

# LOCAL WOMEN'S FULL AND EQUAL PARTICIPATION IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION, DEVELOPMENT WORK, AND PEACEBUILDING: THE KEY TO THE **TRIPLE NEXUS**' SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION



## Case Studies on the Implementation of the Triple Nexus in Bangladesh and the Democratic Republic of Congo

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**The Triple Nexus approach – humanitarian, development, and peace actors using their respective comparative advantage towards collective outcomes – has the potential to transform gender inequalities, invest in local women’s leadership and agency, and effectively prevent and respond to gender-based violence.** To realize this potential, Triple Nexus actors must ensure “a focus on gender equality and women’s leadership across humanitarian, development and peace actions as essential elements in achieving sustainable progress,” as outlined in the Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation Development (OECD).<sup>1</sup>

**By putting “people at the center, tackling exclusion and promoting gender equality,” the Triple Nexus approach prioritizes supporting, empowering, and strengthening the capacities of national and local actors.**<sup>2</sup> Only with local women at the core can the Triple Nexus rectify the humanitarian system’s overreliance on international humanitarian agencies. Only with women’s meaningful participation in peace processes and development initiatives will long-lasting peace and sustainable development be achieved.

**Local women’s civil society organizations (CSOs) have the comparative advantage in developing innovative ways to address the crisis, conflict, and gender inequality, especially their root causes.** Many of them work across silos to meet humanitarian needs in their communities while also resolving violent conflicts and creating conditions for sustainable development. However, local women’s CSOs – and the local and conflict-

affected women, young women, girls and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) persons they serve – are still excluded from decision-making and leadership across the Triple Nexus. As a result, significant gaps remain in meeting their needs and ensuring their safety.

To address this systematic exclusion and foster a feminist approach to the Triple Nexus with the full and meaningful participation of local women in all their diversity, the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) has adopted a three-pronged approach:

1. Elevating women and youth peacebuilders as decision-makers in humanitarian action;
2. Building local women’s and communities’ resilience to threats and violence; and
3. Advocating for gender-responsive and conflict-sensitive humanitarian action and crisis recovery.<sup>3</sup>

The Young Women Leaders for Peace (YWL) program in Bangladesh and the YWL and Localization of Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) programs in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are compelling examples of how GNWP integrates its three-pronged strategy to respond to ongoing armed conflict, humanitarian crises, and underdevelopment.

Bangladesh and the DRC present different contexts in which armed conflict, natural disasters, humanitarian emergencies, and economic and food insecurity intersect and jeopardize gender equality. **GNWP’s intersectional and Localization approach to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in the two countries is based on forming equitable partnerships with national and local partners, wherein they co-design, implement and monitor all activities.** In partnering with grassroots and local women’s

<sup>1</sup> DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. OECD legal instruments. (2019, February 21). <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-5019>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Gender-Inclusive Humanitarian Response. GNWP. Ibid.

rights organizations, GNWP invests in local leadership and national ownership.

## Bangladesh

### Background on Conflict and Humanitarian Response

The influx of over 700,000 Rohingya refugees fleeing the Myanmar military's genocidal campaign in the Rakhine State in 2017 has triggered a protracted humanitarian crisis in Bangladesh. The majority of Rohingya refugees live in 34 extremely congested camps in Cox's Bazar, with 40,000 people per square kilometer. In make-shift shelters, the refugees are highly vulnerable to floods and landslides during the monsoon season. They face precarious access to food, health care, education, sanitation, livelihood, and shelter. Due to restrictions on their movement, livelihood support, and formal education imposed by the Bangladeshi Government, refugees rely entirely on humanitarian aid to meet their basic needs.<sup>4</sup>

The Rohingya refugee women, young women, and girls constitute 52 percent of the refugee camp population. They are the most disproportionately affected by the humanitarian crisis. Most of them are survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Countless refugee women sought abortions after arriving in Bangladesh, while at least 24,000 pregnant and nursing

women require urgent maternal healthcare.<sup>5</sup> After fleeing from the atrocities they suffered in Myanmar, the Rohingya women, young women, and girls face new risks of SGBV or kidnapping to be trafficked on their way to use shared latrines.

