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## **From Vertical to Horizontal Empowerment of Women (in) Peace and Security: Toward a Feminist Perspective of Human Security**

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# 7

## FROM VERTICAL TO HORIZONTAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN (IN) PEACE AND SECURITY

### Toward a Feminist Perspective of Human Security

*Ma Lourdes Veneracion*

#### 7.1 Introduction: WPS from an International to a National Context

Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), as a global agenda, advocates women's participation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, the protection of their human rights, and the prevention of violence against women and girls. This agenda was embodied in United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, a pioneering resolution emanating from the UN Security Council (UNSC) in October 2000. The Resolution finally recognized that the differential impact of armed conflict on women was a matter of significance for international peace and security. The Resolution has been advanced by civil society as it continues to fight to advance the agenda opposing all forms of violence against women (VAW) at women's and human rights conferences, such as those held in Nairobi, Copenhagen, Vienna, and Beijing. Discursively, WPS mainstreams gender in peace and security.

Substantively, WPS has two trajectories: (1) promoting agency and participation, and (2) preventing vulnerability and victimization. The first trajectory is the focus of UNSCR 1325—the foundational resolution of WPS (2000)—followed by UNSCRs 1889 (2009), 2122 (2013), and 2493 (2019); the second trajectory is the primary goal of UNSCRs 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2242 (2015), and 2467 (2019). In practice, more attention has been paid to women's vulnerability than women as change agents (O'Reilly 2019, 195).

In the Philippines, WPS was a momentous event. In 2010, through collaborative work by the State and civil society organizations (CSOs), the Philippines launched its National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (NAP WPS) 2010–2016, becoming the very first Asian country to do so. Four years later, largely through the work of national government agencies (NGAs), the NAP WPS was amended to

streamline its action points and indicators. In March 2017, a new NAP WPS was adopted for 2017–2022, known as the third iteration of NAP.

Parallel to these State initiatives were efforts made by civil society. The first was the establishment of a loose network of human rights and atrocity prevention, peace, and women’s groups from all over the country, known as ‘Women Engaged in Action on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325’ (WE Act 1325). These groups were from grassroots, local, and national spaces involved in ‘advocacy work, education and training, community-based involvement, networking, lobbying for legislation, research, and multi-sectoral/actor dialogues’ (Veneracion 2013, 76–77). Apart from localizing NAP WPS at the municipal and *barangay* levels (i.e., local action plans or LAP WPS), they also designated a role for themselves in monitoring the implementation of the NAP WPS at the national, regional, and provincial levels. For the most part, WE Act 1325 has played the role of domestic norm entrepreneur for WPS:

Particularly, as [a] domestic norm entrepreneur, the network is trying to transcend the usual top-down strategy of grounding an international norm and is now shifting gears toward the value of bottom-up approaches in order to achieve desired results at the grassroots level.

*(Veneracion 2013, 67)*

Based on this conception of CSOs’ role as domestic norm entrepreneurs, this chapter explores the following questions: How did the CSOs fare in pursuing their WPS work during the COVID-19 pandemic? What strategies did they use to continue empowering local/grassroots women partners? Using Naila Kabeer’s concept of empowerment, comprised of agency, resources, and achievement, this chapter teases out the shift from the CSOs’ vertical empowerment to that of local partners’ horizontal empowerment in the context of advancing gender through the WPS agenda during a crisis situation.

## 7.2 WPS Re-oriented toward COVID-19 Response

Despite being initially characterized as collaborative politics between the State and CSOs (Veneracion 2013), this partnership has since become less active. In fact, the State and CSOs seem to have gone their separate ways in terms of implementing the NAP WPS. The Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP)—the Chair of the NSC WPS and main implementer of the NAP WPS—was transformed into a pandemic response agency, the National Task Force on COVID-19. The head of OPAPP, Presidential Peace Adviser Secretary Carlito G. Calvez, Jr, was designated as the ‘vaccine czar’ by President Rodrigo Roa Duterte. According to one of the CSO interviewees for this chapter, ‘Working with government on WPS became difficult as they had a change in focus’ (Resource Person 1).

By 2021, however, OPAPP had resumed its role leading WPS by conducting focused group discussions (FGDs) in several conflict-affected/vulnerable areas. For example, in partnership with the Bangsamoro Women's Commission (BWC), it held an assessment of the situations of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) for women and girls and their families. It also conducted a situational analysis of the condition of women and girls in South Upi, Maguindanao, in Marawi and Lanao areas, and in the SPMS Box (Shariff Aguak, Pagatin now Datu Saudi Ampatuan, Mamasapano, and Datu Salibo). In addition, several initiatives were undertaken to mainstream WPS in the transitional justice roadmap of the Philippine government.

On the other hand, prior to the pandemic, CSOs had continued to deepen their partnerships with local women's groups in operationalizing WPS. There were capacity development programs, FGDs on gender, peace, and security, the concretization of women's meaningful participation, and other activities based on similar issues. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, these positive developments were jeopardized. The mobility of women from conflict areas, as well as their access to essential services, were profoundly affected. The mobility of national CSOs was also impacted, and they were now unable to visit communities as they had previously done. Virtual meetings did not prove to be an effective alternative in the short term because of connectivity challenges, as well as a lack of equipment. However, the local women's groups were still present in the communities, and they were able to connect the community women with the national CSOs. WPS work then picked up, with the national CSOs catering to the needs of local women by providing food packs, masks, and other material support through the intercession of local partners. Mainstreaming gender in their COVID-19 responses to conflict-affected communities became a core role of national WPS CSOs.

### 7.3 WPS and Human Security: Agency

The concept of human security moves security away 'from state security to threats of security that affect people, for example, threats emerging from famine, epidemics, economic decline, environmental degradation, migration and other such crises' (Tripp 2013, 3). It pertains to 'people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people and all communities' and is interlinked with 'peace, development and human rights' (UNGA 2013).

Gender is a human security concern primarily because people, particularly women, are rendered vulnerable and are victimized on the basis of gender. In armed conflict situations, women suffer more from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), such as rape, sexual slavery, etc.

