effectively able to move all networking events online, and thus continue having conversations and exchanges. But the quality of these was different, and the inability to meet in presence was felt by everyone.

Lastly, there was a challenge with language and translation. UPP maintained control of the overall implementation of the projects, and for good reason. This said, its staff seldom could engage partners directly in Arabic. A similar challenge was found with the involvement of some experts. As with other challenges, this one was also dealt with effectively. Activities were successfully implemented, and relations among partners on the two sides of the Mediterranean were consolidated. This said the lack of Arabic-speaking staff at the level of overall project implementation made some interactions slower and strained at times. In the projects, there has not been a budget for translation, and that was clearly a specific challenge for coordination and also for some of the events.

As indicated time and again, the cumulative effect of these challenges did not affect the implementation of activities. The project has remained effective, in other words, as evidenced by the results achieved. What the challenges have done, however, is put a strain on the evolution of the network on the one side, and the scope of its efforts. On the first level, the strain has certainly affected the relations among partners, making coordinating and communication difficult at times. On the second level, the challenges constrained the ambition of project efforts, making it hard to tackle the external forces affecting peace in the five countries. This is further discussed in the next section.

Impact

As with effectiveness, the assessment of the impact of the projects was done against the theory of change. Specifically, impact was associated with key results 4 (Partners become engaged in formal WPS consultations or platforms), 6 (Activists are mobilized and develop the capacity to engage on WPS Agenda, or on peacebuilding more generally), 7 (Activists are networked and collaborate among themselves) and 8 (The network of partners is self-sustained). These are the results this section looks at, identifying, first, the contributions to their achievement made by the projects, and, secondly, the contributions (or limitations) that can be attributed to factors beyond the projects (external and internal).

Contributions by the projects

Starting with the mobilization of individuals outside of the partners—with key results 6 and 7, in other words—there is strong evidence of positive contributions by the projects. These contributions are linked specifically to the localization approach adopted in the latter project cycles.

Where partners conducted training sessions for members of communities (like YBDO in Sinjar), or with potential peace champions (as PPM did in Lebanon), this helped to create a new level of beneficiaries, who themselves were then activated and mobilized to take part in peacebuilding efforts. In Lebanon, for instance, the group of people trained thanks to the projects were able to respond to the needs raised by the most recent war: when hundreds of thousands of Lebanese citizens moved because of the start war in September, the group was so active in responding to the emergency needs, working with the displaced and with the civil society organizations helping them. The impact was also very visible in the case of the participants to the training sessions organized in Iraq. As one participant said, "I did not know about the WPS Agenda before [the project]. They were the first organization to give this training in Sinjar. When I took the training, I was then able to give the information to my beneficiaries, to the women who come to my organization's community centre".

Localization is the key to the success the partners have had in achieving these results in their respective countries. Through the project, the partners—which are grassroots organizations—were able to propose and carry forward the interventions that they wanted, and that they thought most relevant for their countries. "In the trainings", said a partner representative, "we emphasized two regions, both adjacent to the capital, and both deeply affected by the civil war, where the effects are not finished. There was never a complete transitional justice process, and there were missed opportunities. Having people [from different religious confessions] come together is a kind of Track III peacebuilding. That was a great success".

Quotes like this one show how partners were put at the centre of the project, and allowed to define what they needed. Because of this, the activities they chose were all very relevant, and that much more effective. The definition of the needs to target, and how to target them, often came through consultations: "people had heard about peacebuilding, but they did not know what women leadership was, or what transitional justice was", said a partner representative, adding that it was "based on our consultations and also based on requests from women and communities" that those issues were requested, and trainings eventually delivered.

This is all evidence validating the projects' theory of change in relation to mobilization: some partners became knowledgeable about peacebuilding and the WPS, they gained confidence and capacity, and, thanks to the localization approach, the seized on the opportunity to create events to pass that knowledge to more people, mobilizing them.