**In contrast to the principles promoted under the Triple Nexus approach, the current humanitarian interventions fail to transform gender inequalities, invest in women's leadership and agency, and effectively prevent and respond to gender-based violence.** Patriarchal norms and exclusion from decision-making power within camp management aggravate the marginalization, restricted mobility, and lack of access to information and basic services experienced by Rohingya refugee women, young women, and girls. Their specific needs are not adequately addressed. Additionally, the lockdown measures imposed by the Bangladeshi government to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus disrupted the limited gender equality programming in humanitarian interventions.

### Relations between Host and Refugee Communities

The refugee crisis has also significantly impacted the host community in Cox's Bazar. Competition over limited natural resources, employment opportunities, infrastructure,

and services has strained relations between the Bangladeshi host and Rohingya refugee communities. The growth of the budding tourism sector and the promise of increased

<sup>4</sup> Supporting longer term development in crises at the NEXUS: Lessons from Bangladesh. Development Initiatives. (n.d.). <https://devinit.org/resources/supporting-longer-term-development-crises-nexus-lessons-bangladesh/>.

<sup>5</sup> Gender brief on Rohingya refugee crisis response in Bangladesh. UN Women | Asia and the Pacific. (2018). <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/10/gender-brief-on-rohingya-refugee-crisis>.

job opportunities has been stunted by the unsightly refugee camps.<sup>6</sup> Although 25 percent of funding for the Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis and other programs specifically target host communities, most Bangladeshis feel that aid has unfairly benefited the refugees. Hate speech and anti-Rohingya rhetoric increased in 2020, as host community members accused

Rohingya refugees of spreading the virus and humanitarian workers of unfairly prioritizing COVID-19 response and recovery operations within the camps.<sup>7</sup> Not enough attention has been paid to how these tensions can impact the overall social cohesion, peace, and security of communities living in Cox's Bazar.

## Gaps in the Current Humanitarian Response

Humanitarian actors in Cox's Bazar provide some of the Rohingya refugees and host communities' immediate needs such as food, basic health care, and sanitation. However, significant gaps remain in eliminating gender inequalities. **As a consequence of the lack of a Triple Nexus approach in Cox's Bazar, there is little coherence in the work of many humanitarian organizations and a lack of efforts in ensuring the safety and security of refugees, particularly women and girls.** While the Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Working Group, chaired by UN Women and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, promotes coordination amongst actors on gender equality programming in humanitarian interventions, **local Bangladeshi women's civil society participation is limited. Rohingya women are mere recipients of aid.** The response to the Rohingya Refugee Crisis showcases insufficient investment in the Triple Nexus on peace, humanitarian action, and sustainable development. The current international humanitarian system, which was established to deliver emergency relief and protection in crises, is unfit for purpose in Cox's Bazar.<sup>8</sup>

**The most devastating consequence of the lack of investment in the Triple Nexus in Cox's Bazar is the limited support for locally-led, feminist humanitarian action and peacebuilding. Most humanitarian coordination mechanisms remain dominated by international actors. They exclude Bangladeshi and Rohingya women and young women peacebuilders and activists, who are still regarded as passive victims and mere beneficiaries of aid.** Within the GiHA, English is used as the primary language even though many Bangladeshi and Rohingya civil society activists do not speak it. As a result, there are no formal mechanisms and accessible opportunities for Bangladeshi and Rohingya women and young women peacebuilders to participate in decision-making on humanitarian interventions meaningfully.<sup>9</sup> Without this, efforts to address humanitarian crises cannot lead to long-term peace, development, and stability or adequately meet the needs of refugee and host community women and girls. **Therefore, humanitarian interventions that promote gender equality and invest in the agency**

<sup>6</sup> UNDP. (2019, July 27). Integration of humanitarian efforts into Longer-term DEVELOPMENT essential for COX'S Bazar: UNDP in Bangladesh. UNDP.

<https://www.bd.undp.org/content/bangladesh/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2019/07/25/integration-of-humanitarian-efforts-into-longer-term-development.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Anas, A. Z. M. (2020, August 15). COVID-19 fuels tensions BETWEEN rohingya refugees and BANGLADESHI HOSTS. The New Humanitarian. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2020/07/27/Bangladesh-Rohingya-refugee-host-coronavirus-aid>.

<sup>8</sup> Gender-Transformative change in Humanitarianism: A view from inside. Women's Refugee Commission. (2021, April 7). <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/research-resources/gender-transformative-change-in-humanitarianism-a-view-from-inside/>.