According to Tripp, human security from a feminist perspective pays attention to the agency of the people. This notion is already present in the understanding that 'all individuals, especially vulnerable people, are entitled to freedom from

fear and freedom from want, with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential' (UNGA 2013). In the case of women, vulnerability is not perpetual, and they are actors in their own right: 'not enough attention is paid to the ways in which women contribute to their families, communities, and nations in such circumstances, mainly because of the focus on the high politics of men, statist solutions to the crises and international interventions' (Tripp 2013, 18). The process of creating WPS relied on discourses and civil society work on human security, leading to a framework for the UN Security Council to accept (Hudson 2010). As the WPS agenda highlights, women, through their agency, contribute to peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and post-conflict reconstruction. Integral to this process is the empowerment of women.

The Philippine NAP WPS 2017–2022 has four pillars: (1) empowerment and participation, (2) protection and prevention, (3) promotion and mainstreaming, and (4) monitoring and evaluation. In comparison with the first and second generations of the NAP WPS, the current version claims to highlight women's various roles in different peace spaces, as follows:

In this regard, it highlights women's agency—both as leaders and participants—in the peace process of the country. It seeks to continue the best practice of women's presence in formal peace tables as well as in other informal spaces (i.e. civil society and grassroots participation). It also aims to support various initiatives where women empower other women, recognize the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, and religion, and build a stronger constituency for peace and conflict transformation where women are involved in the front, back, and centre of the process. Additionally, it also pays attention to women's empowerment in light of their economic rights.

*(Philippine NAP WPS 2017, 9)*

The empowerment pillar seeks to demonstrate that 'Women and girls, through meaningful participation and leadership, are active change agents in conflict transformation and post-conflict development' (Philippine NAP WPS 2017, 12). In terms of links to gender in human security, it aims to advance the role and contribution of women and girls in attaining and sustaining peace. It also reflects the goal of strengthening women and girls' capabilities, access, and control in relation to decision-making spaces and resources.

## 7.4 Empowerment

### 7.4.1 Defining Empowerment

Empowerment, like most terms, is contested. It can be seen as a technical term (when linked to management, project development, or other output- and outcome-oriented endeavors) or emancipatory (when related to changes in the conditions or

situations of the people involved). However, what is usually agreed on is that it is a process. On the one hand, it is connected with the idea of power—not so much power over but rather power to (i.e., the ability to act), power with (i.e., collective action), and power within (i.e., sense of self-worth) (Coburn and Gormally 2017). On the other hand, it exists in the context of an absence or a lack of something: the absence of control, a lack of access, or the deprivation of space in which to be seen or heard.

In light of these factors, at the macro-level, empowerment challenges power relations, alters the conditions that perpetuate an undesirable status quo, and transforms situations that affect people's lives. For Sen (1993), empowerment involves an alteration in power relations, while for Batliwala (2007), empowerment was borne out as having a strong political meaning, centering on social change, social justice, and equality. As such, there is a distinctive consciousness about the pervading power dynamics, and empowerment helps people to develop the 'capacity to make effective choices [...] and then transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes' (Alsop, Berstelen, and Holland 2006, 10).

At the micro level, empowerment is a process in which people are enabled to participate in decision-making, gain access to resources that can transform their lives, and become actively engaged in shaping the functioning of their community. For Bennett (2002), empowerment is 'the enhancement of assets and capabilities of diverse individuals and groups to engage, influence and hold accountable the institutions which affect them'. Kabeer (2001) defines it as 'the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them'.

#### ***7.4.2 Women's Empowerment in Development Discourse: Kabeer's Agency, Resources, and Achievement***

Women's empowerment can be seen when women themselves mobilize and take on leadership positions in their respective communities (Caiman 1992; Bystydzenski 1992) or increase their power through grassroots movements and activism (Moser 1993; Kabeer 1994). In other words, women are acting on their own and for themselves as a group.

According to Kabeer (2005), empowerment pertains to the process whereby those who have been denied the ability to make choices are enabled to make them (13). Thus, empowerment presupposes change—from not having to having something. It has three dimensions: agency, resources, and achievement, each of which is explored below.

Agency is the act of making choices and doing so in order to challenge embedded power relations. It is power within that intersects with meaning, motivation, and goals. When linked to women's empowerment, it is akin to women's self-worth and how society values this actuation. In the presence of gender discrimination, agency can be actuated when this very discrimination is interrogated. And

through this challenge to embedded power, concrete steps can be taken toward gender equality—thus fulfilling the meaning of agency.

Resources are the essential means through which an individual exercises agency. These resources can be obtained from both institutional settings and relationships formed within a collective. For example, a woman can be a member of a family (an institution), while her situation is that of being a dependent (a relation), thereby limiting her access to resources. Consequently, the scope of her agency is constrained by her very limited resources.

And lastly, achievement for women pertains to the achievement of their full potential: being able to be part of decision-making circles, having voices in shaping the conditions that affect their lives, and advancing gender equality in institutions and relationships. Achievements are therefore the tangible outcomes of agency, reflecting the women's ability to exercise their power and create positive change.

### ***7.4.3 Women's Empowerment in WPS: From Macro- to Micro-Empowerment***

Women's empowerment in peace and security involves their full inclusion and participation in all matters of peace and security. According to Klugman, Nagel, and Viollaz (2021), empowering women not only advances human rights but also leads to sustainable peace. For O'Reilly (2015, 4), women's participation serves as a predictor of peace.

Empowerment of women in WPS can be inferred to mean increasing women's participation in peacebuilding efforts in general. For Barnes (2011), this is indicative of women contributing to peace. As women become more involved in peace processes, it has been asserted that peace is more likely to be sustainable compared to when women are excluded from participation (O'Reilly, Suilleabháin, and Paffenholz 2015; Krause, Krause, and Bräfors 2018).

