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Global women, peace and security index launched in Australia



Anu Mundkur
15 Dec, 2017

Dr Anu Mundkur, ACFID's representative on the Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security, spoke at Australia's launch of the new global Women, Peace and Security Index. The index – which incorporates three basic dimensions of wellbeing: inclusion, justice and security – is designed to identify challenges and opportunities for transformative change. Here, Dr Mundkur reflects on the index, putting it into context against other aspects of the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

Thank you for inviting me to reflect on the recently released [WPS Index](#). Today, I am speaking as ACFID's representative on the [Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women Peace and Security](#).

The WPS Index I believe makes an important contribution to the "sustaining peace" agenda which is front and centre of identical resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council ([UNSCR 2282](#)) and the [70th Session of UNGA](#). By making conspicuous the development-security nexus, the Index highlights the key dimensions of Justice, Inclusion and Security as integral to the achievement of sustaining peace.

In this regard, the WPS Index resonates with the themes that emerged from the [3 roundtables](#) organised by the Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women Peace and Security in September this year. These roundtables with women from diverse backgrounds sought to unpack what peace and security mean and what Australia should be doing to promote peace and security. It is in the context of these discussions that I would like to further explore two dimensions of WPS Index, as I anticipate running out of time!

Looking first at the dimension of Inclusion, the roundtables drew attention to the need for safe spaces for diverse communities and their organisations (particularly spaces for women and girls) to exercise agency and participate in making decisions. The roots of the WPS movement lie in civil society activism and this activism sustains the agenda. We cannot take this space for granted in the



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light of persistent efforts to close these spaces. The Australian Government's proposed bill to restrict advocacy by any organisation receiving foreign donations is as [Marc Purcell](#) the CEO of ACFID has said "an attempt to shut down legitimate comment on matters of public interest by restricting the funding sources available to charities." Manuel Castells reminds us that, "without an effective civil society capable of structuring and channeling citizen debates over diverse ideas and conflicting interests, the state drifts away from its subjects." The WPS index in its next iteration needs to account for this shrinking space and the [CIVICUS Monitor](#) might provide useful data to draw on.

With respect to women's representation in parliament, the roundtables highlighted the insufficiency of looking at numbers alone. Numbers are important. Ask women in PNG where out of 111 MP there are no women in the current PNG parliament. At the same time numbers are a poor proxy for gender-responsive policy and legislative agendas. We must question the value of 32% representation when a Minister holding the women's portfolio crosses the floor in favour of a motion to challenge White Ribbon about its advocacy around "nationally consistent access to safe and legal abortion, including late-term abortion in all states and territories." In seeking a more robust indicator for inclusion, the WPS Index may wish to explore the [Varieties of Democracy's](#) women political empowerment index or the [WomenStats](#) indicator titled "Women's security through voice."

Turning to security, in addition to eliminating sexual and gender-based violence and community safety, at the Roundtables, women raised concerns over the increasing militarisation. The women peace and security agenda is first and foremost about the long-term prevention of violent conflict/instability. This means transforming structures contributing to violence, militarisation and armament. In this regard, the WPS Index indicator on battle-deaths is only beneficial in highlighting organised violence. However, it lets developed countries like Australia off the hook – as it doesn't account for civilian deaths resulting from interventions in Syria for example. Perhaps the next iteration of the WPS index can take into account [The Global Militarisation Index](#) (which examines military expenditure as a percentage of GDP, total number of military (including reserves) and paramilitary forces in relation to population and the number of heavy weapons available in relation to population) and the [SIPRI Military Expenditure Database](#) (compares military expenditure as a share of GDP and per capita).

Women's participation in all aspects of peace and security policy is a core pillar of the WPS agenda. The index must reflect this in its construction. The current index gives equal weight to all indicators. The next iteration of the Index might consider allowing women to weight indicators according to the level of importance women hold for certain issues. The OECD's [Better Life Index](#), for example, allows users to vary the index according to the level of importance they hold for certain issues – as a result, Australia which otherwise ranks very high on the index doesn't if one puts a greater weight on the number of hours worked/week.

The current iteration of the WPS index makes a strong case for looking at WPS as a domestic agenda. While the Australian roundtable participants raised gender inequality and gender-based violence as issues of concern; they also linked peace and security concerns to climate displacement, refugee policy, reconciliation, overseas aid, international trade, bi-lateral and multi-lateral relations. So the WPS agenda is both about the impact of conflict on women and girls and what women say constitutes peace and security more broadly. The current WPS index sits within a larger set of issues that are not always quantifiable but which we need to discuss alongside the indicators used in this index.

This speech was delivered at the Development Policy Centre, part of the Crawford School of Public Policy at the Australia National University.



Anu Mundkur

Dr Anu Mundkur is ACFID's secondee to the Australian Civil-Military Centre. Anu has worked for over 15 years in the field of gender development. She is also an active applied policy researcher whose areas of expertise include women peace and security; women's representation, participation and leadership in politics. Her most recent co-authored publications are: *War-fighting and left-wing feminist agendas: gender and change in the Australian Defence Force* and *A "Fair Go" in the Lucky Country? Gender Equality and The Australian Case*.

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