<sup>9</sup> Promoting the Women, peace and Security agenda in the Rohingya refugee crisis in Cox's BAZAR, BANGLADESH. UN Women | Asia and the Pacific. (n.d.). <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/10/promoting-the-women-peace-and-security-agenda-in-the-rohingya-refugee>.

and needs of local women and girls are not only necessary---they are urgent and critical.

The international community is grateful to the people and Government of Bangladesh for hosting the Rohingya refugees. However, there are serious concerns about the safety and security in Cox's Bazar refugee camps. There are also deep concerns about the relocation of refugees in the low-lying island of Bhasan Char, which is deemed unsafe for settlement.<sup>10</sup> In a bilateral agreement with Myanmar, Bangladesh's position is that Myanmar must create conditions for Rohingya refugees to voluntarily and safely repatriate.<sup>11</sup> These conditions are unlikely to be met in the near future, especially after the military coup in Myanmar in February 2021. Therefore, it is in the best interest of the Bangladeshi Government, the Rohingya refugees, and the host communities to support the implementation of the Triple Nexus approach. **Such an approach will allow for long-term planning on the refugee crisis, enable the Rohingya refugees and the host communities to participate in socio-economic**

development, and promote peacebuilding and social cohesion.

Furthermore, the Bangladeshi Government, the Rohingya refugees, and the host communities – with the international community's support – must work together to prevent the climate change crisis. The heavy rains, massive floods, and landslides in Cox's Bazar and other parts of Bangladesh in July 2021 indicate that the climate change crisis will worsen if no immediate action is taken. This will result in increased poverty and the rise of negative coping mechanisms, malnutrition of girls and women, forced labor and child marriage, and issues related to protection and reproductive health, as reported by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.<sup>12</sup>

**The implementation of the Triple Nexus approach in Cox's Bazar can bring about coherence in the response to the refugee crisis, poverty, climate change crisis, and gender inequality.** It can also help promote more quality sexual and reproductive health care. Hence, the Triple Nexus must serve as the framework for the Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis.

## GNWP's Work in Implementing the Triple Nexus: Women, Peace and Security and Youth, Peace, and Security in Humanitarian Emergency

GNWP implements the Triple Nexus approach in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, in partnership with the local civil society groups *Supporting People and Rebuilding Communities (SPaRC)* and *Jago Nari Unnayon Sangsta* (JNUS). In January 2018, GNWP

started a series of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with host communities and Rohingya refugees in Chittagong and Cox's Bazar to determine local priority issues. **The FGDs established that while local populations are very interested in peace and security,**

<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Watch. An island jail in the middle of the sea. Bangladesh's relocation of Rohingya Refugees to Bhasan Char. Accessed from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/06/07/island-jail-middle-sea/bangladeshs-relocation-rohingya-refugees-bhasan-char#> on 07 June 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Refugees International. (2019, September 25). The BANGLADESH-MYANMAR agreement on Rohingya Repatriation. Refugees International.

<https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/rohingyarepatriation>.

<sup>12</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Asia and the Pacific: Weekly Regional Humanitarian Snapshot (31 August - 6 September 2021). Accessed from <https://reliefweb.int/report/nepal/asia-and-pacific-weekly-regional-humanitarian-snapshot-31-august-6-september-2021> on 16 October 2021.



**women's rights, gender equality, and the Rohingya refugee crisis, no local civil society organizations (CSOs) work on these issues.** Host community members want to be involved in addressing the Rohingya refugee crisis because they are affected by it. Women and youth expressed their vulnerability to violence and trafficking and highlighted the lack of education and economic opportunities. They explained that they felt excluded and unrecognized as local actors who can participate in their community affairs. The realization of this gap and the appeal for support from the host

communities motivated GNWP to organize a series of annual training for young women leaders from Ramu and Ukhiya *Upazilas* (sub-district) host communities in Cox's Bazar from 2018 to 2020. The young women were trained on leadership, literacy, peacebuilding, and social media for advocacy and theater for community dialogues. The trainings led to the formation of Young Women Leaders for Peace (YWL), a network of young women who advocate for sustainable peace, women's rights, women's economic empowerment, and gender equality.