UNSC 1325, as the foundational resolution on WPS, recognizes the various roles that women play in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. In this regard, it sees women's empowerment as inclusion and participation in decision-making spaces. These spaces, particularly those in institutions and peacebuilding infrastructures, must guarantee women's participation. In the case of UNSC 1889, the focus is on women's empowerment in peacebuilding amidst the underrepresentation of women in all stages of the peace process. Strategically, this must be operationalized through needs assessment, planning, and budgeting for programs, activities, and projects. Integral to this process is the advancement of gender equality and the improvement of conditions for women and girls, specifically in the context of post-conflict reconstruction. For Resolution 2122, women's leadership plays an essential role in women's empowerment and their inclusion in all levels of decision-making. For the first time, in USCR 1325, there was a specific mention of women's economic empowerment in transitioning societies. And

finally, as regards Resolution 2493, the reiteration of institutional arrangements and processes has been identified as the key to women being empowered to fully, equally, and meaningfully participate in conflict transformation, as follows:

Globally, as well as in ASEAN, women's contributions to prevention and resolution of conflicts, and to post-conflict recovery, have tended to be in the informal realm (e.g., Tracks 1.5 or 2, in terms of peace processes) or have been at the community level, often led by community-based organizations. More recently, there has been a tendency of national NGOs or even international NGOs to enter into this space, but the bulk of women's contributions to stop violence, provide mitigation solutions, and heal/rebuild after the conflict has been at this informal, community-based level.

*(ASEAN 2021, 15)*

### **7.5 Civil Society, Empowerment, and WPS during the Pandemic Crisis**

Civil society has been integral and invaluable in the development of WPS:

Locally and nationally, women's civil society organizations are key spaces for women's social and political engagement with the power to end wars and build peace. CSOs demonstrate that women's agency, voice, and capacities are critical to local dialogues, better policies, and more equitable peace deals, which established a solid foundation for the new postwar order.

*(Björkdahl and Selimovic 2019, 428)*

In the evolution of WPS, CSOs were present in setting the agenda and institutionalization, as well as implementation and practice. According to Anderlini (2019), the adoption of UNSCR 1325 was largely led by civil society:

We had the vision, the strategy, the tools, the tactics, and not to mention the relentless hard work and singular pursuit that drove our efforts. It was and is an achievement in terms of advocacy because we succeeded in getting governments to embrace our own vision and agenda. As civil society alone, we could not have secured a resolution in the Security Council. That remains an area for state action, so we needed those states to join in.

*(49)*

The CSOs' involvement in developing the first NAP WPS in the Philippines followed a process of collaborative politics. First, in 2007, a group of women from different CSOs came together to talk about UNSCR 1325. That conversation eventually led to the development of a CSO for convening activities to unravel what WPS meant for Filipino women (i.e., agenda-setting). Three years later,



the CSO-led NAP WPS 2010–2016 was launched. Second, during the various regional consultations, government actors—through the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) and OPAPP—joined in. For their part, the government issued Executive Order 865, which created the National Steering Committee on Women, Peace and Security (NSCWPS) as the strategic entity in charge of the implementation of the NAP WPS (i.e., institutionalization). And third, over the following six years, capacity-building for implementing NGAs, policy guidance, amendments to the NAP WPS, and a range of different activities were conducted. In 2017, a new NAP WPS was adopted by the Philippine government. As for the CSOs, they focused on localization of the NAP WPS, bridging grassroots women’s groups with international CSOs, and networking with local partner CSOs (i.e., implementation and practice).

With the onset of the pandemic, adjustments to the ways that CSOs did their work were needed. These changes shall be discussed in the case studies below.

## 7.6 Case Studies

The three organizations chosen for this study, in one way or another, have all been involved in advancing WPS around the country. Each organization has collaborated with a range of local partners for several years in implementing WPS projects. These local partners, in turn, are the ones that organize the activities on the ground, by securing participants and coordinating logistics. Previously, the national CSOs had, to a certain degree, flown in, facilitated activities with local partners, and assisted in moving forward the plans of the participants—all with the help of the local partners. However, the COVID-19 pandemic changed that. The three CSOs were chosen for the study because they have been at the forefront of WPS work since the NAP WPS was first launched in 2010, and each has a strong gender program.

First, Gaston Z. Ortigas Peace Institute (GZOPI) is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that works for ‘just and lasting peace’ in the Philippines. It has been involved in lobbying and advocacy, networking, and capacity building and training. Its areas of interest are gender, human security, dialogue and mediation, as well as peace education. The goals of the Institute are as follows:

- ***Provide effective training and capability-building*** for groups and communities to pursue peaceful approaches to conflict;
- ***Support citizen peacemakers and sectoral formations*** challenging and engaging government and other relevant parties in dialogues and negotiations to advance the people’s peace agenda;
- ***Undertake research, documentation, and model-building*** on replicable Filipino conflict resolution processes;
- ***Build linkages and networks*** with local and international groups that are working for peace and conflict transformation. (GZOPI, n.d.a.)

Since 1994, GZOPI has undertaken training, consultations, and studies on women and peace. It has also been active internationally through affiliations with the Harvard Kennedy School of Government's Women Waging Peace and Southeast Asia Peace Women. More recently, it became involved in a UNSCR 1325 capacity-building project based on the recognition that 'women themselves must be primary agents for conflict prevention and peacebuilding' (GZOPI, n.d.b.).

Second, founded in 2006, Sulong CARHRIHL is an NGO that has emerged from the peace process between the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front of the Philippines (CPP-NPA-NDFP). Part of the organization's mission was to monitor the Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) between the GPH and CPP-NPA-NDFP. Through the years, it has grown its network to 147 partner organizations representing 'women, indigenous people, youth, workers, farmers, academic institutions, duty bearers, and the church' (Sulong Peace 2023a). It is 'an organization that empowers citizens and communities affected by armed conflict through human rights, peace and development' (Sulong Peace 2023b). Later, it became more involved in governance and peacebuilding work using a gender perspective. In 2021, Sulong CARHRIHL was renamed Sulong Peace to capture the expanding work of the organization.