Turning to partners' engagement in WPS-related consultation and platforms—or, in other words, to key result 4—advocacy efforts happened thanks to the projects, and, where they did, they represented avenues for potential impact. In Iraq in particular, the projects allowed the partners in that country to start engaging with stakeholders and with platforms working on the WPS Agenda, to get activated and take part in collective decision-making processes. In Lebanon the projects supported some of the partners there to continue their advocacy and engagement efforts, though these had been ongoing even before the partners were brought together.

One notable contribution of the projects in terms of advocacy can be seen in Italy. In this case, the projects created opportunities for Italian participants to gather insights and perspectives, about the implementation of NAPs, which were then used in their own efforts to engage with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is the institution responsible for Italy's NAP. The policy dialogue with the donor has improved over the years, and while a big role must be attributed to external factors (see below), the projects likely made some contributions to this as well.

Finally, there is a relatively unexpected result, which can be attributed to the projects. Through the exchanges and the networking opportunities, some partners were exposed to new issues—issues like UNSCR 1325 and the WPS Agenda, but also transitional and reparative justice, positive masculinities, and the localization approach itself. Being exposed to these issues, which they found very interesting and relevant to their own contexts, has somewhat altered the trajectory of their work. Because of this, some of them have been trying to continue engaging on these issues. And they are building partnerships around these, which are independent from the projects.

Role of external and internal factors

The impact just described is positive, but it is also limited. And the limitations are primarily to be understood in terms of scope and in terms of partners. In both cases there were internal and external factors that accounted for them.

The projects' impact was limited, first and foremost, because the contexts in which partners operated were complex and deeply affected by multiple crises. The first project, for instance, was implemented in 2021, a year still deeply affected by the restrictions imposed by the COVID pandemic. Partners were able to shift most activities online, but this still affected the quality of interactions and what partners could achieve, in particular in terms of advocacy and the engagement of institutional stakeholders. Social and political crises also affected all of the countries where activities took place—and negatively so. The only exception is Iraq, where the security and political situation has somewhat improved in the last three years.

At the same time, in Iraq as in all other countries, the framework in which the WPS Agenda is developed and implemented is complex. It involves several national institutions. In some countries, like Iraq, it involves both national and regional institutions. Networking or consultative platforms often already exist, especially where NAPs have been officially approved, and they involve national institutions as well as international organizations and CSOs. There are then many different ongoing initiatives, which involve these different stakeholders in a context that is dynamic, often fragmented and even competitive. Working in these settings requires resources—to go to conferences and organize meetings, to monitor developments and contribute to consultations. Through the projects, partners were supported in these endeavours—in the case of Iraq, they were even empowered to engage. But engagement under the project remained limited on account of resources. Activities were effective, but they were also few. On their own, they were successful: all the positive findings in the effectiveness section remain valid. But the scope of the projects has certainly limited their contributions to impact.

Some external factors had positive effects on the projects' ability to achieve impact. In Iraq, a situation of greater stability, security-wise and politically, favoured the conditions under which people and organizations could mobilize to become more engaged. This happened with the project partners—YBO and DAK—and with the people whom they trained. External factors also accounted for the improved dialogue with the projects' donor, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Consultative processes between the Ministry and CSOs have improved in the last three years. This positive improvement allowed for a more participatory approach to the development of Italy fourth NAP, to which both Italian partners under the projects took part. The projects were integral factors behind this change, though there were others, including an effort by the Ministry to structure its dialogue with other stakeholders, including from civil society. The projects' contribution is likely small, but it is nevertheless there.

The achievement of impact was affected by one other factor, which was outside of the projects' control, but internal to the project partners: their missions. The projects ultimately aimed to mobilize partners to become more and better engaged in the implementation of the WPS Agenda. For some partners, this is

exactly what happened: for the Iraqi organizations, for instance, the projects were the first in a series of steps that resulted in their engagement in WPS-related consultative and networking processes. For some of the partners, however, the Agenda was of little interest. They were motivated to take part in the regional exchanges, and thus the networking activities, because of the general principles behind the Agenda, and the need to work for peacebuilding. Their motivation was altogether weaker when it came to engaging on specific elements of the Agenda, such as NAPs, or in policy dialogues, which they might have seen as ineffective to advance their missions. For these partners, the theory of change cannot be validated, and the main reason for this appears to be that those organizations have aims that make their engagement on specific elements of the WPS Agenda much more difficult.

