The SDGs and Prevention for Sustaining Peace: Exploring the Transformative Potential of the Goal on Gender Equality

We are beginning to understand what peace is—the structures, attitudes, and institutions that underpin it, and the motives that drive people to work for it. Still, peace remains largely an elusive goal, often portrayed as the absence of violence.

It has been assumed that if we can understand the complexity of war and violence, we will be able to foster and sustain peace. We tend to study the problems of conflict and aggression, not the solutions associated with peace.[1] This approach treats prevention as a crisis management tool, addressing the destructive dynamics of conflict after they have occurred, typically through short-term and externally driven responses.

To address this peace deficit, IPI is seeking to reframe prevention for the purpose of sustaining peace rather than containing conflict, through a series of conversations from October 2016 to May 2017. Together, we will build a shared understanding of what sustaining peace and prevention look like in practice, at the national and international levels

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Introduction

With the adoption of the General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on sustaining peace and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a multilateral policy consensus is emerging around a common vision for peaceful societies. Building and promoting positive peace, rather than containing conflict and its consequences, is recognized as a more effective strategy for addressing today's complex and interlinked global challenges. These global frameworks treat prevention as an integral part of effective and participatory governance and view peace as both an enabler and an outcome of sustainable development. Under this broad conception of peace, all groups and individuals are free to pursue their needs and aspirations without fear, with equal opportunities, with justice, and in security.

"Sustaining peace," as enshrined in the joint General Assembly/Security Council resolutions on peacebuilding, offers a new approach to enhance the capacity of societies not only to address the immediate consequences of conflict but also to prevent the outbreak of violence using peaceful means. From a sustaining peace perspective, peacebuilding is a long-term, nationally driven process that focuses on strengthening the attitudes, structures, and institutions associated with peace rather than the factors that drive and sustain conflict.

The sustaining peace framework and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development share common principles, such as national ownership, universality, inclusivity, people-centered approaches, long-term perspectives, and a call for coherent implementation across the three UN pillars. Inclusive, transparent, and effective decision making and respect for the rule of law are critical for achieving the SDGs and for sustaining peace. The link between the two agendas is not only Goal 16, which calls for the promotion of peaceful, just, and inclusive societies; there are at least thirty-six targets across the seventeen SDGs related to nonviolence, justice, and inclusivity. These include Goal 4 on promoting a culture of peace and nonviolence, global citizenship education, and appreciation of cultural diversity and Goal 11 on inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities and human settlements.

In addition, the effective implementation of several SDGs will not only prevent the outbreak of conflict but also lay the foundations for self-sustaining peace and development. These include Goal 10 on inequality within and among nations, Goal 8 on decent work for all, and Goals 12, 13, 14, and 15 on

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1 Peter Coleman, "The Missing Piece in Sustainable Peace," Earth Institute, November 6, 2012, available at http://blogs.ei.columbia.edu/2012/11/06/the-missing-piece-in-sustainable-peace .

climate and the management of natural resources. Goal 5, which aims to "end all forms of violence against women and girls everywhere," echoes the letter and spirit of the sustaining peace resolutions as they relate to gender equality and women's contributions to prevention.

Women's Participation, Peace, and Sustainable Development

To illustrate the preventive potential of the SDGs, this paper will focus on Target 5.5, which aims to "ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic, and public life." It will not cover the other relevant targets or goals mentioned above. With contributions from the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) and McKinsey Global Institute (MGI), the paper explores the transformative effects of women's participation.[2]

In addition to normative advances on women's political participation and leadership, there is now overwhelming evidence that gender equality and women's empowerment are closely linked to stability and peacefulness. According to the largest dataset on the status of women in the world to date, gender equality is a stronger predictor of a state's peacefulness than its level of democracy, religion, or gross domestic product (GDP). Where women are more empowered, the state is less likely to experience civil conflict or go to war with its neighbors.[3] Countries ranked as most stable and peaceful overall generally have a high percentage of women in leadership positions. Iceland, for example, is ranked as the most peaceful country according to the *Global Peace Index*, and is also ranked first in the World Economic Forum's *Gender Gap Index*.[4]

When it comes to political representation, as the percentage of women in parliament increases by five percent, a state is five times less likely to use violence when faced with an international crisis.[5] It is also less likely to abuse human rights, commit torture, or wrongfully imprison its citizens. For countries engaged in peace processes and transitions, women's participation helps reach and sustain peace agreements. Evidence shows that inclusive processes better address underlying dynamics and conflict drivers, and help build and identify resilience capacities required for the consolidation and continuity of a peaceful state.[6]

As a result, increasing women's participation and representation in leadership and decision-making positions leads to higher levels of peacefulness and better development outcomes for society. Closing the gender gap helps restore trust and confidence, and enhances the sustainability of policies and resilience of communities. Despite this evidence, enabling factors such as political and economic participation have been the slowest areas of gender inequality to change—when compared to women's educational attainment and health advances, for example (see Figure 1).