The third organization is WE Act 1325, launched in 2010 after the first iteration of the NAP WPS. WE Act 1325 is a national network of civil society organizations with 35 member organizations nationwide (WE Act 1325, n.d.). It was established to help with the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and 1820. In recent years, the focus of their work has been on 'policy review, capacity building and training of various stakeholders; engaging the peace process through its dialogue with panel members; advocating for women's participation in peacebuilding; advocating for peace education and; raising media awareness'. It also aims to 'strengthen the justice system, campaigns against small arms, monitors and documents the effects of armed conflict on women, involves grassroots women in peacebuilding projects, promotes civil society involvement in the implementation of the NAP, and monitors the implementation of the Plan' (We Act 2010, 28). Through its local partners, the network connects with grassroots women in relation to their role in local peacebuilding. Localization of the NAP WPS at the municipal and city levels has also featured in its work, such as the localization undertaken in Cuyapo, Nueva Ecija; Tabuk, Kalinga; Calbiga, Marabut, Basey, and Villareal in Samar; Sultan Mastura in Cotabato City; Marawi City; Butuan, Cabadbaran, Buenavista, and Magallanes in Agusan del Norte; and Real and Nakar in Quezon (Women Engaged in Action on UNSCR 1325 n.d.) for local government units (LGUs) to implement the salient points of WPS, particularly women's participation.

For this chapter, online interviews were conducted with resource persons from GZOPI, Sulong Peace, and WE Act 1325 during the early part of 2021. The researcher then engaged in email correspondence with the local partners of

GZOPI, Sulong Peace, and WE Act to gather insights from their perspectives. Finally, the researcher reviewed the activity reports from the three CSOs to gain a deeper understanding of the activities they have undertaken on the ground. Collected data were organized according to themes based on Kabeer's conception of empowerment.

### 7.6.1 GZOPI

GZOPI was involved in several projects before the pandemic lockdown. The first was a project on women and normalization in the Bangsamoro that involved advocacy and training, while the second was a consultation on the Bangsamoro transition linked to the work of the Third Party Monitoring Team (TPMT). The third project was to establish, through the Global Partnership on the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), a working group for the peace process in collaboration with the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP).

In the early stages of the pandemic, GZOPI added relief and responses for grassroots women to its work through local women's partner organizations that had already been working with them: the Women's Organization of Rajah Mamalu Descendants (WORMD) in Maguindanao, Al Mujadilah Development Foundation/Al Mujadillah Women's Association in Lanao, Nisa Ul Haqq Fi Bangsamoro in Zamboanga, Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi. Consultations with women on peacebuilding continued, and relief packs were given to those who participated. In Maguindanao, GZOPI supported a special project on women's mask-making and distributed the masks to conflict-affected communities.

Since GZOPI was unable to travel to Mindanao due to the lockdown in Metro Manila, it relied heavily on its local partners—such as WORMD, Al Mujadilah Development Foundation/Al Mujadillah Women's Association, and Nisa Ul Haqq Fi Bangsamoro—to conduct grassroots consultations. In the middle of the year, consultations continued, but these were conducted by local partners. In this regard, these local partners shaped the substance and approach of workshops and consultation activities; it was also the local partners who distributed relief packs to the women attendees.

In assessing the situation of conflict-affected areas in which it works, GZOPI has ensured the participation of local women as partners. Other partners of GZOPI include UN Women and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC); it also continued to engage with NGAs such as the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), albeit to a limited degree. Based on the assessment of GZOPI, the situation in the Bangsamoro worsened during the ongoing pandemic: *rido* (or clan wars) continued, and there were more incidents in which Indigenous peoples (IPs) were killed.

With regard to advancing the goals of WPS, GZOPI said that it continued to contribute to the protection and prevention pillar through advocacy and

participation in consultations on peace and normalization. However, all of these activities relied heavily on local partners that had a direct hand in implementing GZOPI projects and in re-shaping the running of workshops in which grassroots women participated.

For example, in the project ‘Deepening Women’s Peace Tables—Philippines (Strengthening Women’s Participation in Transitional Justice in the Bangsamoro)’, women who organized and participated in learning sessions on transitional justice wanted to expand these workshops to other women’s groups. In this regard, ‘they therefore designed, planned and implemented these Women’s Peace Tables (WPT) with more variation on specific needs, unlike in previous years when GZOPI managed these WPTs with their support’ (Deepening Women’s Peace Tables Report, January 2020 to June 2021).

For GZOPI, seeking stronger networking and maximizing existing resources has been the key strategy in trying to survive and advance its work in the middle of the pandemic. Its local partners have been instrumental in its survival. It was also more difficult to advance WPS during the pandemic, as both CSOs’ and the government’s attention were divided. It has been more difficult to advocate for the protection and prevention aspects of WPS. Nonetheless, according to the GZOPI resource person, creative approaches—such as workshops/consultations combined with relief operations due to the COVID-19 situation—were necessary. Additionally, maximizing the connections between existing local partners, grassroots women’s groups, and community women was a key part of the strategy.

### 7.6.1.1 Agency

Prior to the pandemic, the physical presence of GZOPI on the ground was the norm. It had local partner women’s organizations that assisted in the implementation of projects and activities. These women’s groups were integral in gathering the community women—their constituency—to participate in focus group discussions, trainings, and workshops. These activities had to do with women’s participation in peacebuilding. In the context of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), women’s participation is related to governance and politics.

When the pandemic hit, GZOPI could no longer travel and relied heavily on its local partner women’s organizations. The activities and projects were implemented by the local partner women’s organizations themselves. According to GZOPI, ‘in a way, it was good, because they have more leeway in shaping the activities’ (Resource Person 1). In other words, the local partner women’s organizations were not only project implementers but became decision-makers themselves in setting the trajectory of the trainings and workshops. Specifically, they were quick to decide on the needs of women participants. For example, when the women said they needed relief food packs, local partner women’s organizations immediately responded to these needs. In the context of the pandemic, they knew

what the women needed because they were their constituency. And, as such, they were able to make recommendations to GZOPI concerning the situation on the ground.