## Young Women Leaders for Peace in Cox Bazar: A Story of Empowerment

**Previously invisible and unheard in their families and communities, young women from host communities in Cox's Bazar are now active members of the Young Women Leaders for Peace-Bangladesh.**

They conduct gender-sensitive, age-appropriate literacy and numeracy classes for Rohingya refugee and host community women and girls. The Rohingya women they teach can now sign legal documents, read important signs within the refugee camps, and access life-saving information. The literacy and numeracy classes provide a safe space for Rohingya refugee women to share personal stories, including their experiences of sexual violence, child marriage, security concerns, and dowries, as well as their dreams

and aspirations. The YWL members provide emotional support, guidance, and solidarity to the women, facilitating a restorative healing process.

**The young women are also working to dispel anti-Rohingya rhetoric and promote social cohesion between the refugee and host communities.** Negative stereotypes of the Rohingya refugees are common in Bangladesh, including in local communities where GNWP works. At the beginning of the YWL training program, the young women described the Rohingya as bringing traffic to their streets and crime to their communities. However, after regularly interacting with Rohingya refugee women



A literacy class with Rohingya women and girls conducted in the Rohingya camp in 2018



Leadership and peacebuilding workshop with young women from host communities in 2019

through the literacy and numeracy classes, the YWL members developed mutual understanding, trust, and empathy. Following a year-long hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the YWL members could resume teaching classes in February 2021. They have also begun preparations for the development

of economic empowerment initiatives. These initiatives aim to increase women's decision-making power and reduce the vulnerability of Rohingya and host community families to early, child and forced marriage, sex trafficking, and other forms of violence and discrimination.

## Local Women and Young Women's Voices in Policy Spaces

GNWP has trained the YWL members on policy advocacy on peacebuilding and women's rights. **As a result, they are participating and influencing decision-making on humanitarian action. They also bring their views on peacebuilding, which is often missing in humanitarian response.** In coordination with UN Women, GNWP made arrangements to enable the YWL members to participate in GiHA meetings. In addition, GNWP provided interpretation so the YWL could understand the discussions and speak during meetings.

With GNWP's support, the YWL members can now speak in national and global discussions on the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, including Bangladesh's National Action Plan (NAP). They speak about the importance of integrating local women and youth perspectives in the NAP. They stress the need to use the NAP as an instrument to address the Rohingya refugee crisis. They always emphasize the importance of respecting the rights of refugee women and girls. **Indirectly but strongly, the young women leaders urge greater cohesion and synergy between peacebuilding and humanitarian efforts in Bangladesh. Indirectly but effectively, they show how the NAP can be a critical instrument in fostering a Triple Nexus approach to the Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Cox's Bazar.**

To share their priorities for NAP implementation with a broader audience, the YWL members contributed recommendations to an advocacy brief published by UN Women in coordination with GNWP, JNUS, and other civil society groups.<sup>13</sup>

On December 14, 2020, young women leaders from the host communities and refugee camps in Cox's Bazar participated in a closed virtual briefing organized by GNWP. This briefing was one of the few spaces that convened all key stakeholder groups in the Rohingya Crisis, including policymakers from Bangladesh, Canada, Indonesia, and the Netherlands. During the briefing, young women leaders presented their seldom-heard perspectives on the challenges they face, their priorities, and recommendations for gender-responsive and localized interventions to the crisis. They had the opportunity to solicit greater commitment from the international community to pursue accountability for the genocide and other atrocities against the Rohingya people, including SGBV committed against women and girls.

**GNWP's YWL program is one of the few programs in Cox's Bazar that implements the Triple Nexus.** It puts gender equality and women's human rights as a cross-cutting theme in humanitarian, peace, and development work. It highlights local

<sup>13</sup> Promoting the Women, peace and Security agenda in the Rohingya refugee crisis in Cox's BAZAR, BANGLADESH. UN Women | Asia and the Pacific. (n.d.).

<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/10/promoting-the-women-peace-and-security-agenda-in-the-rohingya-refugee>.

women's rights and civil society's participation in designing and implementing humanitarian response and Women, Peace and Security policies, such as the NAP.

**The most important point to highlight from GNWP's experience in Cox's Bazar is the need to build from scratch. There were no local women and young women's programs in Cox's Bazar that focused on humanitarian, peace, and development work before the YWL.** Many women and young women had limited access to education and risked being victims of child, early and forced marriage, and sex trafficking. The YWL trainings offered the first opportunities for women and young women in Cox's Bazar to participate in discussions on women's rights, gender equality, peace and security, and economic empowerment. **Previously invisible and voiceless in their**

**families and communities, the women and young women are now asserting their rights. They are demanding to be acknowledged and heard in policy and decision-making on matters that affect their lives. They are transforming the potential of the Triple Nexus into reality.**

It is necessary to implement more programs of this nature to address the Rohingya refugee crisis effectively. This requires political commitment on the part of the Government of Bangladesh and the Government of Myanmar, as well as collaboration and efficient coordination between the Government of Bangladesh, other Member States, the UN, regional organizations, local and international civil society, and humanitarian organizations, and functional accountability mechanisms.

## Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

### Background on Conflict and Humanitarian Response in DRC

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has faced a wide variety of development, humanitarian, and peace-related challenges since the First and Second Congo Wars (1996-1997 and 1998-2003, respectively). Despite numerous peace processes and the implementation of a series of peace agreements, which ultimately led to the establishment of an elected government in 2006, the country continues to experience high levels of insecurity. Currently, more than 130 armed groups are operating throughout the country, with attacks against civilians, conflict-related sexual violence, and forced

recruitment of children prevalent, especially in Eastern DRC.<sup>14</sup> Responding to the continued volatility of peace and security in DRC, the UN established the second peacekeeping mission in DRC, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), in 1999. Its 2020 mandate focuses on two strategic priorities: protecting civilians and stabilizing and strengthening public institutions.<sup>15</sup> However, MONUSCO's reputation has been stained by several cases of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by its civilian and military personnel.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> HRW World report: Democratic Republic of Congo Events of 2019. Human Rights Watch. (2020, January 14). <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/democratic-republic-congo#36e273>.

<sup>15</sup> Mandate MONUSCO. UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATION STABILIZATION MISSION IN THE DR CONGO. (2021, January 29). <https://monusco.unmissions.org/en/mandate>.

<sup>16</sup> UN security Council briefing ON DRC BY SANDRINE Lusamba. NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security. (2021, March 30). <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/resource/un-security-council-briefing-on-drc-by-sandrine-lusamba/>.



In parallel, DRC has also continued to face an ongoing humanitarian crisis. It is estimated that 19.6 million people will need humanitarian assistance in 2021, up from 15.6 million in 2020 and 8.5 million in 2017. Armed conflict directly fuels humanitarian needs. These needs are further aggravated by disease and epidemics, including COVID-19, cholera, measles, Ebola, the influx of refugees from neighboring countries, and a recent locust outbreak.<sup>17</sup> Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) also remains widespread and is used by armed groups as a weapon of war in North Kivu, South Kivu, Ituri, and Tanganyika provinces. MONUSCO reported 1,053 cases of CRSV in 2020 and 1,049 cases in 2019 – most of which require urgent medical and psychosocial assistance.<sup>18</sup> The scale of CRSV is likely far more widespread as many cases go unreported.

Despite economic growth experienced by DRC in the past years and some progress on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, the socio-economic situation in the country remains precarious. The country ranks 175<sup>th</sup> out of 189 countries in the Human Development Index ranking.<sup>19</sup> Due to patriarchal cultural norms and practices, this affects more women than men. For example, the expected duration of schooling in DRC is 9.7 years on average, but only 5.3 years for women.<sup>20</sup> Although they actively participate in farming and raising

livestock, women often do not have access to land and financial resources. As one of the young women trained by GNWP through its YWL program shared, “husbands forbid their wives to eat what they have worked hard to gather in the fields and force them to sell everything.”<sup>21</sup> Low literacy rates and lack of financial independence make women more vulnerable to violence. It can prevent them from being able to access humanitarian assistance. Thus, after decades of conflict, women and girls in DRC continue to suffer disproportionately from violence, insecurity, and poverty.

**Funding support for gender equality-focused aid in DRC has dropped sharply in recent years, showcasing volatility and shifts in donor funding priorities and commitments.**<sup>22</sup> While the DRC was the seventh-largest recipient of gender equality-focused aid in fragile contexts in 2014-2015, it was not even ranked amongst the top ten largest recipients in 2017-2018, despite being in the bottom 10 of global gender indexes. **The protracted conflict and ongoing complex humanitarian emergencies in the DRC demonstrate the immediate need for gender- and conflict-sensitive Triple Nexus programming. Yet, in this context, very few peacebuilding programs integrate community-led and gender-inclusive humanitarian response.**

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<sup>17</sup> OCHA DRC. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2021, February 10). <https://www.unocha.org/democratic-republic-congo-drc/about-ocha-drc>.

