FROM
TRANSITION
TO
TRANSFORMATION

Strengthening women's effective
participation in peacebuilding
and transitional justice processes:
insights from Colombia, Nepal,
and the Philippines.

"It would be desirable that, just as the weapons handed over by the FARC were melted down, the patriarchy could be burned and disappear!"

Socorro Corrales Carvajal

Acknowledgements

We recognise and thank the women and queer people from different communities, territories and organisations who participated in the Women's Peace Tables, and shared their views, pain, experiences, questions and examples of what peace means to them and what they want transformation to look like. Their contributions are the foundation of this publication, and of a significance that no text can fully capture.

We also thank our colleagues in the respective organisations for contributing to the preparation and implementation of the Women's Peace Tables projects, and for their efforts in creating spaces of listening, reflection, learning and transformation. Our gratitude also goes to everyone who supported us with their

expertise, and to networks and organisations, whose trust in us and collaboration was of great importance.

Together, everyone contributed to casting a spotlight on the rock-strewn roads of militarisation and patriarchy. Roads that we need to clear to live in peace.

We are grateful for the openness of everyone involved in this process of embarking on the journey of collectively writing this report.

This publication is intended to serve those who work towards a feminist transformative justice. We dedicate it to the women and LGBTIQ people who everyday work for social justice, peace and genuine security for all.

Brot
für die Welt

Content

Abbreviations and acronyms

BARMM
Bangsamoro Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao

BTA
Bangsamoro Transition Authority

BWC
Bangsamoro Women Commission

CAB
Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro

CEDAW
Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women

CEV
Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición (Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition)

COIDP
Commission on Investigation of Disappeared Persons

Comunitar
Corporación de Mujeres Ecofeministas

CPA
Comprehensive Peace Accord

CSO
Civil Society Organisation

ELN
Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army)

FAB
Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro

FARC-EP
Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Publo (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army)

GPH
Government of the Philippines

GZOPI
Gaston Z. Ortigas Peace Institute

ICG
International Contact Group

JEP
Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz (Special Jurisdiction for Peace)

LGBTIQ
Lesbian, gay, bi, trans, inter, queer

MCW
Magna Carta of Women

MILF
Moro Islamic Liberation Front

MNLF
Moro National Liberation Front

NAP
National Action Plan

NTJRCB
National Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission of the Bangsamoro

PWAG
PeaceWomen Across the Globe

RAP
Regional Action Plan

Ruta Pacífica
Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres

SGBV
Sexual and gender-based violence

SIVJRNR
Sistema Integral de Verdad, Justicia, Reparación y No Repetición (Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition). Known today as: Sistema Integral de Paz

TJRC
Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission

TRC
Truth and Reconciliation Commission

UBPD
Unidad de Búsqueda de Personas dadas por Desaparecidas (Unit for the Search of Missing Persons)

UNSCR
UN Security Council Resolution

WE ACT 1325
Women Engaged in Action 1325

WPS
Women, Peace, Security

WPT
Women's Peace Table

About this publication

Although women and marginalised groups are disproportionately affected by armed conflict, political fragility and extreme violence, their experiences, knowledge, skills and demands are significantly undervalued and under-utilised when transforming conflicts. Despite UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 guaranteeing the rights of women to participate in peace processes, women overwhelmingly continue to have limited access to mediation, decision-making and transitional justice mechanisms and processes. Consequently, gender norms, which exclude and discriminate against women, are reinforced, leading to the persistence of structural violence. However, peace processes present critical windows of opportunity to promote the formal recognition of women's rights and to change prevailing gender norms.

These windows of opportunity for transformation can be used by local, national, and international actors to address inequalities and injustices that have caused much of the violence that women and marginalised groups have suffered before and during armed conflict. These inequalities and injustices often continue in post-war periods and prevent women and marginalised groups from playing a constructive and prominent role in building restorative principles and transformative public values for peace consolidation.

In order to address the root causes of a conflict, there is not only a need for transitional justice but for an inclusive transformative justice. During peace processes, in which societies revisit and rebuild structures, institutions, procedures, normative and legal foundations for a new state of society, women and marginalised groups must have their voices heard and play active roles in the initiation and implementation of transformation.

To build momentum for a significant advancement of women's participation in conflict transformation, the project "Strengthening women's effective participation in conflict transformation in Colombia, Nepal and the Philippines", from which this publication results, implemented activities which stimulate change on the individual level of women from different backgrounds and also bring about change on the socio-political level by reaching out to key people with access to decision-making.

The project was initiated by PeaceWomen Across the Globe (PWAG) and implemented together with the Corporación de Mujeres Ecofeministas (Comunitar) in Colombia, Nagarik Aawaz in Nepal, and the Gaston Z. Ortigas Peace Institute (GZOPI) in the Philippines from July 2018 to June 2021. In addition to the project activities in the three "post-conflict" countries, the exchange of experiences among the implementing organisations was an important component of the project. As a network organisation that operates globally, it is one of PWAG's main objectives to promote the exchange of experiences among women engaged in peace globally and to foster cross-national learning processes. Although differences exist in the local and national conflict contexts as well as in the degree of gender-sensitivity of the transitional justice mechanisms in the peace processes in Colombia, Nepal and the Philippines, there are many similarities and common patterns, particularly regarding the effective participation of women, as this publication shows.

In all of the three contexts, a lack of political will to implement the peace agreements and to comply with human rights standards by both government authorities and rebel groups could be observed. Furthermore, the shrinking space for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), for example through security risks or new laws which can arbitrarily be used against CSOs and human-rights defenders, are hindering the work and advocacy campaigns of civil society and women's organisations. The Covid-19 pandemic has further aggravated this situation. Because of many other concerns that have emerged during the pandemic, duty-bearers and governments have been less receptive to actions on transitional justice and reconciliation. Furthermore, national budgets for the implementation of the peace agreements that were tight even before the pandemic, have partly been reallocated to respond to the humanitarian and health crises related to Covid-19.

This publication presents insights from Colombia, Nepal, and the Philippines in strengthening women's effective participation in formal peacebuilding processes from the perspective of feminist and women's organisations. Women are generally well represented in grassroots and civil society initiatives dealing with conflict prevention and transformation. Nevertheless, in societies where formal and informal power structures are male dominated – thus practically everywhere – women's access to decision-making structures and the possibilities to use the windows of opportunity for institutional and social transformation during transition are limited. Furthermore,

women in post-conflict societies, especially women from remote areas, tend to be familiar with the local traditions of conflict transformation but may know little about their political rights and responsibilities agreed on in the peace agreements. Yet, knowing about these rights and how to claim them is imperative to gain access to transitional and restorative justice mechanisms. What can the role be of CSOs to strengthen women's transformative participation in peace processes? How can women's demands be brought on to the political agenda? What are the promising strategies to hold duty-bearers accountable for the implementation of gender-sensitive transitional justice mechanisms? What are the possibilities of linking informal peace initiatives with official peace processes?

In this publication, lessons learned, findings and good practices from the projects in Colombia, Nepal, and the Philippines, and the joint learning process among the implementing organisations are summarised based on practical examples.

Structure of the publication

After an executive summary, the first chapter 1, Setting the scene, sheds light on the background of the project from which this publication results, gives a brief overview of the conflicts and women's engagement in and the status of the peace processes in Colombia, Nepal, and the Philippines as of August 2021.

The subsequent chapters 2, Gender-sensitive transitional justice processes; 3, Accounting for diversity in transitional justice processes; 4, Women's participation beyond representation; and 5, Addressing sexualised and gender-based violence, address some of the main challenges regarding the inclusivity of and women's participation in transitional justice processes. After a general introduction, the themes discussed in the chapters are illustrated with examples from the Colombian, Nepali and Philippine contexts. In chapters 2 and 3, practical examples from the projects are interwoven within the text; in chapters 4 and 5, the subchapter Experiences from the Women's Peace Tables demonstrates with examples how the respective issue was addressed in the project.

Chapter 6, Advocacy: From safe spaces to structural transformation, presents advocacy strategies used in the projects to contribute to making transitional justice processes transformative.

In the final chapter, 7, Concluding reflections on the Women's Peace Tables, we each share personal reflections on the projects in the respective contexts of Colombia, Nepal and the Philippines, and regarding the cross-national learning process. The chapter concludes with key takeaways and general implications for the future.

Executive summary

This report is founded on the experiences of and exchanges among conflict-affected women who participated in Women's Peace Tables in Colombia, Nepal and the Philippines. The overall project examined how peace processes can be used as windows of opportunity to make post-conflict transitional justice processes more inclusive and gender sensitive. The report offers insights into how including and amplifying the voices of women and marginalised groups in transitional justice can turn it into a transformative process for society as a whole.

The report draws on the experiences from these three different contexts to arrive at a shared understanding of how long-standing inequalities and injustices continue to be obstacles to the participation of women in post-conflict societies – and it offers practical steps for women's effective participation in peacebuilding.

The project "Strengthening women's effective participation in conflict transformation in Colombia, Nepal and the Philippines", from which this report has grown, is grounded in UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions that form the Women, Peace and Security agenda. PeaceWomen Across the Globe initiated the project and worked closely with the non-governmental partner organisations in the three countries. Corporación de Mujeres Ecofeministas, Nagarik Aawaz and the Gaston Z. Ortigas Peace Institute implemented the projects in Colombia, Nepal, and the Philippines respectively. This report draws from the project learnings of the three organisations and the exchange of experiences among them and PeaceWomen Across the Globe. It is a collaborative work.

Conflict-affected women gathered at Women's Peace Tables, a method to create safe spaces for sharing experiences, exchanging strategies and ideas, and for building networks. They were organised in remote rural areas, across regions and in capital cities. The aim: to get a comprehensive picture of how armed conflicts affected and continue to affect women, to give women and marginalised groups the opportunity to share their painful experiences of the past and to develop a common vision of a peaceful future, and to formulate their collective demands to decision-makers for a gender-sensitive, inclusive and lasting peace.

The key lessons from the projects in Colombia, Nepal and the Philippines include:

- Approaching peacebuilding and post-conflict transitional justice on multiple levels helps to bring women's voices and demands from local and regional communities to the attention of national decision-makers.

- Access to information and resources are a precondition for ensuring equal and meaningful participation of women in transitional justice processes. When women know the rights that they have been promised in the peace negotiations and have the resources to claim these rights, their agency is strengthened. They become important multipliers in their communities.

- Civil society organisations, including women's and feminist organisations, that build larger networks and act collectively are drivers of change. Together, they gain in strength and amplify the demands of conflict-affected women and marginalised groups. Collectively, they can hold decision-makers to account and push for the political will to implement peace agreements.

- For transitional justice to be truly transformative, it needs to address underlying structures of exclusion and to change systems of power. It has to be inclusive and recognise the wide range of experiences of women and marginalised groups during armed conflicts. Intersectionality and inclusivity are about more than "ticking boxes".

- Transitional justice is a long-term process that requires stamina and commitment to navigate the rocky path to transformative justice and sustainable peace. It demands the flexible adaption of peacebuilding projects and initiatives.

The results of the experiences from the Women's Peace Tables and the discussions among the partner organisations are captured in this report. They are complemented by good-practice examples from their respective projects and peacebuilding processes. Together, they offer readers not only insights into the three contexts but provide them with concrete examples of the opportunities and obstacles faced when turning UNSCR 1325 into a lived reality.

Women's Peace Table Biratnagar (top) and Dhangadi (bottom), Nepal, 2021. © Nagarik Aawaz

1. SETTING THE SCENE

The project: "Strengthening women's effective participation in conflict transformation in Colombia, Nepal and the Philippines"

The project "Strengthening women's effective participation in conflict transformation in Colombia, Nepal and the Philippines", from which this publication results, made use of the momentum of the ongoing peace processes to advance women's participation in conflict transformation. The project provided platforms for collective actions and the empowerment of women from different backgrounds, including conflict survivors, women from remote areas and, depending on the country, also indigenous and afro-descendant women and LGBTIQ people, to access transitional justice and reconciliation mechanisms. It also aimed to sensitise key decision-makers to the necessity of incorporating gender justice into policymaking.

Women's Peace Tables (WPTs), the method applied in this project, are events that offer safe spaces and a sense of mutual care that enable the sharing of experiences and the exchange of knowledge about women's human rights and transitional justice and reconciliation mechanisms. WPTs enable conflict-survivors to access resources and networks and empower conflict-affected women to claim their rights, to raise their voices and to carry their demands and lived experiences to decision-makers and duty-bearers through strategic dialogue.

The project included a mutual learning process involving the project organisations, allowing them to exchange the knowledge and experiences of women peace activists from the three countries. This publication presents the learning process, experiences and lessons learnt from the project that the organisations Comunitar in Colombia, Nagarik Aawaz in Nepal and the GZOPI in the Philippines conducted together with PeaceWomen Across the Globe from July 2018 to June 2021.

What are Women's Peace Tables?

Since 2015, PWAG and its local partner organisations have organised Women's Peace Tables with the aim of sustainably strengthening women's participation in peace processes and making their engagement in peacebuilding visible. During the pilot phase from 2015 to 2017, PWAG organised 60 WPTs around the world together with its partners. Originally, WPTs were conceived as complementary to formal peace processes, aiming to bring the voices and perspectives of women into negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction and recovery. The WPTs were designed in the format of an annual campaign, mainly in capital cities.

Based on the positive experiences and findings from the pilot phase, PWAG, together with Comunitar, Nagarik Aawaz, and the GZOPI, designed a longer-term WPT programme with annual local, regional and national WPTs. The goal is to reach more women from remote areas, to provide more space and time for in-depth exchange at smaller WPTs, and to carry the findings from the local and regional events to the national WPTs. The local and regional WPTs are two- to three-day events consisting of various sessions: psycho-social counselling in safe spaces, workshops and training on transitional justice mechanisms, development of advocacy strategies, and exchanges with decision-makers. The results, demands and findings developed at the local and regional WPTs are discussed in all countries at an annual national WPT with the participation of relevant stakeholders and used for further advocacy activities.

