Moving Forward the Mainstreaming of Women, Peace and Security in the ASEAN
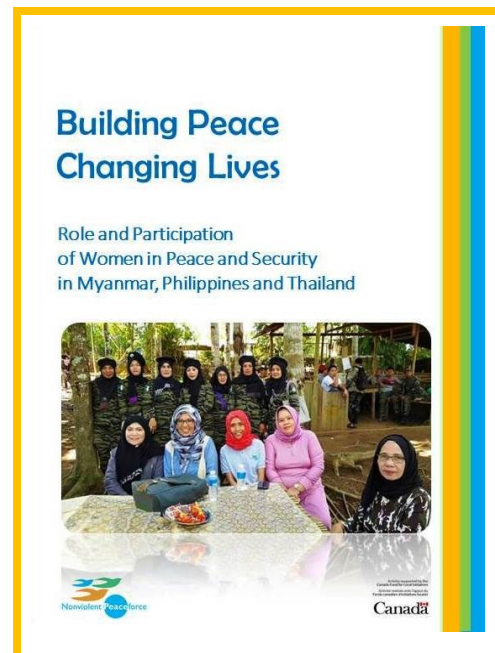
INTRODUCTION

The Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) Philippines, a nonpartisan international organization engaged in preventing violence, increasing safety and security of civilians, and strengthening local peace infrastructures across its program locations in conflict affected areas in eastern and western Mindanao, has extended its work in the SEA region with WPS as its flagship program. The program entitled *Women Creating Impact on Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation* (Women-IMPACT), is in line with the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and subsequent related resolutions, and the 2017 Joint Statement of the Heads of State/Government of ASEAN member states on the WPS agenda in the ASEAN. Women-IMPACT aims to enhance the capacity and participation of women-led CSOs and institutions in peacebuilding and non-violent conflict transformation. With funding from Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI), it covers three ASEAN countries, namely, Myanmar, Philippines, and Thailand.

Part of the activities under the NP's WPS program is the conduct of a baseline study of women's participation in peace and security in the said three countries. The baseline study is meant to provide evidence of women's role and participation in peace and security specifically in Myanmar, Philippines, and Thailand; come up with a regional perspective and database through comparative examples of women's participation in local peacebuilding initiatives; and identify possible courses of action towards mainstreaming

WPS in the region. Study results could serve to inform and guide NP, its partners, and other concerned stakeholders in the crafting and implementation of acceptable, appropriate and applicable strategies towards WPS mainstreaming in the three countries in particular and the ASEAN region in general.

Given thus, the baseline study sought to answer and examine the following: 1. What is the peace and security situation, with focus on the location of women in such situation; 2. What is the socioeconomic profile of women engaged in peace and security?; 3. What are the areas of engagement and initiatives of women in local peacebuilding?; 4. What are the enabling and constraining factors in such engagement and initiatives?; 5. What are the outcomes and impacts?; 6. What are the best practices? and 7. What are the lessons learned and way forward to

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Role and Participation of Women in Peace and Security in Myanmar, Philippines and Thailand

mainstream women's participation in peace and security across the three countries in particular and ASEAN region in general?

In answering and examining the above, the study gathered perspectives mainly from desk and literature review. Where feasible, it employed virtual key informant interviews (KIIs) to enrich the data gathered from desk review. Used as instruments were case study and KII guides. Published materials on the net, including ASEAN-IPR's publications, on WPS and other related issues in the three countries served as data sources in the desk review. Letter of invites, with guide questions and consent form, were sent to 4-7 potential KII participants per country via email. Only a total of five women peacebuilders, one in Thailand and four in the Philippines, accepted the invite and served as KII participants. No one from Myanmar replied to the invite. The participant from Thailand sent her responses via email while virtual individual interviews with participants from the Philippines were conducted via Zoom, a popular cloud platform. The study mainly used descriptive data analysis, as data gathered was largely qualitative. It ran for a total of three months, from November 1, 2020 to January 31, 2021.

The study examined the following armed conflicts: Tatmadaw (military) and various ethnic armed organizations (EAOs)in Mynamar; government and rebel forces (Moro and Communist) in the Philippines; and government and Malay Pattani separatist groups in Thailand.

Patterns and Trends across the Three Countries

The study was able to highlight patterns and trends across the three countries in terms of peace and security situation and women in peacebuilding. Patterns and trends on peace and security situation cover the following:

armed conflicts, including brief history, parties involved, effects of conflict on women and children; government interventions to resolve the conflict; and role of CSOs in peacebuilding. Patterns and trends on women in peacebuilding cover the following: profile of women peacebuilders, areas and initiatives in peacebuilding, enabling and constraining factors; outcomes and impacts; best practices; and lessons learned and way forward to mainstream WPS in the country.

Peace and security situation: 1. Ongoing armed conflicts highlight the unending struggle of marginalized groups; 2. Political and economic control over territory complicated by sociocultural factors serves as main driver of conflicts; 3. Devastating effects of armed conflicts on women and children are similar across countries; 4. Government peacebuilding initiatives vis a vis UNSCR 1325 are inadequate; and 5. local CSOs play varied roles vital in peacebuilding.

Women in peacebuilding: 1. Women peacebuilders come from diverse backgrounds; 2. Women remain underrepresented or unrepresented in formal peace negotiations; 3. Women advance WPS amidst limited space in formal peace process; 4. Women conduct varied and vibrant peacebuilding initiatives in the informal peace process; 5. Personal agency, international and national framework, and support from local and international communities enable women peacebuilding; 6. Discriminatory gender norms, patriarchal power structures, biased personal perceptions and attitudes constrain peacebuilding activities, and dynamics within and among women's CSOs and movements constrain peacebuilding.