In the case of the WORMD, it said that its relationship with GZOPI deepened. They had several online meetings about what WORMD should do during the pandemic and mapped out the needs of women, men, and children. This gave WORMD much-needed information on the pandemic situation and any appropriate actions they could take in response. It also strengthened the view that GZOPI was still taking care of the organization, recommending that it make its own decisions regarding the situation of Indigenous women in the midst of the pandemic (Resource Person 4). Awareness-raising was key in this engagement, as well as highlighting their capacity to decide on situations that would impact them.

By 2021, in the case of the WPT project, most engagements were still being carried out by local partners, even though GZOPI staff were now able return to fieldwork. By this time, the local women CSOs were already thoroughly engaged with the grassroots women. For example, UNYPhil-Women held four WPTs in Maguindanao for ‘women community builders who are members or partners of UNYPhil’ (GZOPI 2021). The same was done by Al Mujadillah Development Foundation/Al Mujadillah Women’s Association for their WPT undertaken in Lanao del Sur and Marawi City on women’s experiences and transitional justice, including in the context of the Marawi Siege. In the same manner, the WPT on transitional justice conducted in Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi was led by NISA Ul Haqq Fi Bangsamoro. Furthermore, local women’s organizations were invited by GZOPI ‘to propose advocacy activities [...] designed and implemented in response to ongoing situations and also anticipating future work on women’s agenda’ (GZOPI 2021).

### 7.6.1.2 Resources

During the pandemic, many regular activities of GZOPI were close to being shut down. According to GZOPI, there were a lot of shifts and changes in relation to sources of funding, as most of these were being diverted to the COVID-19 response. The work of GZOPI was no different. For example, FGDs on peacebuilding and participation included food relief packs for the participants. Resources were also allotted to the making of masks by women for their community’s use. Unfortunately, women’s multiple burdens, worsened by uncertainties resulting from the pandemic, were not addressed in the activities. However, it was the women themselves who spoke out about their situation and their needs. GZOPI responded accordingly by shifting part of their allotment of resources to meeting the needs of their women (Resource Person 1). For local WPTs, ‘GZOPI relayed the project funds to partner organizations based on contracts’ (GZOPI 2021).

### 7.6.1.3 Achievements

In the case of WORMD, the organization emerged out of the capacity development programs of GZOPI, among others. Women assisting with WORMD had training on women's human rights, WPS, preventing and countering violent extremism (PCVE), transitional justice, etc. During the pandemic, it has been noted that GZOPI continued working with local groups on community policing. According to the report of GZOPI, 'community-oriented policing would be more effective in the delivery of police services if they were sensitive to issues and perspectives of both women and men' and 'would also be enhanced by increased participation of women in the various components of the system' (Developing a Gender-Sensitive Community Policing Framework in BARMM 2021, 4). They also had several FGDs with different sectors co-organized by WORMD, at which community policing doubled as an information drive on COVID-19. For GZOPI, its reliance on and realization of the role of local partners became bigger and broader. According to WORMD,

From our experience and observation, we can say that we are more empowered now than before. Our communities recognized our advocacies and, thus, expanded our membership from South Upi and Datu Blah Sinsuat municipalities.

For UNYPhil-Women, Al Mujadillah Development Foundation/Al Mujadillah Women's Association, and Nisa Ul Haqq Fi Bangsamoro, their WPTs yielded the following:

- Through discussions, women were able to share and contribute their stories and insights;
- Such deeper understanding leads to more appropriate and specific plans and responses by women's organizations to engaging transitional justice and peace process efforts; and
- Local women's organizations gained more experience of designing and implementing trainings on transitional justice and WPTs (GZOPI 2021).

### 7.6.2 Sulong CARHRIHL/Peace

Prior to the pandemic lockdown, Sulong was actively implementing a project with Indigenous women (IW) in the provinces of Quezon (Grupo ng Kababaihang Umuugnay sa Pamayanan ng mga Agta/Dumagat na Nagtatanggol sa Lupaing Ninuno, or GUPAD-LN), North Cotabato (Nagkahiusang Lumadnong Kababayan-an sa Tinanan, or NALKATI), Agusan del Sur (Panaghiusa Alang sa Kaugalingnon ug Kalingkawasan, or PASAKK), Bukidnon (Kamalitanan te Matigsalog, Manobo, Kulamanen ne Migsabeka, or KMMKM), Rizal (Samahan ng

Kababaihan sa Puray, or SKP), and Oriental Mindoro (Nagkakaisang Kababaihang Mangyan ng Gloria para sa Kaunlaran at Kapayapaan, or NKMGKK).

Sulong was involved in a capacity-building program on governance and peace from a gender and human rights perspective aimed at strengthening IW's participation in the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres. Specifically, IWs were trained in local advocacy, the conduct of dialogues with local leaders, and the development of livelihood endeavors. They were about to commence the same kind of engagement with IW from Rizal and Davao Region when the COVID-19 lockdown was announced.

During the lockdown, sufficient communication continued with local IW partner organizations for Sulong to feel that the project was proceeding as planned. Continuing the project amidst the pandemic lockdown also enabled Sulong to carry out activities (i.e., data gathering) despite the fact that the organization, based in Metro Manila, was not there with them. At the same time, previous mechanisms, such as the Monitoring and Action Response (MAR) team in various areas, continued with local monitoring and documentation of human rights violations alongside COVID-19 incidents and verification. Sulong relied on these reports to craft its assessment and subsequent actions.

Armed conflict continued in the places where Sulong worked. Incidents of human rights violations increased, the recruitment of children for armed groups persisted, and red-tagging continued unabated. In practice, red tagging is where (mainly) government actors maliciously tag individuals or groups that are critical of the current regime as either communists or terrorists, regardless of their true affiliation (Torres 2019). According to the Republic Act 98551, red-tagging or red-baiting 'may be considered as a crime of persecution against any identifiable group or collectivity on political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender, sexual orientation or other grounds'. This is the result of Sulong's assessment, with input from the IW.