Corporación de Mujeres Ecofeministas – Comunitar, based in Popayán in the department of Cauca in Colombia, contributed to the increased political participation of indigenous, peasant, afro-descendant and mestizo women, as well as of the LGBTIQ population. The local WPTs were conducted in six departments; a national WPT was held annually. More than 750 women and LGBTIQ people participated in the WPTs. Comunitar is closely linked with Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, a feminist network organisation, and was therefore able to easily reach women in other departments. They also collaborated closely with the Colombian Truth Commission (CEV), which had difficulty or was unable to reach many conflict survivors from more remote places. Through the cooperation between the CEV and Comunitar, testimonies of conflict-affected women were brought to the Truth Commission that would otherwise not have been recorded.

Nagarik Aawaz, based in Kathmandu, Nepal, organised an annual local WPT in each of the seven provinces and a national one in Kathmandu. Nagarik Aawaz was aware that conflict-affected women from remote areas often did not have access to the transitional justice process. With the WPTs, their access to this process was improved and their voices, demands and lived experiences were brought into the transitional justice process. More than 1000 conflict-affected women participated in the WPTs in Nepal. With the slowing down of the transitional justice process and the rising frustration of participants, Nagarik Aawaz began to focus more on provincial and local political structures and policymakers. The WPTs were particularly important as they offered safe spaces for reflection.

Gaston Z. Ortigas Peace Institute – GZOPI, based in Manila, Philippines, worked with women peacebuilders to organise local WPTs in the three main areas of the Bangsamoro in the southern region of Mindanao and its islands. The local and national WPTs aimed to strengthen the role of women during the crucial transition period of the Bangsamoro region into the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Women peacebuilders expanded their knowledge about transitional justice, developed their agenda and strategies, and engaged decision-makers in key agencies and peace mechanisms locally, regionally and nationally. They had to prod the parties to act on the key recommendations of the Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission's (TJRC) Report, particularly regarding

the first step of creating a National Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission on the Bangsamoro (NTJRCB). Some of the WPTs also involved public forums as well as training sessions, reaching a total of more than 700 women from various sectors.

As an international network organisation **Peace Women Across the Globe – PWAG,** based in Bern, Switzerland, initiated the Women's Peace Table project and facilitated the cross-national exchange of experiences and a joint learning process between the partner organisations through regular online exchanges and a face-to-face meeting in Switzerland in 2019 and coordinated the work on this publication.

In each of the countries, there were delays because of the Covid-19 pandemic. In some cases, it was possible to conduct some WPTs online, depending on internet connectivity and the availability of electricity. Other factors, such as the increased care obligations due to the pandemic and the subsequent reduced availability for political engagement also affected the implementation of the WPTs. Where it was not possible to conduct meetings in smaller groups or online, the project was adapted. The objectives of the project were achieved despite the pandemic.

Women, Peace and Security

UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) was unanimously adopted by the UN Security Council in 2000. The landmark resolution marks the success of the advocacy and commitment of transnational feminist networks and women peace activists worldwide – in particular those from the Global South – for the formal recognition of the gendered impacts of conflict and the inclusion of women's perspectives into international security and peace policies. Resolution 1325 and nine follow-up resolutions together form the WPS agenda.

The agenda acknowledges different gendered experiences of armed conflicts, calls for women's participation in conflict prevention, resolution, peace pro-cesses and post-conflict reconstruction, and demands the protection of women, including from sexualised and gender-based violence, in armed conflict. The WPS agenda consists of four pillars: prevention, protection, participation, and relief and recovery.

For many women's rights organisations and peace activists, the WPS agenda is a useful tool to advocate for their demands. The agenda and its implementation, however, have also been subjected to critique[1] from feminist academics and practitioners alike. Points of critique include: an essentialist understanding of gender by focusing exclusively on women; understanding women as passive victims and as inherently peaceful and therefore better suited to participate in peace processes; a lack of enforceability of the agenda; or that WPS practice focuses mostly on quotas and does not lead to structural transformation.

"There's a danger that we are just changing the players and not the game. If we just add women and the system doesn't change, we will not change."

Thania Paffenholz, Director of the Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative [2]

A further critique relates to WPS in practice. More than 80 countries so far have developed National Action Plans (NAP) for the implementation of the agenda. Perhaps not surprisingly, the orientation that states give to the agenda correlates with their geopolitical location. While countries of the so-called Global South implement the agenda domestically, countries in the so-called Global North apply their NAPs almost exclusively to their foreign policy. Haastrup and Hagen (2020) argue that dominant WPS practices thus reinforce global racial power hierarchies.

Despite the relevance of these critiques, the agenda still has the potential to be used as a tool for transformative change. On a practical level, the examples in this publication might serve as positive instances. On a theoretical level, feminist scholars continue to work on how to use WPS in a transformative way, an example being Jamie Hagen's work on queering WPS (2016).

1   See for example: Basu, Soumita; Kirby, Paul; and Laura Shepherd (eds.) (2020): New Directions in Women, Peace and Security. Bristol: Bristol University Press.
2   International Peace Institute (2018).

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Context and peace process in Colombia

The conflict:

The signed peace agreement between the FARC-EP (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo) and the Colombian government at the end of 2016, was supposed to have put an end, after more than 50 years, to one of the longest and most violent armed conflicts. The armed conflict resulted in over 220,000 deaths and the displacement of more than 7 million people across the country. The Peace Agreement paved the way for overcoming major causes of conflict, including unequal distribution of land, the lack of opportunities for political participation and the solution to the problem of illicit drugs. The Peace Agreement includes a Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition (Sistema Integral de Verdad, Justicia, Reparación y No Repetición, SIVJRNR). The most important mechanisms of the SIVJRNR are a unit for the search of missing persons (Unidad de Búsqueda para Personas dadas por Desaparecidas, UBPD), a truth commission (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición, CEV) and a special jurisdiction for peace (Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz, JEP).

Women's engagement in the peace process:

The Colombian Peace Agreement sets an international example for women's involvement. At the beginning of the formal talks in Havana in 2012, only 5% of negotiators were female. Thanks to the effective mobilisation and advocacy of women's organisations, which culminated in the National Summit of Women and Peace in 2013, a gender sub-commission was created in 2014. Among other duties, it was given the task to review all documents issued as part of the peace process to ensure that they contained gender-sensitive language and provisions. By 2015, 20% of the government negotiating team and 43% of FARC-EP delegates were women.

The social movement of women and LGBTIQ people played a leading role in influencing the different moments of the peace process, from the dialogues to the final document of the Peace Agreement. The 2016 Peace Agreement is the first in the world to effectively integrate a gender approach and one of the most advanced in the recognition of the rights of women and the LGBTIQ community. The Agreement has an entire chapter devoted to gender. Furthermore, ethnic and gender perspectives are transversally integrated in the Agreement. For example, the document refers explicitly to women's rights to own land, includes special provisions for women's political participation and states that there will be no amnesty for crimes of sexual violence.

The gender perspective was highly contested in the run-up to the referendum of the Peace Agreement that took place in October 2016. After the rejection of the agreement by 50.2%, the gender perspective, and especially the rights of LGBTIQ people, were weakened in the final agreement.

Status of the transitional justice process:

The Colombian Agreement is the most comprehensive and inclusive peace agreement ever signed – but in its implementation it faces serious challenges. Social and political violence in the areas abandoned by the FARC-EP have increased as a result of growing drug trafficking, the formation of criminal groups, legal and illegal mining and the continued presence of armed groups like the ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional) and paramilitary groups. The Colombian state, for its part, is responding with an increased military presence in contested areas. This backdrop of new legal and illegal militarisation leads to persistent armed confrontations, massacres, new displacements, confinement of the civilian populations to their communities, exposure to crossfire, and an increase in other forms of violence such as selective assassinations and gender-based violence. A major problem is the precarious security situation for social movement actors and human rights defenders.

According to the Information System on Aggressions against Human Rights Defenders in Colombia, of the "Somos Defensores" Programme (2021), 180 individual aggressions against 176 human rights defenders[3] were committed from January to March 2021. An average of two aggressions per day were committed: murders, threats, attacks, arbitrary detentions, prosecutions, forced disappearances and information theft. 74% of the attacks (130 cases) were against men and 26% (46 cases) against women. The fact that the percentage of aggressions against women is lower than that of men, does not mean that women defenders are less at risk. It can be explained by the fact that in some areas women continue to occupy fewer representation and leadership roles.

Context and peace process in Nepal

The conflict:

After 10 years of violence, the conflict between the Maoist People's Movement and Nepali state forces ended in 2006. During the insurgency, 17,886 people were killed, 79,571 people were displaced, 1,530 people were disappeared, 8,935 became disabled, and 9,000 women were widowed (Nepal Institute for Policy Studies 2013: 2). Many women were sexually abused and physically tortured during that period. However, no exact data on those cases is available. The armed conflict ended after the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) between the Seven Party Alliance and the then Maoist party was signed in November 2006.

The conflict had a profound impact on gender relations. On the one hand, many women joined the Maoist forces. On the other hand, sexualised violence, especially against women, was used as a weapon of war by both the Maoists and the government forces. At the time of insurgency, many women lost their husbands, either because they were killed or forcibly disappeared, and faced severe gender-based violence. Many were compelled to leave their hometowns, became or were forced to become frontline combatants, leaving behind their roles in the family and in society as daughters, mothers, and wives.

3   In some cases, more than one type of aggression was committed against the same person.

4   In this report, we use both the term survivor and victim, recognising different views and preferences regarding these terms. On the one hand, we use both to account for people affected by sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) who define themselves as either victim or survivor. On the other hand, we also use victim, being aware of the negative connotations and attributions of passivity and helplessness, because the term victim was and is important to claim recognition and support from government. Not using the term victim can remove responsibility from those who are obliged to provide support.

Women's engagement in the peace process:

Nepal's peace process failed to include women, to acknowledge their contributions to system change, and to provide holistic justice to the conflict-affected women through a gender lens. Although 10 years of violent conflict in Nepal opened avenues towards gender equality, women were in effect excluded from the peace negotiations. Their access to the transitional justice procedures remains considerably restricted due to various barriers. During the period of post-conflict reintegration, most women who had been combatants resumed gendered roles and returned to the domestic realm.

Status of the transitional justice process:

The CPA did not specify the content and process of the peace process, nor did it define concrete goals. It was not until 2014, eight years after the signing of the CPA, that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission on Investigation of Disappeared Persons (COIDP) were established as instruments of transitional justice. Since then, the two commissions have conducted hearings throughout the country and collected around 60,000 testimonies. However, the work of the two commissions is perceived as inefficient and has been sharply criticised from various sides. Survivors, human rights organisations and international bodies, including the United Nations (UN), have criticised the lack of independence and impartiality of the two commissions, as well as the controversial amnesty regime of the transitional justice system that violates international law. Furthermore, the interim compensation policy, which regulates compensation for the victims[4] of the armed conflict, does not recognise women who faced sexual violence under the category of conflict victim. This means that to date these women have not received any compensation for what they have suffered.

Context and peace process in the Philippines / Mindanao

The conflict:

The Bangsamoro Transition in Mindanao, southern Philippines, is at a challenging moment in the implementation of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), signed in 2014. This Agreement between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) ended decades of struggles for self-determination that had claimed more than 100,000 lives. The Bangsamoro, the mostly Islamised indigenous peoples, became a minority in their Mindanao homeland due to the massive influx of Christian settlers from northern islands, starting in the first decade of the 20th century. After 17 years of difficult peace negotiations, it took five more years after the CAB was signed for a plebiscite and law to be passed to establish the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in March 2019. The transition government faces a significant challenge of actualising political and fiscal autonomy, while also working towards "normalisation"[5], or building of peaceful communities after the long-term conflict.

Women's engagement in the peace process:

Women played a unique role in the peace negotiations, with Miriam Coronel-Ferrer being the first woman chief negotiator in the world to sign a major peace agreement. She was joined by Yasmin Busran-Lao on the five-member government peace negotiating panel. Furthermore, 60% of their legal team, including its head, were women under the age of 30. This, to a certain extent, put pressure on the MILF, which eventually included two women on their technical panel who were in charge of some of the most critical negotiation issues. Beyond the women directly involved in the negotiations, women's organisations and networks engaged with and supported the peace negotiating panels. When negotiations broke down and armed clashes spread in 2003 and 2008, these groups were at the forefront of peace dialogues and rallies for ceasefire, while also providing humanitarian relief. After the signing of the Peace Agreement, these women's organisations intensively lobbied the two houses of Congress in support of the legislation that would most consistently translate the provisions of the Peace Agreement into law.

Women peace negotiators were able to push for the right of women to meaningful political participation in the Bangsamoro as one of the elements of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB). The FAB set the parameters of the final Agreement, consisting of four annex agreements. The Bangsamoro Organic Law that establishes the new autonomous government based on the FAB, explicitly supports gender mainstreaming in development and ensures a gender and development budget. While these provisions are not ground-breaking in the Philippine context, they set a good precedent in relation to the traditionally more conservative MILF perspective. Participation of women in the negotiations also opened doors for women to some significant positions in the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA). Thirteen women were appointed to the 80-member parliament, two hold cabinet positions, and one heads the Bangsamoro Women Commission (as of August 2021). The Minority floor leader and the Attorney General are women.