Significant structural gains in women peacebuilding are: 1. inclusion of women; 2. women empowerment; and 3. raising of gender related critical issues in peace process. Signif-

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icant sociocultural gains are the changed mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors of women and male stakeholders in the peace process.

Best peacebuilding practices are in line with the women's initiatives in advocacy, capacity building, alliance building, and early warning system. Best practices in Myanmar are: 1. Tea break advocacy; 2. Identifying champions in government and parliament; 3. building and utilizing cordial relationships with male delegates to adopt their policy recommendations; and 4. projecting the plight of women and children in conflict affected areas based on well researched evidence to the international community. Best practices in the Philippines are: 1. Utilizing early strategic alliances with men; 2. Civilianizing peace track and involvement of women's CSOs; 3. Popularizing and normalizing positive aspects of culture/religion in support of women's participation in public decision-making; and 4. Practising courage, competence, and creativity by women leaders. Best practices in Thailand are: 1. Watching language used: refraining from using gender equality and feminism terms that offend men's sensibilities; 2. Keeping men informed about goals and objectives of women's movement; and 3. Utilizing all available communication channels to build peace among concerned stakeholders or conflicting parties.

In capacity building, the best practice across the three countries is focusing on building the capacities of women at the grassroots level in relation to peacebuilding. In alliance building, the best practices specifically are knowledge management and resource sharing. In early warning system, best practice is employing indigenous practices in alerting villagers on looming armed encounter in order to mitigate the effects of the conflict.

Key lessons and way forward in mainstreaming WPS across the three countries under-

score the importance of as well as the urgency of effectively responding to the following issues: 1. Ownership of peace process; 2. Appropriate, acceptable, and applicable peacebuilding strategies and initiatives vis a vis diverse stakeholders and contexts; 3. enhancement of best practices, especially indigenous; 4. institutionalization of best practices; 5. Personal and collective agencies of women peacebuilders; 6. countering of sociocultural gender norms, expectations, and stereotypes; 7. contextualization of gender concepts and frameworks in particular countries; 8. transformation of patriarchal structures; and 9. building on, strengthening and sustaining significant gains.

CONCLUSIONS

Given the above, it can be said that compliance to the UNSCR 1325 and fulfilment of commitment to the 2017 joint statement of the ASEAN in promoting WPS in the region have been found wanting across the three countries.

WPS is not merely about women's participation in the peace process, even as this study focuses on the role and participation of women in peace and security across the three countries. Indeed, it is all about the well-being and empowerment of women ordained by nature to carry the burden of bringing forth life to the world. Certainly, the state of their well-being determines the state of the well-being of others in the family, community, and larger society as well.

WPS covers a whole gamut of issues cutting across the physical, sociocultural, economic, and political life of all across ages, sexual orientations, and gender identities, classes, races, creeds, and ethnicities. It is not a matter for women peacebuilders alone. Each one has a stake and has the duty and responsibility to get involved.

POLICY BRIEF

RECOMMENDATIONS
This study wishes to underscore the following issues with corresponding recommendations to particular stakeholders in WPS mainstreaming in the ASEAN:

The ASEAN
Institutionalization of best practices
Institutionalization of best practices of women peacebuilders is crucial to move the mainstreaming of the WPS forward. A common best practice of women peacebuilders across the three countries is properly and cordially collaborating with the men to advance women's interests and needs in the peace process. The ASEAN could perhaps institute a policy enjoining concerned member states to institutionalize such best practice or find space or body within its structure for the institutionalization of such practice. Such space or body may be composed of an equal number of women and men tasked to develop and implement programs solely on the WPS agenda in coordination with ACWC or other relevant ASEAN bodies, or serve as a funding window that processes proposals on WPS from the different ASEAN member states.

Bridging of gap in access to communication and information and promotion of collaboration among women peacebuilders
Access to communication and information is essential in women's participation in peace and security. Women peacebuilders in tracks 1 and 2 more than women peacebuilders in track 3 seemingly have had more access to relevant communication and information on the peace process. Therefore, it would be best to institute policies or measures to bridge such gap in order to allow women in track 3 to gain equal access to such communication and information. Relatedly, it would be best to institute policies or measures to promote collaboration among women peace-

builders, especially in track 3, across countries.

The CSOs
Building on, strengthening, and sustaining gains
Most best practices and significant gains in peacebuilding have been undertaken and achieved outside the formal peace process. It would be well for CSOs to build on, strengthen and sustain such gains by stepping up their efforts and invest more of their resources, both human and material, in addressing the needs, especially in capacity building, in relation to WPS in conflict affected areas. A strong base is likely to positively influence the dynamics of the peace process all the way to the top.

The Donor Agencies
Provision of more support for research, knowledge management, resource sharing and implementation activities
Research, knowledge management, resource sharing and implementation of activities are crucial towards a better understanding of and more effective response to the situation and needs of victims, specifically women and girls, of armed conflicts. Therefore, there is a need to push for the conduct of more of such activities across the three countries. It would be well for donor agencies to provide more funding support in this area.

Nonviolent Peaceforce Philippines
Main Office
House # 003, General Luna Street
Rosary Height IV, Cotabato City 9600
Tel/Fax: (+63 64) 421 1977
Website: www.nvpf.org