<sup>18</sup> Conflict-related sexual violence: Report of the secretary-general (S/2021/312). undocs. (2021, March 30). <https://undocs.org/S/2021/312>.

<sup>19</sup> Human development report DRC. UNDP | Human Development Reports. (2021). <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/COD>.

<sup>20</sup> DR Congo's Performance on the Women, Peace, and Security Index. Georgetown Institute of Women Peace and Security. (n.d.). <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/dr-congo/>.

<sup>21</sup> Women have the right to own land, says Girl ambassador in DRC. GNWP. (2018, March 22). <https://gnwp.org/ga4p-profile-5/>.

<sup>22</sup> Financing UN Security Council Resolution 1325: Aid in support of gender equality and women's rights in fragile contexts. OECD. (2020). <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/financingunsecuritycouncilresolution1325aidinsupportofgenderequalityandwomensrightsinfragilecontexts.htm>.

## Gaps in Humanitarian and Development Programs

A 2019 report by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) found that: “Humanitarian, development and stabilization actors in DRC, for example, all work at significant scale in North Kivu using community-based approaches, but with minimal coordination or connection between their activities”.<sup>23</sup> For example, some development actors refuse to work in conflict-affected areas such as the South and North Kivu Provinces, due to “insecurity and risk to programming,” while other actors take the opposite approach and identified these areas as priority zones for poverty reduction interventions.<sup>24</sup>

During the Ebola crisis in East DRC in 2018, many international organizations rushed to implement health-related interventions without adequate consideration of the conflict context or mapping of other organizations in Goma and Beni. The lack of gender and conflict sensitivity of the interventions meant that they were unequipped to respond to the scale of sexual- and gender-based violence (SGBV)

occurring in the region. **Additionally, the lack of coordination contributed to a reluctance of local communities to participate in certain projects.** GNWP partners report that many local communities lost confidence in certain projects as many felt that organizations came only for their interests – for example, to collect data rather than prioritize the local community’s needs and interests. Furthermore, although the implementation of Triple Nexus pilot programming in DRC has begun, **there is a dire lack of capacity building on gender equality and investments in women and girls across a wide range of humanitarian action and government-led peacebuilding initiatives.**<sup>25</sup> In cases that international NGOs partner with local women-led organizations, the partnerships are often limited to SGBV prevention and response and not wider humanitarian action.<sup>26</sup> **The lack of coordination between development, peace, and humanitarian actors means that there are no formal mechanisms and accessible opportunities for women and girls to participate in decision-making across these three sectors meaningfully.**

## Localization of the WPS and the YPS Agendas Enables Gender-Responsive Humanitarian Action and Development Programs

GNWP’s work in DRC addresses the Triple Nexus through locally-led initiatives, including Localization of WPS and the YWL program. GNWP’s partners include: Synergie des Femmes pour les Victimes de Violences

Sexuelles (SFVS) in North Kivu, Synergie des Associations Feminines du Congo (SAFECO) in South Kivu and Cadre Permanent de Concertation de la Femme Congolaise (CAFECO) in Kinshasa. As a result of the

<sup>23</sup> Financing the nexus gaps and opportunities from a field perspective. NRC. (n.d.). <https://www.nrc.no/resources/reports/financing-the-nexus-gaps-and-opportunities-from-a-field-perspective/>.

<sup>24</sup> Democratic Republic of CONGO Country STUDY: Humanitarian financing task team output iv. Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). (2019, June 24). <https://www.alnap.org/help-library/democratic-republic-of-congo-country-study-humanitarian-financing-task-team-output-iv>.

<sup>25</sup> Financing the nexus gaps and opportunities from a field perspective. Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Whitson, A. (2019, April 5). Women responders: Placing local action at the centre of humanitarian protection programming. Policy and research from CARE Insights. <https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/publications/women-responders-placing-local-action-at-the-centre-of-humanitarian-protection-programming>.

participatory design process and strong local leadership, GNWP's activities address peacebuilding, humanitarian action, and sustainable development issues holistically.

This is critical since women and young women in DRC do not live their lives in silos but rather experience these three dimensions as interlinked and intersecting.