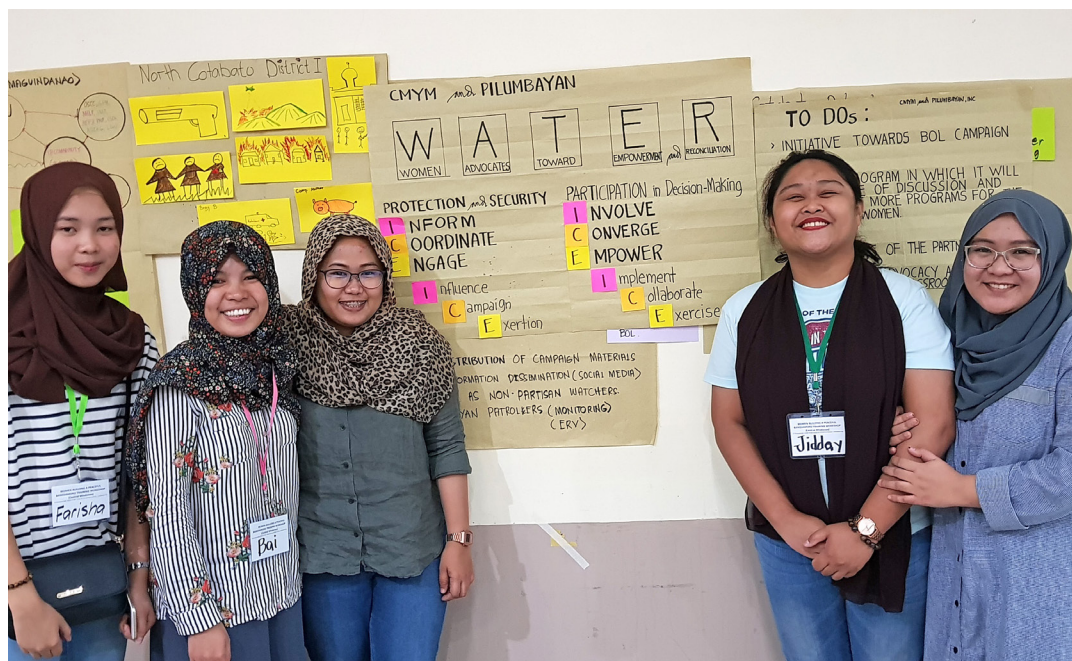### Status of the transitional justice process:

Transitional justice was recognised in the negotiation as one of the essential components of normalisation. A mechanism called the Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) was created by the peace negotiating panels to study and make recommendations on appropriate actions and mechanisms to address legitimate grievances, historical injustices and human rights violations suffered by the Bangsamoro people. They completed the TJRC Report in March 2016, with 90 recommendations. The main recommendation is the creation of a National Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission of the Bangsamoro (NTJRCB) for over-all implementation of the report's proposed actions. Unfortunately, there has been no progress in pursuing the key steps to create the body, with the government not actively advocating for the legislation on the NTJRCB.

In July 2021 the BTA leadership also focused on the proposed extension for the Bangsamoro Transition, which is scheduled to end by May 2022

5   The CAB includes two tracks for the peace process: the political track, which comprises the setting up of the autonomous government, and the so called "normalisation process", which consists of a combination of measures related to the decommissioning of former combatants, the establishment of a transitional justice process and the implementation of confidence-building initiatives.

with the election of the Bangsamoro Government. It has become increasingly evident that three years is insufficient to establish key changes in governance and to complete the normalisation processes, even without the major disruption brought by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the decision on a possible extension lies with the National Congress and the President. With a deadline for necessary legislation set for mid-year 2021, much hangs in the balance. At the time of finalising this publication, the decision has not yet been taken.

Armed clashes between the government military, with support from MILF forces, and other violent extremist groups continued into 2021, causing displacement and suffering to affected women and their communities.

Women's Peace Table Cotabato, Philippines, 2018. © GZOPI

Workshop on Women and Transitional Justice, Nuro, Upi, Maguindanao, Philippines, 2021. © Indigenous Women Resource Center

2. GENDER-SENSITIVE TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE PROCESSES

Transitional justice refers to "the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society's attempt to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation", as stated by the UN (2010: 2). Transitional justice mechanisms include truth seeking and memorialisation, reconciliation and reparation programmes, criminal and restorative justice, and institutional reforms. The context must be the starting point for the design of such measures.

Historically, the experiences and demands of women and survivors of gender-based violence have not been adequately addressed by transitional justice processes, nor have women had sufficient representation or opportunities for participation in decision-making bodies of peace processes. A review of peace agreements from 1990 to 2021 revealed that from a total of 956 agreements that deal with transitional justice issues, only 57 include gender-specific aspects (Bell et al. (PA-X Peace Agreements Database) 2021).

The exclusion of women from peace and transitional justice processes means that women's specific perspectives and priorities are not considered when renegotiating social contracts. This increases the risk that post-conflict political orders cement existing gender inequalities instead of transforming them. Yet peace processes offer critical opportunities to promote meaningful participation of women and girls and the formal recognition of women's rights at the structural level.

Gender-sensitivity in the Colombian, Nepali and Philippine peace processes

Nepal's peace process failed to analyse how political and gender-based violence affects women differently to men, and also failed to include women's experiences in the construction of a national narrative of conflict and reconciliation. Consequently, the wide-spread sexual violence that occurred during the armed conflict is still considered as a by-product of the armed conflict and not as the strategy of war that it was. Its investigation has not been a priority and perpetrators are hardly ever prosecuted, which has contributed to the promotion of impunity in the country. Efforts at reconciliation at the individual and community levels will not succeed without addressing the real grievances that women suffered in the time of war, as dealing with past atrocities is a crucial factor for sustainable peacebuilding.

In the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro **in the Philippines,** it was agreed to create an independent Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC), which was mandated to undertake a study and to make recommendations on how to promote healing and reconciliation of the different conflict-affected communities. For the study, the Commission had the support of a gender expert and conducted a listening process with conflict-affected communities. The report integrated gender dimensions of legitimate grievances, historical injustices, patterns of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and land dispossession. The recommendations respond to the main findings of the study. On reparations, the TJRC proposes basic services, health care and psychosocial trauma healing for women, ensuring gender responsiveness. On non-recurrence, the report encourages more recruitment of women into the security sector as well as integrating the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda into security concerns. The recommendations also take note of the roles that the regional and national Action Plans on WPS and the Bangsamoro Women Commission (BWC) play in the Bangsamoro transitional justice process.

Unfortunately, five years after the release of the TJRC report, no action has been taken on the key

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recommendations, particularly on the establishment of a national commission, the NTJRCB. To date, a Technical Working Group on Transitional Justice and Reconciliation has been set up by the two parties, but this body has still to agree on a roadmap for strategic next steps.

According to the **Colombian Peace Agreement** between the FARC-EP and the national government, the Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition (SIVJRNR) must guarantee that a gender approach is applied transversally and territorially[6]. Furthermore, the effects of the armed conflict on women must be revealed and brought to light.

An example of the commitment to the gender approach is the fact that the JEP and the UBPD are headed by women. Judge Patricia Linares was the first president of the JEP until November 2020, and lawyer Luz Marina Monzón continues to be President of the UBPD. These two entities, like the CEV, are autonomous and independent of the national government. Furthermore, the CEV has integrated a Gender Working Group (see p. 25). These are encouraging indicators but insufficient to address and position gender equality throughout the administration responsible for the implementation of the Peace Agreement. As shown by the November 2020 report of the Kroc Institute, which is responsible for the monitoring of the implementation of the Peace Agreement, the gender and ethnic perspectives have a slower implementation rate than the rest of the Agreement. Only 13 of the 122 gender measures have been fulfilled and there is systematic exclusion of the LGBTIQ population from implementing policies. (Iniciativa Barómetro 2020)

The creation of a Gender Working Group in the Truth Commission and the establishment of gender-sensitive processes to collect testimonies are crucial steps in the right direction. Nevertheless, it can detract from the responsibility of other mechanisms and institutions to integrate transforming gender-approaches in order to achieve the participation of women in these entities, to generate actions that contribute to social transformation, and to recognise the truth as a contribution to reparation and transitional justice. The CEV for example has no juridical function – the prosecution of perpetrators is within the mandate of the JEP. Survivors of SGBV not only want the atrocities they experienced to be recognised in the report of the Truth Commission, but also that they be recognised as crimes by those responsi-

ble. They demand that sexualised violence also be prosecuted in the framework of the JEP.

There are still serious gaps in implementing transformative gender approaches on the structural level, even in transitional justice processes that can be considered relatively successful. The main shortcomings regarding gender sensitivity include underreporting of certain violations, underrepresentation of sexual and gender-based crimes within criminal proceedings, and challenges and obstacles for women and marginalised groups to participate in transitional justice processes. In the following chapters, these aspects will be dealt with more in detail.

6   The word "territorial" refers to the notion of "territorial peace", which became popular during the peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP, when the territorial dimensions of the armed conflict were conceptualised as a central problem for the first time in a country characterised by uneven geographical development and deep regional disparities. The basic idea behind the concept of territorial peace is that peace should be built from below, involving the local civilian population in the territories through participatory processes to take into account specific local characteristics and needs.

The Gender Working Group of the Colombian Truth Commission

The 2016 Colombian Agreement is the first peace agreement in the world that included a gender focus, to guarantee the recognition of the rights of women and the LGBTIQ population. At the negotiation table and later in the agreement it was agreed to promote and main-stream a differential approach, including a gender approach in all of the Truth Commission's functions and actions. That paved the way for the Gender Working Group of the Truth Commission.

The CEV has no juridical function and neither investigates individual perpetrators nor prosecutes them. Its mandate is to find explana-tions for and causes of the violent events that occurred in the conflict and to determine collective and general responsibilities to better understand of the dynamics of the war. Regarding the Gender Working Group this means:

- Understanding the real dimensions of human rights violations, including their causes and consequences and their relationship with historical discrimination against women and LGBTIQ people, which have prevented the visibility of and attention to suffered harm.
- Highlighting human rights violations which are not openly dis-criminatory, but which have a different impact on men and women, for example regarding forced displacement, sexual violence, and sexual and reproductive health.
- Clarifying the link between different human rights violations based on gender-based violence, such as the denial of the right to justice in the case of sexual violence.
- Enriching the research by developing a vision of intersectionality and qualitative methodologies based on counter-hegemonic epistemologies.
- Building proposals for coexistence and non-repetition.

The Commission follows a territorial approach and established 28 local Houses of Truth in the regions most affected by the conflict. The territorial approach works in three ways: clarification of the truth, social dialogue and dissemination of the findings. The Commission's territorial teams have conducted nearly 700 interviews with survivors of SGBV and continue to be in contact with them to clarify the causes and dynamics of the atrocities. Within this group of victims, there are women ex-combatants who have approached the Truth Commission or have been interviewed by the mobile teams and terri-torial investigators. As of October 2020, 206 territorial actions have been carried out, focusing on educating, listening to, or inter-acting with women's organisations and LGBTIQ people to ensure their participation in the tools provided for each of the mission objectives and to guarantee that their commitment, voices and concerns are included in the construction of the truth and will be reflected in the final report.

Women's Peace Table Antioquia (top) and Chocó (bottom), Colombia, 2019. © Comunitar

3. ACCOUNTING FOR DIVERSITY IN TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE PROCESSES

Transitional justice processes need to be more than gender sensitive. They need to be accessible and reflective of the diversity of society as a whole, which means going beyond the inclusion of women. Inclusive transitional justice processes involve considering and addressing intersecting oppressions based on gender, race, class, caste, age, dis/ability or sexuality.

The Colombian, Nepali and Bangsamoro societies are, each in their own way, very diverse societies and share the fact of having a colonial past. Colombia is a country with geographically, culturally, ethnically and environmentally diverse territories, and an indigenous, afro-descendant, mestizo and white population. The Bangsamoro is home to Moro people, indigenous people and Christians. In Nepal, the many different ethnic and linguistic groups and the caste system play a major role.

Without paying special attention to inclusivity in peace processes, certain experiences, needs and demands are privileged over others. Conflict-affected populations are then viewed as one homogenous group, and only experiences of a dominant group are considered, whereby other perspectives and experiences are made invisible and are ignored.

Even when seemingly including a gender lens, "gender" is often understood in a narrow, stereotypical and binary sense as "women". Women are lumped together as if women were a homogenous group. Their diverse identities are not taken into account. By falling back on stereotypes, women are seen, for example, merely as passive victims or mothers. The understanding of gender as women does not account for the diverse and different lived experiences of women, which depends on their positionality in social hierarchies, such as based on race, caste or class. It also does not include masculinities and even less includes the realities of people of diverse genders and sexualities.

Making transitional justice processes more gender-sensitive and aiming at the transformation of structures of inequality requires going beyond the category of "women". It is necessary to apply a gender lens in conflict transformation processes. This involves the analysis and tackling of gendered power relations, taking into account both femininities and masculinities, going beyond a gender binary and recognising the heterogeneity of experiences. Taking an intersectional[7] approach is useful to account for diverse societies.

Taking an intersectional approach in the WPT projects

A major realisation in all three contexts was the lack of access to and information about the transitional justice mechanisms for women in remote areas. In **Colombia,** the effects of the armed conflict are not the same everywhere or for everyone. The coping strategies have depended on the levels of organisation and resistance in the communities. In some places, such as the departmental capitals, people have had access to information about the

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7   Intersectionality denotes the intertwining and interconnection of different forms of exploitation and oppression along categories of exclusion. The term intersectionality goes back to Kimberlé Crenshaw, who used it in 1989. The concept, however, was already used and described before, such as by the Combahee River Collective in 1977, which saw as their "[...] particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives."

Peace Agreement, especially about the SIVJRNR, and the women's participation processes have been relatively dynamic. Therefore, they have been able to attend training sessions, community workshops, and events organised by official institutions and civil society organisations, especially the processes led and organised by the CEV. Conversely, in places with a marked presence of illegal armed groups, a lack of access routes, higher levels of poverty and more accentuated social problems (which are neglected by the state), access to information is limited and processes are slower and, in some cases, non-existent. For these reasons, Comunitar prioritised these areas for the WPTs to allow women affected by the armed conflict to learn about the Peace Agreement and the gender approach, and to understand why their participation is important.

Similarly in **Nepal,** Nagarik Aawaz realised that the WPTs were inaccessible for many women from remote areas and that they were missing an intersectional perspective. The organisation thus expanded the WPTs from national to provincial level. Realising that WPTs in the provincial capitals were not accessible either, it therefore started to conduct WPTs on local levels too, with the help of seven conflict-affected women associated with the organisation since 2012. The women, called Women Peace Facilitators, have the lead for organising local WPTs, and continue to be in touch with communities in remote areas, so they can follow up after the WPT has taken place.

To reflect the societal diversity in the **Bangsamoro,** GZOPI included some non-Moro indigenous women as well as Christian settlers in their WPTs, along with Moro people. Furthermore, non-Moro participants from outside the BARMM were invited to the WPTs in an attempt to build more national awareness and support for the Bangsamoro peace process, particularly among women advocates. Moreover, together with WPT participants, GZOPI has been on an ongoing search for indigenous terms and the translation of the transitional justice terminology into local languages.