Throughout 2020, Sulong maintained its engagement with Indigenous women's organizations (IWOs) in a project titled 'Expanding the Support to Indigenous Women for Influencing Dutybearers on Peace, Human Rights, and Development'. For all of its local partners—GUPAD-LN, NALKATI, PASAKK, KMMKM, SKP, and NKMGKK—additional training, mentoring, and coaching were provided. In the middle of the pandemic, Sulong conducted a study on the six IWOs about how COVID-19 had impacted their political, economic, social, and cultural rights (Sulong Peace 2022).

Apart from working with partner IWs, Sulong strengthened its relationship with the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), the Human Rights Office of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (HRO AFP), and the Human Rights Office of the Philippine National Police (HRO PNP). Engagement with the CHR took the form of coordinating with the regional offices of the Commission. Building a relationship with security forces was a strategy to establish a bridge with the forces on the ground. In light of WPS, protection ensuring the security of women on the ground is key to working with government institutions.

For Sulong, coordination with various stakeholders, particularly the government, contributes to advancing the protection and prevention of violence against IW. Sulong's leadership capacity-building programs also include provisions for early warning, early response, psychosocial support, and paralegal training. IW women directly participate in the monitoring and validation of human rights cases as well as in the control of armed conflict situations in their respective areas. According to Sulong, it is able to do its work because of reliable local partners and engagement with various stakeholders.

#### *7.6.2.1 Agency*

Before the pandemic, Sulong was very much present on the ground. It was active in the capacity building of its local partners, conducting surveys and FGDs, building its constituency, and strengthening partnerships. When the pandemic hit, it needed to ensure that the women felt that their project could continue so that they could continue activities that needed to be carried out. These local partners were able to do things—such as data gathering, monitoring and documentation of international humanitarian law violations, and COVID-19 monitoring in partner areas—on their own.

Sulong conducted a study on how its local partners were faring amid the pandemic through the lens of political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Because all these IWOs had prior capacity development training from Sulong, they were able to respond to the questions in the study. According to the results of 'Women's Rights through a Pandemic', for example, it is clear that NALKATI women believe that their political rights have something to do with leadership and empowerment. In regard to empowerment, the women understand that this means the ability to carry out projects that would benefit their community. In the case of KMMKM, political rights entail political empowerment or the duty to educate other women to be leaders. For PASAKK, political rights pertain to non-discrimination based on gender and Indigenous identity while for GUPAD-LN, it meant the right to become leaders in the community. In the case of SKP and NKMGGK, political rights mean those that ensure the right to participation and engagement in community life. For these IWOs, political rights are paramount since they push them to participate meaningfully in their collective. They also create the opportunity to be leaders and show other IW that they can be leaders too. Advancing governance structures to include women was also one of the things that Sulong included in its training and mentoring.

#### *7.6.2.2 Resources*

Before the pandemic, Sulong had several projects that were supported by various funding organizations. One was on Enabling Women's Participation in Economic, Political, and Social Life, and another concerned the promotion of peacebuilding processes and how civil society can contribute to peace. Needless to say, Sulong



closely coordinated with their funding agencies in mapping out the continuation of such projects. Later on in the pandemic, leadership training programs for women were conducted in new areas: Rizal, Montalban; New Bataan, Davao de Oro; and Magpet, North Cotabato. These groups also learned about organizational development and strengthening for peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

### 7.6.2.3 *Achievements*

Sulong believes that women's participation is a right. Women's organizations trained by Sulong were capacitated on human rights, peace, governance, and gender. The trained IW continued with their own advocacy, engaging with tribal leadership through dialogue and local government units (LGUs) through grass-roots participation. In the case of KMMKM, it was able to manage its livelihood program on its own. It was also able to re-apply the capacity-building training that it had undertaken, as well as carry out humanitarian assistance activities as the need arose. All other IWOs called for more training and mentoring in order for them to internalize the value of IW leadership. For IWOs, empowerment means meaningful participation in the political, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of IW's lives (Resource Person 2).

For Sulong, the self-recognition of IWOs was an outcome of its work with its local partners. This is its contribution to WPS: IWOs in conflict-affected areas are able to realize their rights and capability to be leaders. For example, for NALKATI, IW leadership means the 'ability to participate in the important occasions in the community' and being able to 're-echo to the community what they learned from trainings' (Sulong Peace 2022, 14). In the case of KMMKM, IW leadership means 'opportunities to engage, participate, contribute to the affairs of the community in which they belong' (Sulong Peace 2022, 20), while for PASAKK, the leadership of IW relates to 'enhancing their capacities and contributing to the growth of the community' (Sulong Peace 2022, 26). In the same vein, for GUPAD-LN, SKP, and NKMGKK, IW leadership cannot be separated from community life.

### 7.6.3 *WE Act 1325*

Before the pandemic lockdown, WE Act 1325 was busy with several projects and activities. It was involved in talks with peace-table actors such as the NDFP in an effort to return to peace negotiations; it engaged in legislative advocacy concerning the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) and campaigns for the plebiscite; and it conducted humanitarian assistance in evacuation camps during the Marawi Siege.