## Young Women Leaders for Peace in the DRC: From Victims to Change Agents

GNWP launched the YWL program in the North and South Kivu provinces in 2014. It targets young women, including survivors of SGBV, from communities in Goma, Béni and Masisi, North Kivu, and Bukavu, South Kivu. The program has driven transformational change across the three components of the Triple Nexus. It has empowered young women to become leaders in peacebuilding initiatives, develop micro-business to increase their financial independence and their family's income, and provide literacy training to other young women in their communities. The young women's skills developed through the program enabled them to quickly mobilize to provide humanitarian relief to SGBV survivors and local communities facing COVID-19. Moreover, the literacy classes they provided to other young women have strengthened their resilience and their communities and improved their access to information about humanitarian assistance and other basic services.

**business with GNWP's economic empowerment capacity-building support and seed funds.** The young women re-invest their earnings to organize literacy and peacebuilding training in nearby rural areas. They have also generated support from community elders and religious leaders to condemn impunity for sexual violence. **In South Kivu, the YWL visit local communities to conduct sensitization and training on women's rights issues.** They prepare "period kits," which enable girls and young women in neighboring communities to maintain menstrual hygiene. Women's and girls' inability to manage their menstrual hygiene in schools or at work results in absenteeism, which in turn deny them important opportunities in life and prevents them from contributing to the development of their communities. They also hosted a monthly radio broadcast on topics like prevention of conflict and sexual violence and promotion of relief and recovery. As a result



Members of GNWP's YWL Program at a training in 2018



YWL member speaking with market vendors in Goma during a field visit

**Young women in North Kivu, including SGBV survivors, have started their micro-**

**of their participation and leadership in the program, the young women report increased decision-making power in their families and**

more confidence to stand up for their rights and challenge the stigma surrounding SGBV.<sup>27</sup>

**The YWL members have brought about nascent changes in their local communities that embody the Triple Nexus.**

**Through the Localization of WPS program, GNWP also works with local government and civil society actors, traditional and religious leaders, security sector, and international development partners in DRC to ensure full-cycle implementation and monitoring of the WPS agenda.** The Localization of WPS is a people-based, bottom-up strategy based on the premise that local ownership and participation lead to more effective policymaking and implementation. Through Localization, GNWP and its civil society partners dialogue with police and military personnel and former and active members of armed groups in community-led discussions on conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Together, these actors analyze the peace and security context, root causes of conflict. They

## Conclusions

Although the Triple Nexus approach holds great promise when it comes to gender equality, coordination between development, peace and humanitarian actors is severely lacking in crisis- and conflict-affected situations in the refugee camps and host communities in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, and in North and South Kivu, DRC. As a result, there are still no formal mechanisms or accessible opportunities for local women, young women and girls to meaningfully participate in decision-making across these three sectors.

GNWP's Localization of WPS and YWL programs address the reality that grassroots

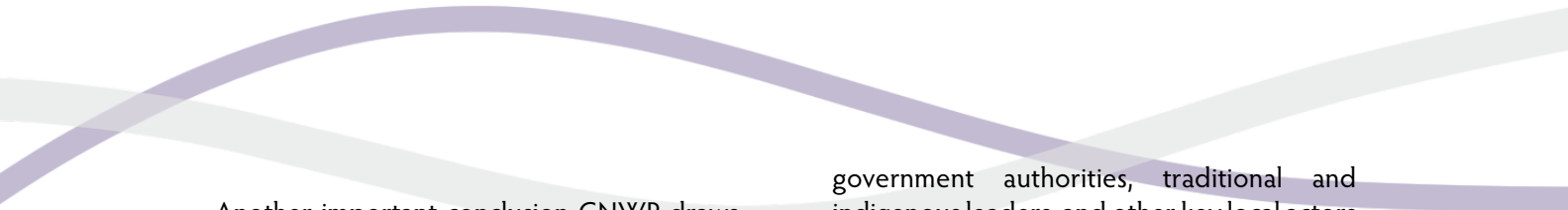
then agree on actions needed to address security needs.

**While Localization focuses on the peacebuilding component of the Triple Nexus, it facilitates a transition towards more gender-responsive and conflict-sensitive local governance, thereby promoting more sustainable development.** In 2015, GNWP launched Guidelines for the Integration of the UNSCRs 1325 and 1820 into Local Development Plans in the DRC, in partnership with CAFCO, the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Children, and the Ministry of Decentralization. This led to the adoption of local decrees (*arrets*) to support the implementation of WPS resolutions and more gender-responsive governance in South Kivu, including establishing a 40 percent quota for women's participation in the local council. During a 2018 evaluation, participants from Katanga province highlighted that Localization led to changes in attitudes, with traditional chiefs being much more open to discussing issues of gender equality and women's meaningful participation in decision-making.

women's rights and youth organizations hardly exist in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, and in North and South Kivu, DRC. It is not the priority of the UN and international humanitarian organizations to provide fundamental training to local women and youth on women's rights, human rights, leadership, peacebuilding, economic empowerment, and advocacy with governments and the UN. It is even less of a priority for them to conduct follow-up training and help local women and youth to form their organizations, let alone guide them as they learn to participate in policy- and decision-making on peace, development and humanitarian action.