In **Colombia,** Comunitar includes criteria of ethnic, generational and geographical diversity, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression as well as diverse dis/abilities for participation in its WPTs. Women from different communities and with different backgrounds contribute their stories and experiences of both violence and pain and of resistance to the WPTs. Together they construct a collective truth of what happened in

their territories as a basis for achieving gender justice. They thereby recognise their differences and identify common positions and strategies to demand and defend peace in an all-encompassing way. But it is not only a matter of convening meetings applying criteria of diversity. It is also necessary to reflect, identify and raise awareness at the WPTs about why and how these differences intersect, and build an understanding of how the armed conflict exacerbated the oppression of women, not only because they are women, but due to multiple, intersecting discriminations, be they racist, heterosexist, or classist.

With the WPT participants, Comunitar analysed different mechanisms of power that manifest in different forms of violence that women experience. Intersectionality is not a panacea for resolving asymmetries and ending violence. But it is useful and "served to challenge the hegemonic model of the universal 'woman', and to understand the experiences of poor and racialised women as a product of the dynamic intersection of sex/gender, class and race in historically constructed contexts of domination." (Viveros Vigoya 2016: 8).[8]

8   PWAG's own translation from Spanish: "[...] ha servido para desafiar el modelo hegemónico de "La Mujer" universal, y para comprender las experiencias de las mujeres pobres y racializadas como producto de la intersección dinámica entre el sexo/ género, la clase y la raza en contextos de dominación construidos históricamente."

Historical timelines:
a tool for understanding transitional justice

In one of the exercises at the WPTs in the Philippines, GZOPI asked the participants to make a historical timeline to deepen their understanding of transitional justice in the country.

Working in groups based on their province or area, they first discussed the following questions:
1) What were the major injustices, human rights violations and conflicts that happened
   over the past in your province or area?
2) What were the movements or struggles of people in response to these situations?
3) How were you personally affected by these events?

National Women's Peace Table, Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines, 2019. © GZOPI

A large strip of craft paper had been placed on the wall of the workshop room. A timeline was drawn on the sheet and each decade marked, allowing for enough space. In the next step, representatives of the groups used marking pens or cards/post-it notes to place the significant events/developments/movements the groups had selected at the appropriate place on the timeline.

Then the representatives explained what they had placed on the historical timeline and the highlights of their group's discussion. In the plenary, participants discussed the women's insights and reflections on the historical timeline and the process of making it.

Therefore, rather than listen to lectures on the historical events that are relevant to the transitional justice processes, the women themselves identified the relevant events, particularly those meaningful to their experiences. They were able to grasp the role of communities not just as victims but also as agents of resistance. This exercise was also a good introduction to the later discussion on concepts of truth, memory, justice, and the role of women.

At the national Peace Table, the local historical timelines developed at the regional WPTs were consolidated into a Mindanao Historical Timeline from Women's Perspective.

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Exchange with representatives from local government, Women's Peace Table Biratnagar, Nepal, 2019. © Nagarik Aawaz

4. WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION BEYOND REPRESENTATION

The passing of UNSCR 1325 and its follow-up resolution has led to increasing acknowledgment of the importance of women's participation in peace processes. Yet 20 years after the landmark resolution was adopted, still only 2% of chief mediators and 9% of negotiators in formal peace processes were women. Only a minority of agreements mention gender equality or women's rights. This is even though it is known that the inclusion of women in peace processes has a positive influence on and shifts dynamics towards concluding talks and implementing agreements (UN Women 2015). A gender-sensitive transitional justice agenda furthermore offers an opportunity to further gender justice generally. Transitional justice processes usually address individual human rights violations but can also "address the context of inequality and injustice that gives rise to conflict, transforming the structures of inequality that underpin this violence." (UN Women 2018a: 1)

- **Nepal:** While there has been progress in terms of women's political participation in the federal parliament and on the local level, this has not changed the situation for women. Their voices are not included when important decisions are taken. They continue to face high levels of verbal and physical violence. In parliament, male members of parliament use misogynistic and sexist language towards the female members. This behaviour reflects prevailing social norms and oppression inherent in Nepal's patriarchal structures. Regarding the peace process, women tend to be seen solely as victims of war and are not acknowledged as agents of change.

- **Colombia:** Comunitar has observed that women have not been considered as actors for societal development. They are underrepre-

sented in leadership positions. Gender-based violence, femicide and poverty are widespread among women. These inequalities persist in institutional democracy and in the implementing structures of the Peace Agreement. A main obstacle that women face is the lack of security guarantees from the state. Women in general, and especially conflict-affected women and women community leaders, are at risk because the disarmament of the FARC-EP has led to the emergence of new armed groups, which in the absence of the state have taken over territorial control. Women human rights defenders are at imminent risk of assassinations intended to sanction and silence women who have dared to fight for their rights. This lack of state protection means that women's concerns and needs are not taken into account.

- **The Philippines:** Poverty, lack of basic services and poor education are major obstacles to women taking an active political role. Early marriage, with 15% of Philippine women being married under the age of 18 years, limit their future. The interpretation of some Islamic teachings to mean that women should not be in leadership positions, as well as the politics of elitism and patronage further complicate political participation. Dynastic control is widespread when it comes to elective positions in local governments or congressional areas – a problem not just in the Bangsamoro, but throughout the country. Women who do hold positions in local government, parties or congressional districts in the Bangsamoro in most cases hold them because of family connections and large financial expenditure.

Another major obstacle to women's participation that was specifically addressed at the WPTs is the

lack of access to information. Access to information is a necessary pre-condition to participate in official peace processes. The projects confirmed that often women did not know about the transitional justice mechanisms and how to access them. Thus, sharing information about the mechanisms was an important part of the WPTs.

Hence, there are many obstacles to the participation of women in peace processes and in politics, which differ according to context but also share similarities. Patriarchal societies, structural discrimination of women, gender stereotypes and gender-based violence, and the related multiple burdens women face, such as with regards to care work, are hindering factors everywhere. In addition, access to information and resources is an important precondition to enable participation.

Meaningful participation vs tokenism

However, even if women are participating in political or peace processes, the question remains, is this participation meaningful or mere tokenism? What is meant by meaningful participation? The term, often used to indicate "genuine" participation beyond representation, has become an empty signifier. Participation, and often also meaningful participation, can mean anything ranging from tokenistic to substantial contribution to a process. Giving "meaningful" meaning, describing what meaningful is, is not easy. While numerical parity is encouraging, it does not equate to transforming sexist and discriminatory views and to a commitment to women's rights and gender justice. Consequently, meaningful participation is more than just the mere representation of women. Rather, "it means that women's diverse interests and rights are fully reflected and included through sincere efforts to address the machinery of exclusion represented in the set of structural obstacles women are faced with" (Kvinna till Kvinna 2020: 9).

While there has been some success in including women's rights or gender aspects in legislation, such as the Magna Carta of Women in the Philippines, which includes far-reaching and detailed provisions towards compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Framework Agreement of the Bangsamoro (see pp. 34–35), or the Colombian Peace Agreement, the challenge lies in the implementation of respective laws and the guaranteeing of women's participation.

In **Colombia,** the Peace Agreement incorporated a gender approach thanks to the advocacy and pressure from the feminist movement and of women's, LGBTIQ, and human rights organisations. This gender approach is a structural one that aims to make real transformation possible, to eradicate power asymmetries, violence and other injustices that particularly affect the lives of women. Despite the structural gender focus, which resulted in more than 100 related provisions in the Peace Agreement, there is no guarantee for implementation. So far, there is scant compliance with the measures relating to gender.

What does this imply for our understanding of meaningful participation? It is obvious that the mere presence of a few women does not lead to any real transformation. However, while there is the need for structural analysis and the eradication of mechanisms of exclusion and discrimination, it is also imperative to go beyond paying lip service and actually implementing agreed on measures. Or, as Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls said: "We don't just need to be at the peace table. It's time to redesign the table." (UN Women 2019).

Experiences from the
Women's Peace Tables

The WPT project addresses the systematic exclusion of women and their perspectives. Women are not being recognised for the role they are already playing at the forefront of conflict transformation in communities. They are also not adequately represented in decision-making. One strategy of the WPTs is to strengthen women's participation in decision-making at local levels, which is often easier to achieve than at national levels.

Access to information

In the first project year, Comunitar became aware of a great lack of awareness among conflict-affected women in remote areas of Colombia about the different mechanisms of the Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition (SIVJRNR). In response, Comunitar developed a certification course on the SIVJRNR in cooperation with the Autonomous University of Cauca. The course was planned for 20 women who have an interest in learning about and supporting the processes being carried out within the framework of the SIVJRNR. The idea is that the participating women, who are social leaders within their communities, will replicate the course content in their areas and act as multipliers in their respective communities, thereby spreading information on the transitional justice process.

Amplifying the voices of conflict-affected women

The WPTs in the Nepalese provinces have contributed to significantly amplifying the voices of conflict-affected women. Through the training in WPTs, the women started to raise their voices and needs in front of the representatives of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. They also raised their concerns before local government and other relevant stakeholders of the provinces. Regional and national media have covered organised events and spread the voices of the women to the wider public. The women were increasingly recognised on local levels as agents of change, taking on leadership roles in conflict transformation. Importantly, they were able to change negative self-perceptions due to stigmatisation and recognise themselves as changemakers.

Negotiating for women's meaningful political participation in the Government of the Philippines and Moro Islamic Liberation Front Peace Agreement

Experiences of Yasmin Busran-Lao, member of the negotiation panel of the Government of the Philippines (GPH)

"For me, meaningful means having equal opportunity to influence decision-making at all levels. It is a right that is substantial, not a mere token."

Yasmin Busran-Lao, member GPH Panel

One of the major gains for women in the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) signed on 15 October 2012 by the negotiating panels of both the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is the provision on the right of women for meaningful political participation. The Basic Rights state: "(g) Right of women to meaningful political participation, and protection from all forms of violence."

The question often asked by those who were closely monitoring the progress of the peace talks is how did this come about? How easy or difficult was it for both parties to agree on this provision given the very low inclusion of gender-just statements in most peace agreements all over the world?

On the second day of the 25th Exploratory Talks on 14 February 2012, the GPH proposed the inclusion of the provision in the discussion on basic rights. Being a newbie on the GPH panel (I was just appointed a few weeks before) with several decades of experience in Muslim women's rights advocacy, I took this proposal and its eventual agreement by both parties as a promising opportunity for women to take meaningful leadership positions in the future Bangsamoro government.

As I expected, our counterparts from the MILF wanted further discussion on this matter by raising several questions, even recommending that the word "meaningful" be deleted and keep the rest of the sentence. The persistence of the GPH in pushing for the inclusion of the word dragged into the third day, prompting the facilitator, Tengku Dato Ab' Ghafar, to ask the members of the International Contact Group (ICG) to give their definitions.

The power of words: words at play at the negotiating table

The MILF asked what do we mean by meaningful? Does it mean substantial or maximum? At what level should that participation be? This is an excerpt of the dialogue among members of the ICG and members of the GPH and MILF panels:

"It is not just about equality, what is meaningful is defined on a case-to-case basis."
Johaira Wahab, Head GPH Legal Team

"Meaningful is best understood by its opposite, which is meaningless. One can have participation that is meaningless."
Prof. Miriam Coronel- Ferrer, Member GPH Panel

"Meaningful means genuine."
Christ Wright of UK, Member ICG

"'Equal participation' might be better."
David Gorman, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Member ICG

"That would mean privileging quantity over quality."
Emma Leslie, Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, Member ICG

"Women and men cannot have absolute equality because they are different physically, biologically and even emotionally."
Mohagher Iqbal, MILF Panel Chair

"Yes, we are different, biologically, socially. Men traditionally carried arms, women gave birth. But equality is not about sameness. It is about relationships founded on mutual respect and the dignity of both persons. It is not different from what the MILF wanted for the Bangsamoro – parity of esteem. The same "parity of esteem" or mutual respect that is desired between the majority and the minority population is desirable as well between men and women."

Prof. Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, Member GPH Panel

Reaching a compromise

In order to resolve this long discussion, GPH Chair Marvic Leonen suggested a compromise by proposing that both panels use meaningful as appreciated by the women in the GPH panel, and also based on the MILF's own understanding. He moved to retain the word. The MILF chair agreed.

This is how the "meaningful political participation of women" was negotiated in the GPH and MILF Peace Agreement which became part of the basic rights in the Bangsamoro, a right which I pray that the women of the Bangsamoro will exercise fully with courage, in peace and security.

Source: Coronel-Ferrer, Miriam (March 2014): Woman at the Talks. In: Kababaihan at Kapayapaan 1, 3–7.

Women's Peace Table Dhangadi (top) and Biratnagar (bottom), Nepal, 2021. © Nagarik Aawaz

5. ADDRESSING SEXUALISED AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Historically, the experiences of women and survivors of sexualised and gender-based violence (SGBV) have been silenced and not adequately addressed in transitional justice processes. Internationally, this began to change with the ad hoc international criminal tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. Both conflicts were marked by high levels of sexualised violence. In the aftermath, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court 1998 recognised "rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation, or any other forms of sexual violence or comparable gravity" as crimes against humanity (Article 7,1.g.). This was a historic success in international criminal law. After decades of struggles by activists, SGBV was recognised as a weapon of war.[9]

Everybody can be affected by SGBV, but due to power dynamics, women are disproportionally affected. Furthermore, it must be emphasised again that women, men, and gender minorities are not homogenous groups. Gender intersects with age, class, race, sexuality, and other systems of power, producing a multitude of masculinities and femininities which are differently affected in each context.

- In **Nepal** race, class, gender, and other social hierarchies are very much intertwined in its armed conflict. Women who faced sexual abuse and physical assault were mostly from marginalised, poor, ethnic and indigenous communities. Sexual violence was perpetrated by both warring parties who turned women's bodies into a battlefield of the armed conflict. Yet, survivors of sexual violence are still not recognised as victims of conflict in the interim compensation policies of the transitional justice mechanisms, despite years of struggle by groups of conflict-affected women and other civil society organisations.

- In the **Philippines,** the TJRC report had noted SGBV in reviewing the gendered dimensions of historical injustices and human rights violations, although these were not described in detail. The report recommends further investigation, in particular by the Subcommittee on Historical Injustice to be created under the NTJRCB.

- In the **Colombian** Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition, SGBV has been recognised as part of the armed conflict, used as a mechanism for territorial and social control. This form of violence has affected countless people, mostly women, and has generated enormous pain. The Gender Working Group of the CEV has the mandate to bring to light patterns of sexual violence that occurred during the armed conflict.