Finally, there is one unintended factor, which should be closely monitored in the future. The organizations brought together under the projects have very diverse backgrounds and approaches to their work. Those approaches may work in their own contexts, but they may have unintended negative effects in other contexts. For example, in some countries being seen working on, or simply partnering with an organization that works on gender and with sexual minorities might be enough to justify pushback by stakeholders or communities. Partners are obviously interested in joining the network, and have benefitted hugely from it, but entering into a partnership could increase the risk of exposure, and this could lead to harm.

Coherence

Under this criterion, the last one assessed, the evaluation sought to understand how coherent the project has been to the policies defining the WPS Agenda (external coherence), and to the logic of the projects, as this has been described in the theory of change (internal coherence).

The projects had, in general, external coherence. They all wanted to focus on how the implementation of the WPS agenda could be strengthened in each country. A NAP, where this existed or was in the process of being adopted, represented a natural and easy entry point. External coherence was further consolidated by the partners' decision to focus on the participation pillar of UNSCR 1325, which provides ample flexibility in terms of the design of specific initiatives. In Iraq and Lebanon, this is indeed what happened. WPS-related consultative processes or platforms existed, which were taken into consideration in the design of activities. In these countries, the projects allowed local partners to gain more knowledge, and then use this knowledge to engage in policy-level dialogues. Overall, the WPS Agenda, and even the NAPs, are often broadly defined policies, and this allowed partner organizations to retain a good level of coherence even as they implemented very different activities in their own countries.

External coherence was linked to partners' motivation to engage on the WPS Agenda, however, and this was not always the case. In Tunisia, for instance, the partner's knowledge was increased, but engagement did not follow. In Lebanon, a similar situation was found with FFP. Here, again, a big role was played by those organizations' motivations.

Internal coherence was high in the first project cycle, but it strained in the last two. While the localization process provided ample opportunities for ownership on paper, the implementation of specific activities that had to different significantly from one partner to another, and from one country to another, proved challenging under this criterion. This was due to expectations more than capacities. As one person noted: "although from a local point of view, partner organisations and their projects provide support [related to women empowerment], it is also true that everyone interprets it in their own way, and not all of them have satisfactory results, this with respect to the WPS Agenda".

Photo: Participants in an awareness raising session on gender-based violence prevention, Iraq (DOZ, 2022).

LESSONS LEARNED

The evaluation identified a number of lessons learned, which should be carried into future efforts:

- **Governance mechanisms are important.** Even in an informal network, it is important to establish and then maintain certain balances—for instance, between partners, and between priorities—and the best way to do this is to invest in the development of governance mechanisms. In particular, all partners must be aware of the processes that may lead to the expansion of the network, or to the choice of specific objectives and priorities.

- **The intergenerational element amplifies impact.** For those organizations and, even more so, people who have been working on the WPS Agenda for a long time, engaging with new partners or in new countries can be a way to rekindle their enthusiasm. For those approaching the issue for the first time, it is a way to get access to new and relevant knowledge, and potentially resources. Having both experienced and novice organizations is, as such, a winning formula.

- **Common priorities should be set and clearly stated.** Even in an informal network, it is important to have common priorities, to provide clear direction to both new and old partners. Priorities should not only focus on thematic issues, but also on coordination and governance issues. Also, common priorities should be reviewed every time the network grows. As one partner noted, "I believe in this platform. The more we are, the greater the impact. But we need to understand what each of us wants to do on the WPS Agenda (and what we do not want to do)".

- **NAPs are a tool with important limitations.** NAPs are a key tool in the WPS Agenda, and they can represent very positive entry points for engagement. This said, they are also a very specific and technical tool, withing the WPS Agenda, which usually represents a compromise point between institutions that have committed to implementing UNSCR 1325 and CSOs willing to work with institutions on this front. NAPs can, as such, provide a limited framework for partners interested in societal, grassroots and radical change.