During the pandemic lockdown, WE Act 1325 realized that it needed to recast and realign its funds to assist conflict-affected women who were also impacted by the pandemic: 'It was in this context that WE Act and Oxfam Women's Empowerment for Leadership in Development and Peace (WELD-Peace) agreed on a set of re-designed activities that would respond to Moro women's practical needs for immediate humanitarian relief in light of the crisis caused by the pandemic and

Ramadhan' (Report on Moro Women's Experiences under COVID-19 2021). The activities had the following objectives: '(1) to undertake women-led humanitarian assistance to poor and marginalized Moro women affected by the extended community quarantine/lockdown during the season of Ramadhan'; and '(2) to enhance the Bangsamoro Women's Agenda by gathering Moro women's lived experiences in dealing with the COVID-19 crisis as well as their aspirations for the post-COVID recovery intervention programs' (Report on Moro Women's Experiences under COVID-19 2021). One of these activities was the delivery of *iftar* during Ramadan, as well as the delivery of food packs to women FGD participants from North Upi, North Cotabato, Lanao del Sur, and Zamboanga. WE Act 1325 also did the same for armed conflict widows who needed immediate relief assistance. In other words, their actions were consultation and humanitarian assistance rolled into one. As for the expected output, the activities were designed to ensure that WE Act partners would be mobilized to provide assistance to poor and marginalized women. For the grassroots women, the expected output was to gather 'women's lived experiences in dealing with COVID-19 crisis as well as their aspirations for post-COVID recovery intervention programs summarized and incorporated into the Women's agenda' (Report on Moro Women's Experiences under COVID-19 2021).

As regards the assessment of conflict in the areas in which it was working, the WE Act 1325 relies on local partners and their partnerships with various conflict-affected communities. To a large extent, the physical presence of WE Act 1325 is represented by their local partners. Through them, WE Act 1325 can touch base with grassroots women who also have insights into their situation. Apart from local partners and grassroots women, WE Act 1325 also engaged with BARMM government entities such as the BWC. Unfortunately, when the pandemic hit, WE Act 1325 could no longer engage with NGAs such as OPAPP as it had previously. However, it continued to network with other CSOs.

The niche of WE Act 1325 is women's participation and representation. It has a positive track record in policy advocacy and networking and has also been strong in preparing women leaders for political and economic participation, as in the case of Bangsamoro women. Because of this, WE Act 1325 is optimistic that Bangsamoro women will play a significant role in the Bangsamoro transition process. It has been hearing about possibilities from local partners: women's political parties, IW parties, and/or IP parties with women representatives. Despite the pandemic, no matter how challenging things have been, WE Act 1325 believes that it can still achieve its goals. Learning from experience, WE Act 1325 trusts the 'bottom-up' approach, as well as relying on local partners to see their advocacy through.

### 7.6.3.1 Agency

WE Act, as a network of partner organizations nationwide, has wide coverage in terms of its work. It has been fully supportive of the governance infrastructure and

processes in the Bangsamoro, particularly in terms of legislative advocacy. It also engaged in humanitarian assistance in collaboration with its local partners during the Marawi Siege. Many of its activities were onsite and physical.

With the lockdown, it had to respond to the needs of marginalized and vulnerable women, particularly food, which the women stated was their greatest need. Through its local partners, it was able to provide this. At the same time, it assisted local partners in the production of psychosocial materials about COVID-19.

One of its activities was a survey of the impact of COVID-19 on women from conflict-affected/vulnerable communities. The survey was conducted in collaboration with its local partners, namely the Group of Women Advocating for Peace in the Archdiocese (GWAPA) and PilumBayan, in two areas—Cagayan de Oro and Cotabato City—both chosen due to the presence of local partners.

According to the survey results on the impact of COVID-19, conflict-affected/vulnerable women mostly had difficulties in terms of their mobility, loss of income and livelihood, inability to spend time with other people, fear of being infected with COVID-19, and lack of access to basic essentials. In Cotabato City, the main impact was the loss of income and livelihood (WE Act 1325 2021).

From the survey results, WE Act and the local partners developed recommendations for the national and BARMM governments. These are:

- Continue to provide appropriate responses to the needs and rights of poor and marginalized women affected by the COVID-19 crisis, including equal access to humanitarian relief services and goods. This includes access to emergency subsidy funds, of which a significant number of women had been deprived;
- Provide seed capital funds for women and their families who were forced to close down their small businesses because of community quarantine/lockdown restrictions; and
- Upgrade basic health services at the *barangay* level and in public hospitals.

In this engagement, WE Act provided local partners with the opportunity to do their work more on their own. In planning such activities, they had more input since they were the ones that had connections on the ground. They would also be the ones to follow through and implement other data collection strategies to deepen the responses of the women respondents.

### 7.6.3.2 Resources

Resource realignment because of shifts in activities had to be carried out in the context of changed needs during the pandemic. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the FGDs added the dimension of food pack assistance for women and their families. This was done based on the understanding that affected people needed basic goods:

Food packs were the immediate need that was expressed. At the start of the lockdown, it was foreseen that informal workers' and daily wage earners' survival would be affected, as they lead a hand-to-mouth existence. [This group also included] widows, divorced women, single women, and senior women.

*(Resource Person 3)*

For WE Act, along with Oxfam WELD-Peace, an important facet of humanitarian and peacebuilding assistance is to address the needs of women in communities affected by conflict and complicated by the situation of COVID-19. For example, WE Act, along with GZOPI, also supported a special project of women making masks for distribution to their communities. Unfortunately, this assistance, which resulted in the women being able to generate some income from their products, was provided only during the beginning of the lockdown. As the COVID-19 situation worsened, such activities were discontinued.

#### 7.6.3.3 Achievements

Local partners like WORMD, GWAPA, and Pilumbayan have deepened relations with WE Act. They have been capacitated and given the freedom to organize and mobilize constituents on their own. WORMD undertook many online meetings with WE Act that indirectly capacitated them on the use of technology and social media. According to WORMD, the pandemic did not serve as an obstacle in conducting activities in Indigenous communities. The organization itself tried to assess the situation of women, men, and children during the pandemic. According to WE Act 1325, in the survey undertaken by GWAPA and Pilumbayan,

The immediate impact of the crisis on the women, personally and their families, was the limited mobility, especially for those who had to leave home for work. Some experienced separation of families, lamenting that they could no longer visit relatives even if they were living in the same city. During Ramadhan, family gatherings to pray and break their fast together, at the end of the day, is an important ritual. A number also missed going to their mosque to worship. Not being able to observe this age-old ritual could make one lose their sense of balance.