9   There is a difference between sexual and gender-based violence. Although sexualised violence is always a form of gender-based violence, not all gender-based violations are sexual violence. According to the International Center for Transitional Justice ICTJ, "gender-based violence refers to the motivation for or intended impact of the violation. [...] Examples of gender-based violations that are not forms of sexual violence include forced marriage, domestic violence, using children to inflict psychological trauma, threats of rape, and forced domestic work." (ICTJ 2018, Module 1: 36).

Obstacles to the inclusion of survivors of sexual violence in transitional justice processes

Although in recent years significant progress has been made in recognising SGBV, and especially sexualised violence, as a serious human rights violation during conflict, there are still many obstacles to including survivors of sexual violence in transitional justice processes, such as the under-reporting of certain violations, and policies and procedures that make it difficult for survivors to access transitional justice mechanisms.

Mainly the following barriers were observed in the project contexts, which correspond with general patterns:

- Reluctance to speak about sexual violence because of cultural stigma and shame. Social and family structures often hinder survivors reporting sexual violence, as a woman's body is considered part of the prestige of a family.

- Many women fear being re-victimised when speaking about the violence they experienced, of not being treated with respect, understanding, empathy – actions informed by "do no harm" principles. This fear of being judged and humiliated stops many women from giving testimony to transitional justice bodies, like truth commissions.

- Lack of gender-sensitive reporting mechanisms: In the WPTs in Nepal it became clear that a large number of women did not feel comfortable giving testimony to the Truth Commission. Most of the commissioners were men and there were no safe spaces where women could testify about the violence they had experienced. In addition, many women said that the perpetrators pressured them not to register the complaints. In Colombia, CEV commissioners were aware of these and other obstacles to women's reporting and put mechanisms in place to ensure that conditions were gender sensitive.

"In many cases, women bring up incidents related to sexual violence but not the sexual violence itself. For example, the girl who was raped in Comuna 8 and was found naked in a gully. When she arrived at the hospital the doctor only recorded the shot that left her blind! This happened all over the country. Therefore, everything that you are telling us is important. But you decide what is important for you in your testimony. For example, one of you can say I just want sexual violence to appear on my daughter's death certificate, or I want my sexual organs to be reconstructed."

CEV Commissioner Angela Salazar, WPT Antioquia-Cafetero, Colombia

Other forms of gendered violence

Efforts to include a gender lens in transitional justice processes have mostly concentrated on women's experiences with SGBV, with the consequence of silencing other gendered patterns and important aspects of women's experiences in conflict. This carries the risk that the issues that conflict-affected women may face in the post-conflict contexts will be ignored.

According to UN Women (2012) the most frequent violations experienced by women during conflicts are of a socio-economic nature. The fact that many transitional justice measures mainly address political and civil rights violations leads to the exclusion of women's interests and needs. For example, women whose husbands are disappeared often face many structural inequalities that keep them from performing basic financial and logistic tasks for their families, such as accessing family bank accounts, selling their homes, and registering their children for school.

In the Philippines, GZOPI observed during its engagement with conflict-affected women that the most common harm experienced by women in armed conflict is that of internal displacement and its accompanying miseries. This has happened on a massive scale in Mindanao: an estimated number of more than 900,000 persons were displaced in 2000, about 450,000 in 2003, then 600,000 in 2008. The Marawi City crisis in 2017 resulted in the evacuation of 450,000 persons. By 2021, 120,000 persons still have not been able to return. The displaced went to public evacuation centres or stayed with other relatives who sometimes house up to 10 additional families. This created harmful situations: lack of food, poor health and sanitation, lack of privacy and risk of sexual harassment and assault. There are reports of young girls being married off so they can claim a separate package of benefits from the government as a "family". Furthermore, forced prostitution[10] and trafficking emerge in these circumstances.

The economic hardship of women whose husbands were disappeared or have been killed during the armed conflict is also a big issue in Nepal and Colombia. Many of them are forced into sex-work to support their children.

These examples show how SGBV is interlinked with other forms of violence. Structural violence, social, political, and economic inequalities that women also face during relatively peaceful times increase their vulnerability during conflict and post-conflict periods. For a real transformation during transitional justice processes, root-causes of social, political, and economic inequalities must be addressed.

10 Some feminists in the Philippines prefer to use the term "prostituted women" rather than "sex workers" because they do not consider prostitution as work or a choice. We recognise that this is a debate globally. Within the author collective we have different views regarding this terminology. Some of us prefer to use the term sex work, because it highlights the labour context of sex work and is non-judgemental.

Experiences from the Women's Peace Tables

The importance of safe spaces

The creation of safe spaces for conflict-affected individuals and the community at large is imperative for sustainable peace. Women in particular need safe spaces, as they carry multiple burdens and are subjected to many kinds of violence but are seldomly heard.

Against this background, the WPTs in Colombia, Nepal and the Philippines have been conceived as safe spaces with the aim of creating platforms for conflict-affected women to exchange their experiences of resistance and resilience in a secure atmosphere of trust, to engage in the construction of peace and also to bring to light the pain that the armed conflict has caused them, without fear of stigmatisation.

Opening spaces and structures for sharing and understanding past suffering and structural violence is critical for enabling collective democratic changes in the structures of power.

1. Psycho-social support and healing trauma

A central component of the WPTs is the psychosocial support for the participants. Included in that is ensuring that no actions are taken that do harm by re-victimising, essentialising or reinforcing stereotypes.

At the WPTs in **Colombia,** the practice of listening, based on a comprehensive psycho-social approach in which women are able to voice the pain that resulted from sexualised violence, has been applied. In each encounter, Comunitar provided tools that contribute to the transformation and healing of these pains or traumas. These methods include the joint construction of mandalas, the creation of collective weavings, the path of truth (see p. 43), body recognition, guided relaxation sessions, the use of aromas and candles, and the sowing of plants. By verbalising the experienced atrocities, the participants were able to release emotional blockages that they had held for years. Often they carried feelings of guilt, as though they had been responsible for the crimes.

The psycho-social approach helped to empower women: they began to value themselves and to recognise how their actions of resistance allowed them to overcome their pain, how organising themselves contributed to building their social agency for the common good. The alliance between Comunitar, Ruta Pacífica and the CEV in the WPTs has left an important methodological, emotional and political legacy: empathy, respectful listening, unconditional belief in the victims, action without harm, and confidentiality. An important aspect of the WPTs is allowing the women to reflect on the importance of breaking the silence that hides the pain and the multiple negative impacts that they have suffered in a creative, healing and transformative way.

The exchanges with women who experienced similar atrocities made it easier for many participants to talk about their own experiences. In their day-to-day lives they often repress the memories of pain, as expressed in this statement of a WPT participant: "We don't dare to cry at home because we don't want to burden the family." Realising that they are not alone in their pain helped many participants to overcome their feelings of guilt.

There were similar experiences in the WPTs in **Nepal**. Nagarik Aawaz created the WPTs as spaces for women who faced direct impact of the armed conflict to support them in (re-)building meaningful relationships, airing their trauma, and expressing their narrative of war and their own lived experiences. The safe spaces created with the WPTs opened an avenue for conflict-affected women to move toward individual reconciliation by uttering their stories and developing their self-esteem. At the WPTs participants came to realise that they are among many other women who suffered during the armed conflict. These encounters changed their notion of victimhood: they have become changemakers and peace leaders.

> **"Here is a place where we can give free rein to our feelings. Grief – but also relief that we are not alone."**
>
> WPT participant, Cauca, Colombia

"I am a girl from the LGBTIQ population, a lesbian, and after what happened in the armed conflict, I had lost my dignity. I thought that because I had a different sexual orientation, that I was to blame for what had happened to me. I thought that because I was a lesbian, I didn't have the same rights as a heterosexual woman. I felt that my dignity was on the floor, and my self-esteem. But I started to get over that, and in the psycho-social workshops they made me understand that no matter my sexual orientation, I was still a normal woman like any other person and that I was not to blame for what had happened to me. Because of that I learned that I had to walk with my head held high despite what had happened to me and despite my sexual orientation."

WPT participant, Valle del Cauca, Colombia

"For us, what helps us most is participating in spaces such as these encounters, where many women have come in solidarity to help us heal our body, mind and spirit."

WPT participant Colombia

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2. Avoiding revictimisation

Many survivors are emotionally injured by the violations they suffered and could be at risk of being revictimised or retraumatised when speaking about what they have experienced or when providing their testimonies to truth commissions. The previous section has shown the importance of psycho-social support in a protected setting for counteracting revictimisation and retraumatisation. Consequently, it is essential that those who guide rehabilitation processes or interviews for transitional justice bodies prepare themselves psycho-emotionally and develop coping tools and resilience. Good practice in this regard is the Guide for addressing sexual violence (Manual de formación en enfoque psicosocial) produced by the Gender Working Group of the CEV (2018) in **Colombia**. This tool allows all those working in or collaborating with the Truth Commission to address sexual violence in a way that respects the rights of the survivors and leads to the identification of the root causes of this grave human rights violation.

How conflict survivors are addressed is another important aspect of preventing revictimisation. Women are still mainly considered as "passive victims" of conflicts and not considered as relevant actors for peacebuilding and social transformation in post-conflict societies. They frequently achieve visibility only for their suffering, not for past, actual, and potential roles as sources, initiators and agents of both conflict and peace. This narrative, also still prevailing in transitional justice bodies, needs to be changed.

In this spirit, the participants of the WPTs are addressed as agents of change. In dealing with the past, not only traumatic experiences and lived atrocities are remembered, but also stories of resistance, solidarity and community building which are shared and brought to light. The CEV is committed to this approach. For its final report, the Commission not only collected testimonies of grievance but also of resistance and agency: how women confronted the armed conflict and defended territories, and how they participated in rebuilding the torn social fabric.

3. Taking collective measures

The experiences of the WPTs also demonstrated the importance of collective measures for individual and collective rehabilitation. Through psycho-social collective actions, stories of pain and healing emerged. The participants recognised that the pain has been individual but also collective, that territories, communities and organisations have also been violated. Realising that other women suffered similar violence, that their stories are part of the common truth-seeking process and that a gender-sensitive approach is not only a women's issue, but also one of the whole society, was a key realisation for many participants.

The networks built or fostered trough the WPTs reinforced the feeling of not being alone and opened new perspectives for social transformation through mutual support and collective advocacy activities (see chapter 6).

Collective measures and interviews by transitional justice bodies can also encourage survivors to speak openly about their experiences because in safe group settings stigmatisation may diminish. In some of the WPTs in **Colombia**, which were organised in close cooperation with the CEV, the CEV implemented the methodology of collective interviews so that the women were able to make visible patterns of violence suffered in a given territory or period, without being obliged to give their individual testimony.

Walking the Path of Truth in Colombia

Re-uniting, sowing and reaping new and better seeds

Let the truth emerge so that the diversity of lives and the hope for a better world may remain!

In line with the psycho-social and ecofeminist approach of individual and cultural healing, Comunitar organised the WPTs outdoors in nature, for example on a farm. There, participants can pay homage to women's connection with the earth, the plants and the animals as symbols of rebirth and harvest. These places evoke and invoke the biodiversity of which women are part. Particularly for women who have spent their lives in rural areas, where the land and territories are part of the ancestral, family, community and cultural legacy that they lost during the conflict.

One of the participatory, psycho-social methods Comunitar used during the WPTs is the Path of Truth. This method allows the participants to interact with themselves and with others. The women walk together through the forest. Messages are attached to some trees, for example: "I have understood that I can't stay with this pain; I want to learn to forgive." The women can decide if they want to reflect on the message alone or share what that means for them with the group.

Walking the Path of Truth harmonises the inside with the outside, giving the women the opportunity to walk in each other's steps and to remake the paths of what women want and need in society. As the 2004 Kenyan Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai has said: "When we plant trees, we plant seeds of peace and hope." which translates

Women's Peace Table Popayán, Colombia, 2019. © Comunitar

into a kind of human ecology that sows new visions of relationships between the feminine and the masculine, between the human and the environment; in order to relearn and not submit; to share and distribute emotions and feelings, pains and dreams of our body and mind, which are never outside social and cultural contexts. As the women walked the path, they recognised that the armed conflict has damaged not only bodies, but also biodiversity. Each encounter along the Path of Truth was allusive to the symbols of harvesting and defending peace.

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Collaboration of transitional justice bodies with civil society organisations

Transitional justice mechanisms are generally limited in resources and operate under tight deadlines and pressure due to their expansive mandates. For example, the Colombian Truth Commission's mandate only has a term of three years (until November 2021). Outreach to civil society, particularly to human rights organisations, women's organisations, victim support groups and research institutions, can ease the burden and be of great support in getting access to hard-to-reach conflict survivors and with regards to trust-building measures. The Gender Working Group of the CEV has built alliances and agreements with over 20 women's and LGBTIQ organisations and research institutes, which have contributed by collecting testimonies, developing research and methodological inputs, and with personnel support.

Based on the CEV's alliance with Comunitar and the Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres national network, Comunitar has organised all the WPTs in **Colombia**. CEV commissioners, members of the Gender Working Group and documenters participated in all the WPTs and informed participants about their mandate, the CEV process and about the gender and ethnic focus of the Peace Agreement. Participants could choose to give their testimony to the CEV during the WPT on a voluntary base.

The CEV documenters noted that for the conflict-affected women it was easier to give their testimony during the WPT sessions than in other settings in which they collected testimonies. Because of the safe environment, the women appeared more relaxed while giving testimonies. They could pick up on what they had talked about in the group sessions. The women felt more protected, knowing that the other participants would support them after the interview was recorded.

Building bridges among divided societies

Due to the large-scale violence and the power imbalances during armed conflict and in its aftermath, communities often develop deep-rooted mistrust towards and sever their ties with each other. In the three contexts, mistrust towards transitional justice mechanisms can be witnessed. This mistrust is largely due to a lack of information about the mandates of transitional justice bodies, the poor implementation of peace agreements, the absence of participation mechanisms for conflict-affected communities, especially for marginalised groups, and of gender-sensitive approaches.

Safe spaces can facilitate dialogue between divided societies and counteract the prevailing uncertainty and fear during and in the aftermath of armed conflict. Safe spaces can bring divided communities together and support mutual understanding, conveying a sense of belonging, as well as acceptance and tolerance.