- **Beware of the rush.** The funding cycle has imposed a difficult rhythm for the implementation of the projects. Now, periods of high intensity are to be expected in any interventions. But the windows under some of the projects have been very small, and therefore the pressure to get things done has been very great. Where the rush has been excessive, a strain has been put on coordination and communication, and in general in the relations among network members. In thinking about the work plans, all efforts should be made to control this intensity, so that it does not endanger the central relations behind the projects.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The efforts of UPP and its partners were extremely relevant for the challenges CSOs generally, and WLOs specifically, face in trying to influence the extent to which, and how, the WPS Agenda is implemented in their own countries. The informal, transnational network of CSOs that was created thanks to the projects UPP that started in 2021 was also an effective vehicle for creating much-needed exchanges and the transfer of skills and knowledge from organizations that had already been working on the WPS Agenda for years, and organizations that were new to it. This feature was critical not only for achieving some of the projects' most positive results, but also for engendering a very positive, virtuous dynamic, which effectively motivated experts and novices alike.

Several key results were achieved beyond these, but the extent to which the projects had impact was ultimately tied to the national contexts, and the desire of partners to be engaged on the WPS Agenda— or not. Where the contexts created opportunities and partners were eager for a new avenue through which to exercise their voice, evidence of impact was easy to find. Where the contexts proved difficult and resistant to CSO-led advocacy, or where partners did not see the WPS Agenda as something on which they wanted to fully engage, evidence was less forthcoming. Also, the limited financial resources made available through the projects created a constant limit to the activities that partners could implement—and thus to the impact they could hope to achieve.

Overall, there is much value in what the projects were able to achieve. They showed a new and original way in which the implementation of the WPS Agenda could be supported. And they fed a strongly felt desire for transnational exchanges and cooperation. In light of this, the following recommendations are made, with the hope of providing actionable suggestions on how UPP's and partners' efforts could be improved in the future:

1. Continue with localization strategy, but within clearer objectives or priorities. Giving ownership to partners, and allowing them to decide and then implement activities that made sense for the communities they served, and in the context of the social and political dynamics they faced, was an effective strategy, which should be continued. At the same time, some parameters—related to the type of activities to implement—could be discussed at the network's level and decided beforehand, in order to ensure that internal coherence is strengthened.

2. Invest in establishing some governance protocols or mechanisms. While the network remains informal, it should nevertheless have some clearly defined processes through which collective decisions are taken. For instance, it should be clear to all network members how financial resources are to be allocated among the different activities to be proposed or implemented. And it should be clear to all how new members are invited into the network.

3. Focus on activating actors who are new to the WPS Agenda. The projects were very effective in activating the interest of new CSOS to be engaged on the WPS Agenda for the first time. And to the extent that the many CSOs remain excluded from, or unaware of, the Agenda, then such mobilization efforts should be continued. Newly established CSOs should have a chance to take part in already established consultative platforms. They should be given the knowledge and skills to influence these and other decision-making processes. Historically excluded groups, like CSOs working with disabled people or minorities, should also be empowered.

4. Continue supporting regional exchanges. There remains a strong appetite for such exchanges, as they represent critical moments of reflection and opportunities for networking. UPP should continue investing in these events, and partners should support them. The focus of these events should also be jointly agreed, to ensure that all partners are equally invested in their success.

5. Expand the network only when resources allow it. Beyond clarifying the procedures and rules by which new members could be welcomed into the network, the latter's expansion should be tied to available resources. Expanding when none are available may engender competition and put pressure on partners to deliver without adequate support.

6. Leverage the role of Italian stakeholders. Italian institutions can play important roles in the target countries, and have a good reputation among CSO stakeholders. This is, for instance, the case in Lebanon, where Italy has established strong bilateral ties, related to development cooperation, and where it leads the UN peacekeeping mission. In such situations, it could be valuable to establish a policy dialogue with Italian institutions, dialogue that could then be useful for advocating changes to how the WPS Agenda is being implemented.

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