*(WE Act 1325 2021)*

In a survey conducted through local partners, women respondents from Cagayan de Oro and Cotabato expressed the hope that NGAs could provide jobs and capital to offset the livelihoods that they lost. They also hope that the 'government will apply equality in access to basic services and the social amelioration program' (WE Act 1325 2021). From the perspective of WPS, the engagement of both local partners and grassroots community women in addressing the impact of COVID-19 on their lives exemplified participation. According to WE Act 1325:

In terms of the role of grassroots women, we try as much as possible to involve community-based organizations that are mainly partners of our local partners. For example, WORMD physically mobilized women for the Bangsamoro Women's Commission's 18-days Campaign on Violence Against Women. Physical presence is important, but since we ourselves are unable to do so, our local partners like WORMD and Pilumbayan do that themselves. In a way it is more positive because you can see the grassroots presence, the face of empowerment by WE Act 1325 are the local partners that mobilized them.

*(Resource Person 3)*

#### **7.6.4 From Vertical to Horizontal Women's Empowerment in the Context of WPS: Women's Agency as Central to Human Security**

First and foremost, all of the CSOs examined here maximized the resources that already existed. To a large extent, this has been a gain achieved through networking. During the pandemic lockdown, CSOs banded together and worked with one another. Second, there was a heavy reliance on local partners who were also members of a national network of CSOs. In this respect, prior working relationships, as well as being integrated into the network itself, made it easier for the national-level organizations to connect with grassroots organizations. At the same time, local partners were given greater decision-making roles in administering work in the field. The multi-level (global, regional, national, local) interactions taking place result in a web of connective action. In the case of national networks, engaging the State—both collaboratively and critically—involves interactions between agents. While the pandemic may have complicated the situation, CSOs did not give up and used various means to continue their work. For example,

the COVID-19 pandemic comes on top of existing challenges facing the implementation of the WPS agenda, including a global pushback against multilateral cooperation. But at the same time, the pandemic has demonstrated the prescience of this agenda, revealing the importance of gender analysis and gender-sensitive responses and the value of women's leadership, including that of local women peacebuilders, in times of crisis.

*(Rahmaty and Jaghag 2020, 2)*

And third, listening to realities on the ground has been an essential facet of the work of the CSOs. It is no longer about parachuting in and flying out but now includes the relationship between the national level and the local and grassroots levels. This has proven to be an important aspect of women's meaningful participation, and we are likely to see more of this before the pandemic ends.

Prior to the pandemic, GZOPI, Sulong, and WE Act engaged in the vertical empowerment of local partner organizations and their constituencies. This essentially means that empowerment was a top-down process, from the national CSOs

to local groups, with agency being passed down to the partner. This was done largely through capacity development and training. Local partners were also part of a network in which they engaged their constituents in various activities such as FGDs and consultations. As regards resources, these came from GZOPI and Sulong themselves. These efforts were deemed successful when the local partner and its constituencies were more capacitated and enabled to participate in the informal spaces of peacebuilding.

During the pandemic, there was a shift to horizontal empowerment. GZOPI, WE Act, and Sulong have remained in the picture, but the agency is now more focused on their local partners. For example, in the case of WORMD, it was able to organize and mobilize its constituencies to engage in peacebuilding on its own, while KMMKM was able to advance its livelihood programs as a group. Resources are passed down to local partners by GZOPI, WE Act, and Sulong. Achievement takes the form of the direct participation of local partners and their constituencies (See Figure 7.1).Figure

In the context of WPS, the micro-empowerment of women involves considering their participation. As seen in the case studies, the CSOs developed relationships with local partners prior to the pandemic. In this sense, GZOPI, WE Act, and Sulong have capacitated these women’s groups through their various activities and engagements. By the time the pandemic hit, the local partners had sufficient agency of their own to carry on with their work. Their empowerment continues to grow as the national CSOs are now the ones relying on them. They have also been more active in decision-making, for example, in relation to how to shape consultation sessions and workshops. Additionally, they are able to respond immediately to the needs of their constituencies since they are the ones on the ground, and they are very much present in informal spaces of peacebuilding in the context of the pandemic. This is their experience of horizontal empowerment: They form a chain of decisions and actions despite the impartial presence of national CSOs.

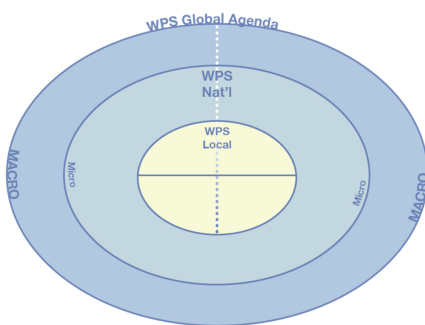


FIGURE 7.1 Macro to micro and vertical to horizontal empowerment. Source: author

## 7.7 Conclusion: Toward a Feminist Perspective of Human Security

WPS is a global agenda that seeks to advance women's human rights in peace and security. It is a macro-empowerment discourse because it links gender equality to peacebuilding and conflict transformation; it also pushes for the protection of women's human rights and the prevention of violence against women. This agenda is operationalized at the national and local levels. NAP WPS and even local action plans (LAP) on WPS have provided guidance for the micro-empowerment of women. In the case of the Philippines, its major pillars are participation and empowerment, protection and prevention, mainstreaming, and monitoring and evaluation.

This chapter investigated CSOs and the operationalization of WPS during a pandemic. It argued that the older practice of top-down empowerment—the national CSOs empowering local partners through capacity development—was no longer apt in pandemic circumstances. It then explained the occurrence of horizontal empowerment, whereby local partners were empowered to decide on their own how to mobilize, organize, and empower their grassroots women partners. The strategies employed involved training and reinforcing learning with communities, providing consultations coupled with humanitarian assistance, and paying attention to while also responding to the needs of the women. Without undermining the realities of women's vulnerability on the ground, it is also crucial to recognize their agency. In terms of the human security concept, this means realizing women's full potential as agents for peace. Empowerment is integral to this process as an opportunity for women to empower other women. This is the feminist idea of human security.

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