In the initial phase of the WPTs in Nepal, women who were victimised by the government and the Maoists didn't want to meet or sit together. They blamed each other, saying, "Your party killed my loved ones". After listening to the women's stories in the safe space of the WPTs, they all began to understand that every woman is suffering from grief and trauma. This sharing in safe spaces has contributed to their individual reconciliation and to building networks among previously divided women. As a consequence of the WPTs, the women have started a movement to fight for their rights.

"I am a government-side victim. I was put in jail for a year and was subjected to severe mental and physical pain. In the local election I was made a member of the executive council of the local government. I had never attended any programmes before where our issues and experiences were prioritised. The opportunity that I got to hear and share each other's story has made me realise that I am not alone in this journey."

WPT participant from Rolpa, Nepal

"I am an ex-combatant from Achham.
I have attended several programmes con-
ducted in the name of conflict-affected
women, but I found this space completely
different. This event specifically focuses
on our issues and listens to our voices.
I believe programmes like this, where
only conflict-affected community is at the
centre, helps in bringing all the victims
together and understand one another's
problems."

WPT participant from Achham, Nepal

6. ADVOCACY: FROM SAFE SPACES TO STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION

"We demand recognition. We demand our voices to be heard. We demand security. We demand a future for our children. We demand truth. And we demand justice, now!"

WPT participant from Surkhet, Nepal

The lack of state guarantees for the secure participation of women in advocacy activities means that their concerns and needs are not taken into account, thus perpetuating social conflicts. In addition, marginalisation and poverty contribute to restricting the building of spaces in which women's organisations can advocate for social transformation.

This is where the WPTs come in. The exchanges in the WPTs allow participants to recognise systemic and structural dimensions behind their personal experiences of violence and exclusion, to lift the silence and develop strategies to make voices heard, to give expression to one's own anger, to formulate demands and to enact them in the context of transitional justice processes.

As the previous chapter has shown, safe spaces play an important role in this, but are not enough to create real transformation. Cultural and structural change requires constructive debates in society as a whole. Women's demands must be visible in public spaces. Advocacy campaigns that succeed in challenging dominant narratives and

the lack of willingness of duty-bearers to implement transformative and gender-sensitive transitional justice process are key.

An example from Nepal: when the process of collecting the testimonies on what occurred during the war started, there were no safe spaces and counselling rooms for women to submit their testimonies. Many women returned to their communities with a feeling of fear and insecurity. At the WPTs conducted by Nagarik Awaaz, women demanded a counselling room from the transitional justice bodies, where they could submit their testimonies without fear. As a result of the pressure generated at the WPT, their demands were met. Other relevant advocacy practices from Colombia, Nepal and the Philippines are presented below.

Experiences from the Women's Peace Tables

Networks and collective action

Alliances among and networks of grassroot women's groups can greatly enhance advocacy by bringing together the strength and resources of diverse groups, using synergies, making women's voices heard and collectively claiming rights. As the experiences in the Philippines and Colombia have shown, aggregated voices of CSOs can be a powerful tool for change. The intense lobbying of grassroots women peace groups was and is essential for the inclusion of gender-sensitive approaches in the peace talks and for keeping feminist demands alive in the post-conflict transitional phase.

In this spirit, the WPTs were embedded in local and national networks in order to strengthen existing feminist alliances, making women's demands more visible and exerting more pressure on decision-makers.

In **Colombia** the main network for collective political thought and action was Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres. The national network was founded in response to the war in Colombia and operates nationally. More than 300 women's organisations and groups from nine departments are part of the network. In their communities and territories, these organisations weave alliances with other community initiatives that reinforce the importance of joining forces and the need for the Peace Agreement to be implemented in the territories in a participatory, inclusive and concerted way. In Cauca, Comunitar is the focal point of the Ruta Pacífica and coordinates the work of the network in the department. Ruta Pacífica is also part of the Women and Peace Summit (Cumbre de Mujeres y Paz), made up of eight collectives of women's organisations that defend women's rights. The Summit has helped highlight women's demands and their needs, which in turn has contributed to the recognition of women's rights on the national level. By embedding the WPTs in broader network alliances, the findings and demands from the local WPTs have flowed into regional and national advocacy activities and vice versa. It has been possible to strengthen ties between women from different organisations and regions – ties that contribute to the development of advocacy actions and increase the enforceability of rights. The ties also help to carry out actions that contribute to seeking peace and truth and to empower women's grassroots groups. The groups base their advocacy on the Peace Agreement and the prioritisation of lines of action among the different collectives that help to depatriarchalise and decolonise public discourse and to transform the perceptions and practices that harm women's bodies and lives.

In the **Philippines,** the relevant network for linking the WPTs with broader national advocacy activities was Women Engaged in Action on 1325 (WE ACT 1325). Nationwide, the network comprises about 40 women's, peace and human rights organisations and was initially formed to engage duty-bearers on the implementation of the National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325. GZOPI helped to convene WE ACT 1325 and has been serving as its secretariat since 2016. The network provides an important forum to study the CAB from a feminist perspective, both in and outside the Bangsamoro. Moreover, it supported the women negotiators in both the GPH and the MILF, accompanying them as they worked for women's issues in the CAB and lobbied the House of Representatives and Senate for gender provisions in the Bangsamoro Organic Law. The endorsement of women peace groups from all over the country brought the Bangsamoro peace process to a national constituency. The lobbying that non-Bangsamoro women did with their district legislators further boosted acceptance and confidence in the new autonomous government.

The WPTs involved coordination with WE ACT 1325 to further develop policy positions of women's organisations into a Women's Agenda for Peace and Justice in the Bangsamoro. In particular, proposals for women's roles and priorities on transitional justice and reconciliation were added to earlier drafts of the Women's Bangsamoro Agenda, covering the protection of women and prevention of violence, the electoral and political systems and participatory mechanisms, socioeconomic development, and normalisation. These issues were discussed in the local WPTs and affirmed and consolidated during the National Conference on the Women's Agenda for Peace and Justice in the Bangsamoro in November 2019. The WPTs and WE ACT 1325 also successfully lobbied the Bangsamoro parliament or BTA for a law creating a more powerful and inclusive Bangsamoro Women Commission (BWC). The BWC as the regional machinery on women has the mandate to pursue gender and development mainstreaming with agencies and local governments in the BARMM.

"My husband was disappeared. Since his disappearance, I have been working for conflict-affected women to ensure their rights and fight for their justice. In our locality, we organised a meeting with the head of the municipality to discuss the situation of the conflict-affected women and to know where they stand in the current context. I have formed a committee of conflict-affected women after being nominated as the chairperson. Our committee had requested to paste the pictures of the dead and the disappeared on the walls of the ward, thinking even though they do not exist they are still remembered."

WPT participant from Baglung, Nepal

In **Nepal,** through the exchanges at the WPTs, conflict-affected women started to form regional networks to unite and strengthen their voices, putting pressure on local government authorities to continue the transitional justice process in due time.

UNSCR 1325 as a tool for advocacy

The adoption of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) in 2000 and the nine follow-up resolutions was a great victory for women's rights activists and a milestone in the recognition,

legitimisation, and promotion of women as actors in conflict transformation and peacebuilding. Yet, the review of the status of its implementation on the occasion of the 20th anniversary in 2020 was sobering. The participation of women in peace processes has barely increased. Women often play only a temporary or symbolic role without meaningful inclusion or diversity and without the possibility of influencing transformative justice. Obstacles and limits also lie in the fact that UNSCR 1325 does not prescribe concrete ways for states to implement and carry out the binding decision of the Security Council. Their implementation is not legally enforceable.

If states and groups responsible for crimes against women do not comply with the recommendations of the resolution, few substantial results will be achieved. In many contexts there is a lack of political will, accountability and resources, as well as institutional barriers to guarantee effective protection, justice and avenues for the meaningful participation of women.

Despite multiple limitations, the WPS agenda can be an effective advocacy tool to press for the recognition of women survivors and foster women's participation, as examples from Colombia, Nepal and the Philippines show.

In **Colombia,** UNSCR 1325 was an important reference in the mobilisation of survivors', feminist, women's, and human right's organisations for women's meaningful inclusion in the peace negotiations and the final agreement. The framework of the resolution enabled organised women to demand the incorporation of a gender perspective in the regulations for transition in Colombia, which, without being fully complied with, has slowly increased public awareness of women's demands for justice. A palpable example of these effects is the signed Peace Agreement with a differential approach in which gender, territorial and ethnic issues were considered and incorporated. The gender focus of the Agreement provides a frame of reference to demand women's participation in political life. Furthermore, the resolution helped women's and feminist organisations to make more insistent demands for peace on the local level, to raise awareness of violence against women, to demand that women survivors are acknowledged, and to call upon the state for protection.

In the WPTs, the participants reflected on the gender approach of the Peace Agreement in order to think about a political, and organisational appropriation of the approach in the implementation of the Agreement. They also wanted to understand how peace could transform sexist, colonialist and racist perceptions, which have made the work of women to be considered inferior. In this process they learned to exert influence and to demand women's rights in organisations, families, communities, territories, and institutions with the aim of expanding and radicalising democracy beyond the numerical parity between women and men.

Yet, as with other provisions, laws, and nominal mechanisms for the protection of women, Colombia does not comply with the recommendations of UNSCR 1325. In fact, women do not enjoy protection and justice.

To become an effective tool, the Women, Peace and Security Agenda must move beyond rhetoric and be woven into actionable policy on national and local levels, for example in National and Local Action Plans and be linked with CEDAW, a binding multilateral instrument.

In the **Philippines,** women CSOs had pushed the collaborative effort with key government agencies to develop a National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 and 1820. However, when the first NAP WPS for 2010–2015 was launched in March 2010, the National Steering Committee created for the NAP included government entities only. The women CSO leaders therefore decided to form the WE ACT 1325 network among themselves to engage in implementation and monitoring of the NAP WPS. The current NAP WPS for the years 2016–2022 builds on the first version and identifies updated indicators on actions and outcomes for UNSCRs 1325 and 1820 in the Philippine context. A more powerful legal document that bolsters the NAP WPS is the Magna Carta of Women (MCW), a law passed in 2009 to ensure compliance with CEDAW. The MCW integrates language from UNSCR 1325 and mandates many detailed actions for the rights and empowerment of women, as well as the institutional mechanisms to be established. It requires all government entities at national and local levels to allocate a minimum of five percent of their budget to implement their Gender and Development plan and projects. This provides a source of possible funding for projects on WPS by all agencies and local governments.

The Bangsamoro Women's Commission has also drafted the Regional Action Plan (RAP) on WPS for the Bangsamoro for 2020–2022 and is in the process of consultations to create the BARMM Gender and Development Code. A significant development is that both the NAP WPS and the RAP WPS have at least one major action point (out of 17 actions) focused on transitional justice. In this positive context, the local WPTs and national conferences in the Philippines included reviews of the NAP WPS and the RAP WPS, and gave space for engagement with key leaders of the NAP WPS National Steering Committee and the BWC.

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Influencing political decision-making: holding duty-bearers accountable

Women are generally well represented in grass-roots and civil society initiatives dealing with conflict prevention, conflict transformation, and peace-building. Nevertheless, in societies where formal and informal power structures are male dominated – thus practically everywhere – structural factors limit women's access to decision-making bodies and their options for using the transition period for institutional and social transformation.

Advocacy and engagement with key actors, holding them accountable and linking informal peace initiatives with official transitional justice processes, are promising strategies. Holding the government and other duty-bearers accountable is not only essential for the realisation of citizens' rights but also contribute to building trust in official peace processes and preventing further conflict.

How can CSOs influence and strengthen the meaningful participation of women in transitional justice processes though cooperation with key-stakeholders and official bodies?

1. Engaging with duty-bearers

The precondition for the meaningful participation in transitional justice processes and the engagement with key stakeholders is knowledge about existing mechanisms: how they function, where the right places are to address demands, and what the effective ways are to voice demands and concerns. Therefore, all the WPTs included tailored training sessions for the participants.

For example, in the **Philippines** WPT participants gained additional knowledge on transitional justice and reconciliation frameworks, such as the Dealing with the Past approach used by the TJRC, particularly from lectures by convenors of the Independent Working Group on Transitional Justice.

In **Nepal,** the women were trained to facilitate the formal sessions with government authorities. Through training and by giving the conflict-affected women the lead in sessions with government authorities, ownership of the project and leadership of conflict-affected women were strengthened. This can also be observed by the fact that over 15 additional local WPTs have been organised and implemented on the initiative of conflict-affected women themselves.

2. Engaging with relevant actors

As already mentioned above, engaging with key actors, sensitising them, and holding them accountable is a central strategy. Therefore, relevant actors were invited to the WPTs. In **Nepal** and the **Philippines**, the WPTs were divided into two sessions. The first were closed group sessions and the second provided the opportunity to interact with local, regional and national stakeholders.

In the Philippines the sessions with duty-bearers were organised as public forums. Other local participants and duty-bearers were invited to hear the women's transitional justice agenda and to get responses from some key stakeholders. The public forums were useful in enabling dialogue, considering that it is sometimes difficult to engage major actors or duty-bearers unless they are invited to public events. At the same time, public events also make duty-bearers more accountable.

3. Women supporting women

Women's advocacy work builds on the relational element: women supporting women. Through many of the advocacy activities and programmes, GZOPI has been able to count on the presence and support of women civil society leaders, the women members of the peace panels and technical working groups, including some who were later appointed members of the Bangsamoro parliament and ministries. They have been very willing to share their knowledge and perspectives on significant developments in the peace process and in its implementation. They have also taken the time to listen to stories, feedback, and proposals from women from the communities and civil society and have supported their inclusion in formal processes and mechanisms.

4. Women's political activism in the election of national leaders

The success of a national peace process is highly dependent upon the political will of the national leadership to support such a process. Women peace activists are also political actors who help ensure the election of a national leader who embraces peace, human rights and gender equality. Such leaders will more likely listen to women and appoint them in key positions in government.

5. Localising accountability

Local and regional advocacy is sometimes more effective than advocacy on the national level. Therefore, for the WPTs in **Philippines** key duty-bearers at the local and regional levels, including representatives from the Regional Human Rights Commission, the BWC, and the Bangsamoro Development Planning Agency, were invited.