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<sup>27</sup> Gender-Inclusive Humanitarian Response. GNWP. Ibid.



Another important conclusion GNWP draws from its work in humanitarian emergencies in Bangladesh and DRC is that fundamental training, sustained capacity building, organizing of local women's rights organizations in crisis- and conflict-affected communities are hardly funded. This lack of funding and the persisting exclusion of local and conflict-affected women young women, and girls in decision-making and leadership across the Triple Nexus means that significant gaps remain in meeting their needs and ensuring their safety.

By implementing the Localization of WPS and YWL programs, GNWP contributes to reducing "risk and vulnerability over multiple years through the achievement of collective outcomes," as outlined in the DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus.<sup>28</sup> Its work with local women and young women in Bangladesh and the DRC brings a new dimension to the Triple Nexus approach by putting women's and girls' rights at the core and ensuring local communities' participation in peacebuilding, humanitarian action, and development. The ownership, participation, and leadership of local women and youth peacebuilders build the necessary capacity and resilience to prevent future crises, promote a culture of peace, and foster sustainable development.

GNWP's partnership with grassroots women's rights and youth organizations, local

government authorities, traditional and indigenous leaders, and other key local actors in GNWP's Localization of WPS program integrates WPS commitments into local development plans. Its efforts to ensure local women peacebuilders' participation in coordination mechanisms such as the GiHA Working Groups, enable local voices to influence decision-making in humanitarian response – often the exclusive domain of the UN and big international humanitarian organizations. Working in tandem with the local women and young women it trained to become peacebuilders, GNWP uses WPS as an entry point to work in the humanitarian and development arenas. In this way, GNWP, local women, and young women realize the transformative potential of the Triple Nexus approach where it matters most: in underdeveloped local communities directly affected by crises and violent conflicts.

GNWP elevates the local level implementation of the Triple Nexus approach to the global level through its leadership in the establishment of the Generation Equality Compact on Women, Peace and Security, and Humanitarian Action<sup>29</sup> and the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund<sup>30</sup>. These are two of the global multisectoral coordination mechanisms that drive accountability and mobilize financing for the WPS agenda and gender-responsive humanitarian action.

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<sup>28</sup> DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. OECD legal instruments. (2019, February 21). <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-5019>.

<sup>29</sup> Learn more: <https://forum.generationequality.org/women-peace-security-and-humanitarian-action-wps-ha-compact>.

<sup>30</sup> Learn more: <https://wphfund.org/>.





## Recommendations

Member States, UN entities, and INGOs must take the following actions immediately:

1. Recognize crisis- and conflict-affected local women and young women, and local women's civil society organizations as partners and essential stakeholders by increasing their full, equal, and meaningful participation in decision-making on peace, development, and humanitarian action at local, national, regional, and global levels.
2. Increase funding for gender equality programming in humanitarian action and investment in pooled funding mechanisms to support localized, sustainable, and women-led peacebuilding, development initiatives and crisis response. This should include funding for the training and organizing of women and young women in crisis- and conflict-affected communities where local women's rights organizations do not exist.
3. Improve coordination and collaboration between peace, development, and humanitarian actors through platforms such as the Generation Equality Compact on Women, Peace, and Security and Humanitarian Action to transform policy-making and programming to better respond to the needs of conflict and crisis-affected women, young women, adolescent girls, LGBTQIA+ persons, people with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, and other vulnerable groups.
4. Adopt Localization and the Young Women Leaders for Peace as critical strategies to invest in women's and young women's empowerment and leadership across peace, development, and humanitarian sectors.
5. Adopt and implement policies that guarantee women and young women's right to access and control financial and other resources, including land and technology. In conflict and crisis-affected communities, dedicate resources to improve skill sets, generate employment and allocate seed funds for women and youth's entrepreneurial activities.