

The Asia Pacific Mediation Leadership Summit Gender and Mediation Theme Group Summary & Recommendations

Overview

The Asia Pacific Mediation Leadership Summit: 'From Talk to Action' was collaboratively hosted in Bangkok, Thailand, between 2 - 4 December 2011, by the Asia Pacific Mediation Forum (APMF) in conjunction with renowned academic, government, United Nations (UN), commercial, non-governmental and civil society organizations (NGOs, CSOs) from across the Asia Pacific region and globally.

Gender and Mediation Theme Group

A Gender and Mediation Theme Group at the Summit, co-convened by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Women, brought together leading women mediators, negotiators and peacebuilders with the aim to explore gender perspectives in peacemaking, women's under-representation in peace negotiations, and to discuss and unpack critical issues faced by women in conflict mediation.

Over twenty delegates engaged in the Gender and Mediation Theme Group shared perspectives and experiences from their respective countries across the region including: Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Timor-Leste, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Additional delegates in attendance at the Asia Pacific Mediation Forum Summit from within and outside the Asia-Pacific with expertise in peace negotiations and mediation also took part in the Gender and Mediation Theme Group Workshop.

Key Challenges and Issues

Rich discussions amongst delegates brought to light critical gender issues experienced by women in mediation and conflict resolution. Participants also explored gender issues in mediation through the lens of operational and institutional challenges, and socio-cultural barriers. Key discussion points and issues identified included the following:

- **Women remain largely excluded from conflict mediation and peace processes in all tracks of negotiations.** Women's low levels of participation in 'track one' peace negotiations, both as mediators and negotiators, was highlighted. Similarly, there remains a continued absence of women as signatories to peace accords across Asia Pacific. It was noted that the UN should play a greater role in increasing women's involvement in track one peace processes, through the involvement of more women as part of mediation and negotiation teams. The importance of available gender expertise in all peace negotiations processes was also emphasized.
- **Women's groups (civil society and grassroots) do not have sufficient access to mediators and government officials working on peace negotiations.** Delegates raised concerns that peace processes were by nature exclusive and suggested there was a lack of entry points for women's engagement at national and sub-national levels. An information deficit was also noted amongst

civil society groups, highlighting the need for improved information sharing between mediators and government representatives, and civil society groups.

- **A disconnect exists between women decision-makers at the national level and grassroots women.** While in some context in-roads were starting to be established, the need for increased information sharing and opportunities for engagement between women in national level decision making positions and grassroots women was articulated. The disparity in capacities was highlighted as a challenge, pointing to the need for increased education and training for women at sub-national /grassroots levels.
- **UNSCR 1325 has not been effectively nationalized and promoted.** The timely implementation of UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans, underpinned by clear budgetary commitments and inter-ministerial responsibilities was highlighted as critical to bolster the role of women as mediators and peace-makers in all tracks of negotiations. Ambiguity around available government budgets was raised and the need for broader awareness raising, targeted at both men and women, on women's rights and the important role of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding came to the forefront of discussions.
- **There is a need for greater public recognition of women peace-makers and negotiators involved in conflict resolution.** National, regional, and international recognition of women peace-makers at national and sub-national levels, such via media coverage or awards, was considered an effective way to promote the role of women as mediators. Recognizing women's role in peace negotiations and following a peace agreement was seen as a catalyst to encourage further involvement of women as mediators and negotiators.
- **Women's political participation following peace agreements has been enhanced by the use of quotas, but more effective participation rather than tokenism is crucial.** While quotas were perceived as effective temporary measures to open up political space for women, it was highlighted that the use of quotas needs to result in more effective participation and representation within all echelons of national and sub-national governance bodies, so to encourage greater political leadership of women. Quotas were regarded as one lever to encourage women's political participation in post-conflict states. It was recognized that socio-cultural barriers and levels of capacity must be addressed in order to create an enabling environment for effective political participation of women.
- **Socio-cultural constructs of femininity and masculinity can restrict women's leadership potential as peace-makers and mediators.** Discussions considered the limiting nature of traditional gender constructs and stereotypes to women's leadership potential as mediators. Deep seeded gender relations were unpacked, highlighting power dynamics (i.e. the financial dependency of women) and patriarchal systems that maintain traditional gender roles and

disparate power relations (i.e. religious bodies or customary mechanisms drawn on for conflict resolution).

- **Women's lack of mobility can hinder their physical participation in negotiations.** Issues of resources and women having major responsibility for dependants was raised. Interventions that have previously addressed issues of women's mobility were discussed (i.e. provision of day care) and financial support for travel and time.
- **Women involved in peace negotiation face increased security threats.** Discussions considered the need for the provision of security for women mediators and negotiators. Similarly, it was highlighted that recognition (for instance, via national media and recognition by international organizations through public recognition) of women mediators can sometimes help to ensure protection and security.

Discussions also emphasized the effective advocacy strategies and breakthroughs achieved by women when excluded from the negotiations table and formal peace-making processes. It was noted that women's civil society groups have played a significant role advocating for women's issues from the periphery of peace processes, calling for women's inclusion and participation, and the consideration of women's issues and rights in negotiations and peace agreements. Gains for women have occurred through women's groups' resilience and continued efforts to make their voices heard.

Recommendations and Potential Interventions to Address Gaps and Challenges

Delegates identified potential responses and interventions to address challenges and gaps for women in mediation and conflict resolution. Recommendations sought to: leverage current frameworks and mechanisms established for conflict resolution; broaden interventions to harness the role of women as mediators; and deepen gender mainstreaming at an institutional and operational level.

Recommendations

Mobilize resources in support of projects that seek to: increase women's capacity and participation in peace negotiations; ensure availability of gender expertise for mediation and negotiation teams; increase the number of professional mediators and/or negotiators with gender expertise; raise awareness of socio-cultural constructs of femininity and masculinity that restrict women's leadership potential as peace-makers and mediators.

Specific interventions could include the following elements (but not limited to):

Engage

- Improve the interface between grassroots women and women in decision-making positions; as well as between civil society groups, government bodies and external mediators engaged in conflict resolution and mediation.
- Support women's participation in religious and/or customary decision-making mechanisms established to facilitate conflict resolution at national and sub-national levels.

Recognize

- Recognize and promote the role of women as mediators and negotiators during and following peace negotiations.

Reinforce

- Institutionalize accountability mechanism for gender mainstreaming in non-government and multilateral bodies involved in the provision of mediation services.