Similarly, in the WPTs in **Nepal,** due to the stagnation of the transitional justice process on the national level, Nagarik Awaaz focused on members of the new federal structures and their responsibility for reconciliation, aiming to sensitise them about the needs of conflict-affected women. The public dialogue sessions at the WPTs with local government authorities were a novum in Nepal. It was the first time that sessions between local government authorities and conflict-affected women had taken place on the provincial level. The local government bodies were very positive about the exchanges. Many of them said that they had not focused their efforts on transitional justice and had forgotten about the pain of conflict-affected women. They had thought this was the responsibility of national policymakers and the central government. During the WPT sessions and further meetings, local and national government bodies committed to collaborating with conflict-affected women and organisations to plan for their sustainable livelihoods and to empower conflict-affected women. The continuation of the dialogue will be essential to hold the local government bodies accountable for their promises.

"I am a government-side victim and was sexually tortured. I am a member of the national level network of conflict victims. This Women's Peace Table has been creating a platform where we can raise our issues and problems with the different stakeholders. This space has been able to contribute to making the local level authorities aware that they need to be more accountable and sensitive to our issue."

WPT participant from Province 7, Nepal

Linking informal peace initiatives with official transitional justice processes

In the WPTs in **Colombia,** representatives from the three SIVJRNR units created under the Peace Agreement, the CEV, JEP and UBPD, have been invited to inform participants about the scope and differences of each unit, their challenges and achievements. Participants could bring in suggestions they developed in previous exchanges for the building of inclusive, lasting, and creative peace. Although Comunitar was unable to ensure participation of all three entities, the dialogue with them has been consistent. Their contribution and participation were important for the WPT participants because now they know the institutions that have the responsibility for the implementation of the Peace Agreement, particularly with regards to the differential and disproportionate impacts of the conflict on women's bodies and lives.

Relationships with CSOs can also be a means of support for the transitional justice bodies, for example in fostering their legitimacy and providing them with access to broader communities. The cooperation with the Gender Working Group of the CEV and the joint planning of all the activities from the beginning has been a great success. As the CEV's budget has been halved by the government, the cooperation with CSOs became even more important. Through the WPTs, it was possible to gather individual and collective testimonies from conflict-affected women from regions difficult to access for the CEV. These testimonies are particularly important, both because there is little available information about the impacts of the conflict on women in very remote areas, and because the CEV had difficulties in getting access to those women.

Building CSO alliances

In **Colombia**, the most revealing examples of the political and social agency of women's organisations have been the collective study and analysis of the Peace Agreement and the current stage of its implementation. Based on that, the participants of the WPTs agreed on a prioritisation of women's concerns, needs and demands and formulated consolidated proposals to put into practice in the local peace agendas. These agendas are key documents to influence local and regional administrations to promote gender-sensitivity and the allocation of budgets in development plans that give course to the territorial implementation of the Peace Agreement.

For example, the Peace Agenda of the Women of Cauca emerged from a dialogue between 17 organisations from 29 municipalities from the department of Cauca. Among them are social, rural, urban, indigenous, afro-descendant and youth organisations. As the dialogue forums continue as part of the Peace Agenda of the Women of Cauca, the network is growing. This process has revealed that there is not only a need for advocacy towards government institutions for the implementation of the gender-focus of the Peace Agreement but also for awareness raising among other CSOs that are less sensitised on the issues of women's rights and those of the LGBTIQ population.

Women's Peace Table Chocó, Colombia, 2019. © Comunitar

7. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS ON THE WOMEN'S PEACE TABLES

Colombia

The WPTs in Colombia were spaces and moments for building trust among women from different localities and cultures, helping them to share their painful experiences of the armed conflict and their hopes and expectations of the peace process. The participants expressed a sense of liberation from the negative emotions that had caused them so much pain, which they had almost never talked about before the WPTs. Many of the women did not have basic knowledge about their own bodies or emotional health or about their rights to a life free of violence. They did not value themselves as agents of coexistence. They had not understood the Peace Agreement as a pact for a new society in which women are no longer treated as sexual objects or as beings of lesser importance. The WPTs became the platforms for women to exchange knowledge, build communities and reflect political proposals, to think about ethnic, generational, territorial and cultural diversities – to rethink peace beyond the FARC–EP's laying down of arms. They enabled psycho-social counselling. This despite fears about the continuing violence of other illegal armed groups and of the government itself.

These exchanges of ideas, experiences, expectations and hopes have demonstrated how those who have suffered the atrocities of war have the capacity to rebuild Colombia. Spaces for dialogue, listening, sharing of experiences, capacities and knowledge, are indispensable for the recognition of the individual, collective, organisational, territorial, communal, environmental and economic effects caused by the armed confrontation. The reconstruction of the social fabric, broken by so many years of war, requires talking about the individual and collective pain that women and LGBTIQ people have experienced.

Bringing the truth into the light of day about what they have suffered and also about how they have organised themselves collectively provides a path to recovery from the social and familial condemnation they experienced because of normative moral ideas.

Without the participation of survivors and of those who advocate for social justice in the reconstruction of Colombia, peace will remain an unattainable dream. Women who are aware of the impact of the armed conflict advocate for a state that protects and guarantees coexistence, constructive deliberation and consultation in all public affairs, instead of militarising and violating the territories.

The Peace Agreement is an urgent call to the institutions and authorities responsible for guaranteeing social justice with a gender focus, demanding that they comply with and enforce the more than 30 laws that would guarantee women's rights in Colombia. If complied with, these laws would to a large extent reduce the historical debt owed to more than 50% of the population: women.

The WPTs in Colombia have contributed to raising the awareness that implementing the gender approach to transformative peacebuilding requires political will from the governments, citizen participation, public deliberation and non-sexist education, not only for students, but for all personnel working in the entities of the new institutional architecture that must guarantee the implementation of the Peace Agreement. The three transitional justice institutions of the SIVJRGN were not a gift but a demand by civil society

peace organisations. The WPT participants underscored the important role these three institutions play in recognising and making visible the truths and acknowledging the violence they suffered in the conflict. They stressed that the truth, as a historical testimony, serves to reconstruct the memory of the victims and serves as a basis for the JEP, so that sexual crimes do not continue to go unpunished. Furthermore, the truth should serve to raise public awareness and educate citizens about all forms of discrimination that women experience in their lives. The peacebuilding process must give way to respectful relations with women, in conditions of equality and dignity. They must be treated as social actors in all areas of community life and in the public sphere, enjoying guarantees for equal participation in political and decision-making positions in the country.

In November 2021 the Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition (CEV) will present its final report. But truth is not built in three years and the work to rebuild the truth and to transform society must continue. We know that peace is not only created through the Agreement and that it is a long process. We women from the Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres have been doing the work for the last 24 years at least; we have been doing it from the home, the neighbourhoods and the communities. The WPTs assisted the CEV in gathering historical records of the experiences of women in the conflict, with the support of Ruta Pacifica de las Mujeres. The WPTs amplified the voices of the women. They shared their feelings and opened their hearts to express what peace should be and demonstrate the role that truth plays in the reconstruction of a gender-just Colombia. Peacebuilding will be achieved by promoting and strengthening women's organisations to empower women, to build their capacities, expand their knowledge and increase their participation in decision-making in public and private spaces.

Nepal

The WPTs in Nepal offered unique spaces for women who were directly impacted by the conflict. During the meetings, women were able to express how the large-scale violence during and after the conflict affected their lives and how it impacted their position in society. The WPTs provided women with a space where they could explore their potential for individual and collective growth. Together, they discovered ways to build their self-esteem and to regain their physical, spiritual and psychological integrity. The WPTs helped the women to rebuild their emotional stability and their sense of agency in a holistic manner. The participating women built new and intensified existing relationships with each other and hosted their own dialogues on the impact of the conflict and of the prevailing structural violence.

The leadership of the affected women is one of the core values of Nagarik Aawaz's concept of Transformative Peace Leadership. In this project, it meant that the local WPTs dialogues were led by Women Peace Facilitators. Coming from conflict-affected backgrounds, these women established themselves as community leaders. The Peace Facilitators have been working with Nagarik Aawaz for ten years and play a crucial role in shaping an inclusive space where women can raise the diverse issues that matter to them and their communities.

The WPTs also aimed to bridge divisions within and between conflict-affected communities and networks. Women who suffered violence by the Maoist party or the government, the two actors of the conflict, shared their stories, experiences, and pain at the WPTs. Through this act of sharing, they developed mutual understanding and compassion for each other's grievances. They also became aware of the strength of their collaboration to advocate for their rights and justice collectively.

Local WPTs also brought together conflict-affected communities with those that had not, or not directly, been affected. The relationships between these groups are often tense. Through the exchanges at the WPTs, however, their mutual understanding and empathy grew. The less affected communities began to feel more responsible for supporting conflict-affected women who are trying to re-establish themselves in society.

Finally, the WPTs were also creative spaces: women could share stories of resistance and strength through songs and poetry. This, too, helped them heal their trauma and recharge their energy.

Each of the different elements of the WPTs is essential for the creation of an opportunity to build tolerance and a culture of peace that can contribute to sustainable peacebuilding at the community level. Using a feminist analysis, the participating women have built their collective networks and started challenging the legitimacy of established power and transitional justice structures.

Nepal continues to be in transition. While the national transitional justice process is stalled, the WPTs allowed Nagarik Aawaz to engage local and federal actors in a dialogue on reparative measures to support conflict-affected women. Sensitising institutions is crucial to achieving sustainable peace in Nepal. In a time of shrinking space for peace and transitional justice, the WPTs created valuable safe spaces for women, community groups, local and national political leaders, and other stakeholders to come together and address a variety of issues. In this way, the WPTs contribute to keeping the peace and transitional justice agendas alive.

This project is of strategic importance for us at Nagarik Aawaz to realise our vision of a just and peaceful Nepal. The WPTs continue to play a vital role in giving women the space and time to build their leadership, expand their own networks and to keep challenging the structural violence which Nepal's peace process has failed to address.

Philippines

The WPTs gathered women to engage in the peace processes in a cohesive manner. Their involvement was particularly significant during the challenging period following the establishment of the Bangsamoro transition. A good number of the women had accompanied the peace negotiations from 1997, even when these sporadic talks had been marred by several large-scale outbreaks of armed conflict. They had experienced much heartbreak, witnessing the effects of violence on their families and communities. Some went through three or four rounds of displacement.

In the first year of the WPTs, these workshops were mainly concerned with learning about the policies and mechanisms of the "normalisation process", including its security, economic development, and transitional justice components. Women then discussed and painstakingly crafted proposals for how women can be better protected and empowered in these processes and how their participation can be increased. At the WPTs, the NAP on UNSCR 1325 on Women Peace and Security was reviewed side by side with the Bangsamoro Organic Law that was the concrete implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Alongside these local WPTs and national conferences, the women's excitement increased while preparing and campaigning for the YES vote in the plebiscite on the BARMM in January 2019.

The second year of the WPTs focused more directly on learning about transitional justice. Enough time was given, and some creative exercises used, so women could grasp and own the often complicated and overwhelming terms used that are so crucial to addressing the roots of the conflict. Part of the difficulty has been the ongoing search for indigenous terms and translation of the terminology into local languages. The lack of progress on the implementation of key recommendations of the Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission Report by the main actors, particularly the government, were another difficulty. There is a compelling need to build a constituency for transitional justice that will insist on action. In preparation, the WPTs have provided a space for women to learn together, to develop their agenda on transitional justice, and to start some local initiatives.

The Covid-19 pandemic for some time immobilised us with fear and uncertainty. The Philippines instituted stringent quarantine and lockdown measures throughout most of the country. A militarised and law-and-order approach was taken that resulted in many arrests, but lagged in providing sufficient protection to health workers on the frontlines.

It was difficult to schedule the WPTs and other activities, as policies for quarantines and travel kept changing. However, amid these limitations and restrictions, creativity blossomed: the local WPTs continued to be face-to-face events but were divided into smaller and more numerous gatherings. Aside from the difficulties of internet connection and lack of access for many women, actual gatherings and direct conversations would always be more meaningful.

The advocacy activities supporting the WPTs included the support for local women's dialogues (families of fighting combatants from the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters), training on politics via online platforms, workshops among displaced women, the writing of women's stories. A national WPT conference was not possible under these circumstances. Instead, various online workshops were organised: a workshop updating on NAP WPS/RAP WPS and transitional justice, an orientation on "listening sessions", a speakers/communicators training session on transitional justice, and sessions on Appreciative Inquiry and Living Resiliently for youth and for women. Although internet connectivity was sometimes very poor and there were also power interruptions, women embraced the new technology and this somehow helped maintain connection.

Throughout the project, the WPTs were fortunate because women readily and generously showed up to support other women. They included some of the 1000 PeaceWomen nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005, like Teresita Quintos-Deles, who had been the Presidential Adviser on Peace Process, and who had guided the peace process on Bangsamoro, and Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, the chief government negotiator. Our resource persons and coordinators made time to share their knowledge despite the pressures of urgent challenges. They also seemed to draw strength and purpose from their interactions with the community of women peacebuilders.

The WPTs affirmed the value of continuing to dialogue across diversities and despite discomfort. They brought together mostly Bangsamoro women of Muslim faith, but also women from

distinct ethnic groups: Maguindanao, Maranao, Iranun, Tausug, Yakan. They gathered with Christians from different ethnic backgrounds (Ilocano, Ilongo, Bisaya, Tagalog) and non-Islamised indigenous women (Teduray, Lambangian, Dulangan Manobo and other Manobo groups). The national WPT included more Christian women representing various NGOs, but also indigenous women from various tribes of the Cordilleras and the Sierra Madre, who like many Manobo of Mindanao are facing the other major conflict in the Philippines between the government and the National Democratic Front.

In the WPTs, women exercised patience and courage in exacting accountability from government and non-state actors (often men), keepers of peace mechanisms and peace architecture. They exchanged views with academics and researchers. Some participants exuded much hope and humour despite the atrocities they had experienced. Many still grieve from the recent pain of the Marawi siege of 2017, with the continuing cry "let us go home" due to the mass displacement. On the other hand, some very young Moro women based in another city experienced discrimination but were largely oblivious to violent conflict.

