

How (not) to make WPS count

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Anu Mundkur and Laura Shepherd offer a commentary on the WPS Index and caution those attempting to measure progress in the complex worlds of peace and security.

In October 2017, the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS) and the Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO) presented their new Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Index at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. The Index claims to be ‘unique among indices on both the gender and the security fronts’ in that it combines key measures and insights from gender and development indices with those from peace and security indices (*Women, Peace and Security Index 2017-2018*, p.7). Launched with a global media campaign and high profile in-person events, the new, much-hyped, WPS Index certainly appears to be drawing attention to gendered dynamics of peace, security and justice – making such issues count, if you will pardon the pun.



Jeni Klugman of GIWPS at the London launch of the WPS Index at LSE, 30 November 2017

We suggest, however, that this new WPS Index may not actually be a WPS Index at all. What it is counting, or making count, only partially captures the complexity and dynamics of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, which derives from but has a life far beyond the suite of Security Council resolutions that make up its primary architecture. The new WPS Index has undeniably produced a (somewhat unsurprising) ranking of the 153 countries it surveys according to their levels of inclusion, justice and security for women as captured in 11 indicators. But this is neither new nor particularly resonant with what we understand the principles and best practice of the Women, Peace and Security agenda to be.

It is a bit of a stretch for the new WPS Index to claim, as it does, to be the first in bridging gender and development and peace and security domains. There are many global indices measuring human development, gender inequality, women's empowerment, peacefulness, and – perhaps most relevant to the GIWPS Index – the status of women across a range of domains. The latter is quantified in the WomenStats database. The 6 multivariate scales

and 9 composite indicators of women's status and security, developed by coding over 350 variables covering gender inequality, development, and justice, makes WomenStats as much a measure of women peace and security as the GIWPS Index (perhaps even more so). Looking at the two side by side, it is difficult to see what the GIWPS index brings to the measurement of peace, security that isn't captured in more detail and across a greater number of countries (175) in WomenStats. A further advantage of WomenStats is its transparency regarding its data sources and weightings afforded to the indicators. This facilitates critical engagement allowing users to judge whether they think the data sources and its weighting is credible. By contrast, the GIWPS indicators are presented with limited explanation, beyond a brief summary of the source.

We have some concerns with respect to the indicators used (or missing) in the GIWPS index. The GIWPS Index claims to measure 'discriminatory norms' by representing 'the percentage of men ages 15 years and older who disagreed with the proposition: "It is perfectly acceptable for any woman in your family to have a paid job outside the home if she wants one"' (the data is drawn from the 2016 Gallup-ILO poll). There are many scenarios in which the proposition may be supported, but in practice oppression still exists. It is not beyond imagining support for the proposition while at the same time expecting the woman to do the majority of household labour and childcare, only permitting her to work part-time or in casual employment (rather than a career), monitoring her movements. There is much to examine in this simple proposition and it cannot stand in for a detailed analysis of women's economic security.

Further, we have a number of concerns about the inclusion of battle-deaths as part of the indicator that purports to measure organised violence. The inclusion of battle deaths perpetuates particularly pernicious stereotypes – antithetical to supporters of the Women, Peace and Security agenda – of a civilized peaceful global North and an uncivilized and violent global South. It lets 'developed' countries off the hook: these countries may not be perpetrating violence against their own citizens but their responsibility doesn't end with their national borders. Some of these countries are perpetrating violence against civilians in other countries, and through their foreign policies have been doing this for years. The Women, Peace and Security agenda seeks to hold national governments accountable for militarism in all its forms, so we need to find better indicators to measure violence, in keeping with the antimilitarist foundations of the agenda itself. Military spending and active military enrolment, for example, are arguably better indicators of militarism than the indicators from the Uppsala database.

As we see it, at the heart of the Women, Peace and Security agenda is conflict prevention, specifically women's participation in conflict prevention, and the GIWPS Index captures none of this. Further, in the domestic realm, the nurturing of the WPS agenda is often undertaken by women's civil society organisations, and these are also invisible in the GIWPS Index. Without this civil society activism, the agenda wouldn't exist and certainly wouldn't be sustained. There is data available on the vibrancy of, and rights afforded to, civil society movements across the world, which suggests that such spaces are under threat even in so called developed countries. A WPS Index must therefore account for women's participation in conflict prevention and existence of civil society spaces to enable women's voices to be heard. In addition a WPS index should find a way to elucidate the

complex relationships between domestic policy (including the development and funding of national action plans for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and the rest of the WPS resolutions) and international affairs.

The affiliation with a high-profile institutions and the media campaign around its release no doubt ensures that the GIWPS Index has brought matters of women, peace and security to the attention of some who may not have otherwise heard about the agenda, and this can only be a good thing. But we need to tread carefully in such endeavours. We need to ensure that when we are claiming to measure WPS, we are actually measuring the things that WPS is seen to represent. Women, Peace and Security agenda coalesces around a range of issues – militarism, the relationship between government and civil society, women’s leadership for peace – that are not always easily quantifiable but which we urgently need to make count.

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