What is the future, what have we learned from the process of the WPTs? The WPTs have demonstrated the value of gathering women in conversation and of what some Mindanao peacebuilders call the "dialogue of life". The WPTs can continue to be a priceless support for women at various levels of creating the emerging Bangsamoro. These include women in the communities on the ground, where they comprise the majority of teachers and health workers, in the bureaucracy, in academia, in the Bangsamoro parliament, in the peace mechanisms, and in the Bangsamoro Women's Commission as well as in civil society organisations.

During this pandemic, a time of profound change and uncertainty, it became clearer that as women address the injustices and issues of the past, they yearn to create, to dream and to build the future of peace.

Joint learning process

This project was conceptualised from the outset as a joint learning process, facilitated by PWAG. It involved regular online exchanges among everyone involved and a face-to-face meeting in Switzerland in 2019. The insights from the learning process are gathered in this publication.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, holding a second face-to-face meeting was not possible. Instead, we seized the opportunity presented by the pandemic and held several online discussions and virtual meetings to plan, discuss and write this report. We would have preferred meeting and engaging with each other in person, not least because our group spans four countries on three continents and includes some who speak English and others who speak Spanish. It was a challenge to write collectively without a shared language. But thanks to interpreters, translators and online-meeting platforms, we were able to overcome pandemic-related hurdles and complete this report.

Both the online gatherings and the face-to-face meeting in 2019 allowed us to share experiences and learn from each other's expertise. Recognising similarities and differences in the three contexts, the joint learning process proved invaluable. It provided all involved with new inspiration, insights, and methods.

But not only the exchange of knowledge was appreciated: equally important was the sense of care and solidarity at the meetings. We also shared self-care strategies, which are of tremendous importance in the often arduous work that peacebuilding can be. Spending time with others who have been committed to peacebuilding for years, decades even, made us realise that we are not alone. This feeling of solidarity and sisterhood gave us strength and fresh energy.

The participatory manner in which this publication was developed shapes the result. We had to navigate different priorities, needs and perspectives. For PWAG, which coordinated the process, the challenge was to allow enough room for discussion and negotiation, without losing sight of the goal or dominating the space.

Developing and writing this report together was worth every challenge. Collectively, we were able to create something that is stronger than if it had been developed by one of us alone.

Take-aways and thoughts on the way forward

"From transition to transformation" offers insights into why and how transitional justice must and can be made more inclusive for women and marginalised groups. It demonstrates how transitional justice can be turned into a transformative process. Peace processes offer windows of opportunity to achieve these goals, by not only including women and marginalised groups and addressing their concerns, but also by seizing the opportunity to tackle the structural inequalities and injustices that caused the outbreak of armed conflicts in the first place.

This publication draws on the experiences of feminist and women's organisations in Colombia, Nepal and the Philippines on strengthening women's effective participation in peace processes.

While women are generally well represented in grassroots and civil society organisations, decision-making processes, formal peace processes and transitional justice mechanisms tend to be elitist. To a large extent they exclude women and communities facing multiple discrimination. Factors that impede women's participation in peace processes include patriarchal, exclusionary power structures, structural discrimination, gender stereotypes, sexualised and gender-based violence, and a lack of socio-economic resources.

That is where the project "Strengthening women's effective participation in conflict transformation in Colombia, Nepal and the Philippines" comes in. At Women's Peace Tables, a method designed to create safe spaces for sharing experiences and networking, conflict-affected women share their truths. Collectively, they develop strategies to build a gender-sensitive, feminist peace and to tackle exclusionary power structures, all in an effort to contribute towards transformative change.

The main insights from the project and strategies applied in it in are summarised below and are complemented by reflections and questions about the way forward.

Multi-level approach

- To enable access to the transitional justice mechanisms to women in remote areas, the projects used a multi-level approach. WPTs were organised locally in remote areas, regionally in regional centres, and nationally in capital cities, to carry the demands of conflict-affected women at the local level to regional and national duty-bearers and decision-makers.

Access to information and resources

- A major obstacle to women's participation is the lack of access to information and resources, a precondition for participation. The experiences gained during the project confirmed that even though women often knew local conflict-transformation traditions, they lacked knowledge about their rights agreed upon in the peace agreements. Yet, being aware of their rights and knowing how to claim them are essential to gaining access to and contributing to transitional and restorative justice mechanisms. At the WPTs the participants were provided with essential information and strategised how to formulate their demands and claim their rights. The WPT participants play a key role as multipliers: they carry the information from the WPTs back to their communities, thereby significantly broadening the impact of the WPTs.

  By participating in WPTs, participants increasingly were able to unlearn negative self-perceptions that they held due to stigmatisation and societal norms, and recognise themselves as agents of change. Thanks to the WPTs, women's skills as local facilitators were further strengthened and the number of local facilitators was increased. More women began taking on leadership roles.

Doing justice to intersectionality

- To be transformative, transitional justice processes need to be inclusive, recognise the heterogeneity of conflict survivors' experiences according to their positionality in social hierarchies, must consider multiple, intersecting inequalities and must address them as structural root causes. Taking an intersectional approach, however, is more complicated in practice than in theory. We are taking many open questions away from our discussions for future reflection and consideration. How do you plan and implement a project intersectionally? How do you render processes more intersectional without falling into the "add and stir" trap? How do we address economic and social inequalities and everyday concerns as part of transformative justice?

- There is a danger of merely "ticking the gender box" by adding a few women to peace and transitional justice processes without giving them a say in decision-making. Including a person from every marginalised group to a given body to tick the "intersectionality box" is tokenism and will not lead to transformation. For transformation to be truly transformative, the underlying structures of exclusion and systems of power need to change.

Network building and collective action

- Civil society groups can increase their influence if they overcome divisions through coalition building and joint positioning. Through the participation of representatives from various local, regional and national networks at the WPTs, existing networks and the ties between them were strengthened. In some cases, new local networks were formed where they did not exist before.

- The projects contributed to (re-)building meaningful relationships among previously divided groups and enabled them to implement common actions. The in-depth exchanges among women from different organisations, backgrounds and regions helped to prioritise lines of action among different collectives, to formulate and implement common advocacy strategies and actions to make women's demands more visible and exert more pressure on decision-makers.

Accountability

- As the comparison between Nepal, Colombia and the Philippines has shown, the mobilisation of women's and LGBTIQ organisations and networks can play a significant role in pressuring for the development of gender-sensitive peace processes and transitional justice mechanisms. With a view to possible later formal peace processes and their gender sensitivity, it is essential to strengthen women's and feminist movements in advance. This enables them to put pressure on decision-makers to construct gender-sensitive peace architecture.

- Gender-sensitive mechanisms in the official peace agreements, like the gender focus in the Colombian Peace Agreement, provide a frame of reference and entry-points to demand women's participation in the implementation of the peace agreements and to hold duty-bearers accountable. In the case of Nepal, where binding gender-sensitive mechanisms in the peace agreement are completely absent, advocacy activities for the integration of women's demands are more challenging.

- Although there are differences in the degree of gender sensitivity in the peace agreements and the established transitional justice mechanisms in Colombia, Nepal, and the Philippines, a lack of political will to implement the agreements was observed in all three contexts. The Covid-19 pandemic made duty-bearers and governments even less willing to act on transitional justice and reconciliation. Accordingly, CSOs have an important role to play as watchdogs for the implementation of the agreements. Hence, the WPTs contributed to keeping the transitional justice agenda alive during the pandemic and duty-bearers accountable for its gender-sensitive implementation.

International support

- International support for national peace processes is a double-edged sword. For example, financial support can be biased due to the national interests of the donors and jeopardise the ownership of the peace processes in the respective countries. Divergent interests of different international stakeholders can further challenge the process. Nevertheless, international support can help enhance the influence of civil society and other groups before, during and after the negotiations: through financial support, by providing expertise, and in holding governments accountable for implementing the agreed provisions based on human rights standards, including UNSCR 1325.

- Although most of the international community's attention is usually focused on the negotiation phase, in Colombia international cooperation financed the projects of many women's organisations to support their autonomy. The ultimate aim of this support is to empower women's political agency to demand and defend the inclusion of a gender focus in the Peace Agreement as an initial act of reconciliation in a permanent search for the construction of a transformative, creative, and genuine peace.

- Although conflicts and contexts differ, several lessons and practices can be transferred and adapted from one context to another. Lessons from prior peace processes have played and continue to play an important role in advancing the way peace processes are designed, negotiated and implemented. For the Gender Working Group of the CEV, international support has been of great importance to form and advance methodologies, building alliances and to counter the foreseeable challenges once the final CEV report is made public in November 2021.

- Substantial gains made during inclusive peace negotiations are often lost in the implementation. Simultaneously, international attention tends to wane after the enactment of a peace agreement. Yet, pressure – and support – from the international community are important to ensure the agreed provisions are in fact implemented; specifically the contested provisions on gender and minority rights.

Long-term strategies

- Conflict transformation and peacebuilding processes are not linear, nor do they end with the signing of a peace agreement. Rather, the agreements lay the foundation for the rock-strewn path to transformative justice and sustainable peace. Addressing the root-causes of years-long armed conflicts, reconstructing the torn social fabric, and rebuilding inclusive structures, institutions, normative and legal foundations for a new society are long and complex processes with many backlashes. The fact that provisions related to disarmament have a higher implementation rate than economic reforms and ethnic, gender and environmental commitments proves this point. Therefore, implementation over the long-term and the flexible adaption of peacebuilding projects and initiatives are vital to achieving sustainable outcomes.

- Post-conflict settings often remain highly volatile and dynamic – as still is the case in Colombia, Nepal and the Philippines. To minimise risks and contribute to sustainable conflict transformation, the implementation of peacebuilding activities must be conflict sensitive. This includes a continuous context and conflict analysis and adapting activities where necessary. Despite multiple challenges during the project implementation, some of which are mentioned in this report, most of the objectives have been achieved. The Covid-19 pandemic posed a big challenge. Restrictions on travel, mobility, and public gatherings made it difficult and, in some cases, impossible to organise the WPTs as in-person gatherings. Furthermore, the pandemic added to women's burdens, for example with additional care responsibilities, and diverted the attention of partners, duty-bearers and other stakeholders on women, peace, and justice due to concentration on the pandemic and survival. These circumstances particularly hindered advocacy activities for structural change.

The commitment, endurance, and persistence on the way to transformative justice must continue. The first phase of the project "Strengthening women's effective participation in Colombia, Nepal and the Philippines" ended in June 2021, but a second, two-and-a-half-year phase has already begun, building on the lessons learned and the networks built during the first phase.

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Colombia

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Nepal

Comprehensive Peace Agreement concluded between the Government of Nepal and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), 21 November 2006 (unofficial translation): https://peaceaccords.nd.edu/wp-content/accords/2006-11-29-peace_accord-MOFA.pdf

Philippines

Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, 27 March 2014 (including all previously signed agreements between the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front): https://peace.gov.ph/2014/03/comprehensive-agreement-bangsamoro/

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Organisations

Corporación de Mujeres Ecofeministas (Ecofeminist Women's Organisation) – Comunitar

Comunitar is a civil society organisation based in the department of Cauca in southern Colombia, founded in 1986. Comunitar was formed by a group of women of diverse ages, experiences, backgrounds, and worldviews who work for the defence of women's rights. Comunitar is the focal point of the Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres in Cauca.

Comunitar is committed to the cultural, social, economic, and political transformations that are required to fight for a peaceful country. Comunitar also promotes and accompanies processes and movements in defence of bodies and territories, so that they can be free of violence. In general, Comunitar works towards the sustainability of a dignified life. Therefore, we defend rights and resist all forms of violence.

www.comunitar.org.co

Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres

The Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres is a feminist, pacifist, and antimilitarist movement founded in 1996 that works nationwide in Colombia. The Ruta Pacífica also engaged for the negotiation of the Peace Agreement to end the armed conflict and to make visible the impact of the war on women's lives and bodies. It builds on the ethic of nonviolence in which justice, peace, equity, autonomy, freedom, and recognition of others are essential principles. The Ruta Pacífica consists of women from 300 organisations that reach out to nearly 10,000 women in more than 142 municipalities in 18 departments of Colombia. The members represent the ethnic, generational and cultural diversity of Colombia.

The Ruta Pacífica and Comunitar establish strategic alliances and dialogues of knowledge with organisations and other national and international social movements. These movements work for the common good, the defence of the rights of diversities, peacebuilding, and social justice. The political motto is, "We do not give birth to daughters and sons for war".

www.rutapacifica.org.co

Gaston Z. Ortigas Peace Institute – GZOPI

The Gaston Z. Ortigas Peace Institute was established in January 1991 to support citizens' peace engagement in the Philippine peace processes, especially by assisting peace networks and coalitions. The vision of civil society peacebuilders to co-create a just and sustainable peace in the Philippines is necessarily also a feminist vision.

GZOPI has been serving as the secretariat for Women Engaged on Action 1325 (WE ACT 1325) since 2016. WE ACT 1325 is a network of 39 civil society organisations for monitoring and implementation of the Philippine NAP on Women, Peace and Security. Together they are pursuing a Women's Agenda for Peace and Justice in Bangsamoro, particularly during the transition period establishing the autonomous government based on the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro. GZOPI and WE ACT 1325 also accompany women during the difficult search for a peaceful and just political resolution of the other major conflict in the country, that between the State and the Communist Party of the Philippines -the New Peoples' Army- National Democratic Front.

www.gzopi.wordpress.com

Nagarik Aawaz

Nagarik Aawaz is a peacebuilding organisation that is guided by its vision of a just and peaceful Nepal. It started its journey at the time of armed conflict (1996–2006). The grievances and sufferings of the conflict still exist in the communities in Nepal. They are the by-product of the unaddressed prevalent structural violence. Nagarik Aawaz believes that if women and youths are provided with the space and resources, they can play a key role in bringing the issue of structural violence to their own leadership and can contribute to building a just and peaceful Nepal.

https://nagarikaawaz.org.np/

PeaceWomen Across the Globe – PWAG

PeaceWomen Across the Globe (PWAG) is a feminist peace organisation with an international network that works towards the equal inclusion of women in all areas of peace and security. The network of PWAG dates back to the nomination of 1000 women for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005. The international organisation is based in Bern, Switzerland, and is committed to the participation of women in peacebuilding. PWAG advances the sharing of experience and knowledge between PeaceWomen worldwide and advocates for women's sustainable and visible peace work.

https://www.1000peacewomen.org/