Viable economies and sustainable economic growth are also positively correlated to increased gender equality. Likewise, gender *inequality* hurts not only women's access to the economy, but overall levels of development. According to the UN Development Programme, "A 1% increase in gender inequality reduces the country's human development index by 0.75%."[7] Though they are half of the world's population, women generate just 37 percent of the world's GDP while spending three times as much time as men on unpaid caretaking—a massive economic contribution.[8]

If gender gaps in work and society were addressed to unleash the full potential of women, the world economy would experience a significant

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2   See Institute for Economics and Peace, "The SDGs as a Prevention Agenda for Sustaining Peace: Quantitative Evidence on the Link between Goal 5 and Goal 16," October 2016; and McKinsey Global Institute, "The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women's Equality Can Add $12 Trillion to Global Growth," Summary Brief, October 2016.

3   Valerie M. Hudson, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Mary Caprioli, and Chad F. Emmett, *Sex and World Peace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

4   See Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Peace Index*, 2016, available at http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/GPI-2016-Report_2.pdf ; and World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report*, 2015, available at www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2015/ .
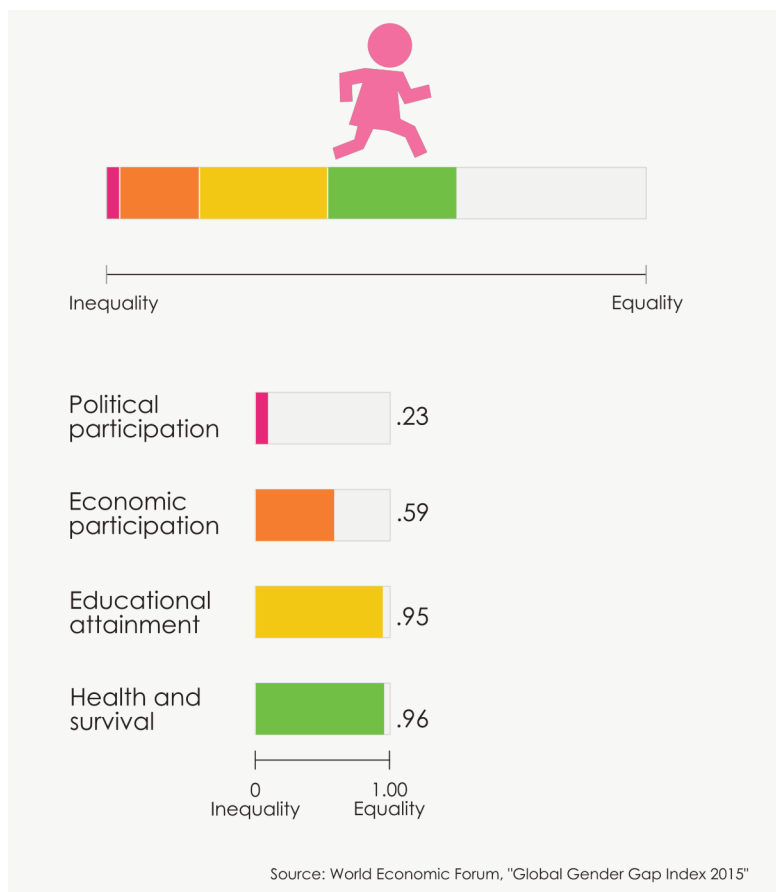
5   Mary Caprioli, "Gendered Conflict," *Journal of Peace Research* 37, no. 1 (2000).

6   Marie O'Reilly, Andrea Ó Súilleabháin, and Thania Paffenholz, "Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes," International Peace Institute, June 2015, available at www.ipinst.org/2015/06/reimagining-peacemaking-womens-roles-in-peace-processes .

7   UN Development Programme, *Africa Human Development Report*, 2016, available at www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hdr/2016-africa-human-development-report.html .

8   McKinsey Global Institute, "Power of Parity," p. 2.

Figure 1. Closing the gender gap

Source: World Economic Forum, "Global Gender Gap Index 2015"

to women's participation, as well as culture and personal choice. But the economic impact of gender equality is clear: "Achieving the economic potential of women will require addressing gender gaps both in society and in work," including essential services and economic opportunity, legal protection and political voice, and physical security and autonomy.[10]

Data show that encouraging and supporting women's leadership and participation has a wide range of positive outcomes for economic prosperity. Some studies have found a positive correlation between the number of women on a company's board and its financial success, because the quality of governance improves with greater inclusion.[11]

Many factors help create the conditions for the participation and empowerment of women. According to MGI, these include open and adequate education for all, health plans designed specifically for women, laws on domestic violence, and laws and policies on the number of leadership and decision-making positions for women (see Box 1).

The main indicator for Target 5.5—currently still being fine-tuned—is the "percentage of seats held by women and minorities in national parliament

boost. According to data analysis from MGI, were women to participate in the economy identically to men, global GDP would increase by up to $28 trillion by 2025.[9] This extent of growth in economic participation is unlikely, due to remaining barriers

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Box 1. Reconciling national and customary law

Many constitutions forbid discrimination on the basis of sex, but the application of customary laws on issues relating to marriage, divorce, and disposal of property can often override national constitutions. Having committed to the goal of gender equality and women's empowerment, some countries have started tackling the issue of reconciling existing national policies and strategies with customary laws and traditions. These efforts have focused both on updating legal frameworks and on engaging with local leaders to counter the negative social and cultural norms that inhibit women's rights. Transforming national constitutions and reconciling customary and statutory laws have resulted in more gender-equitable access to civil law (generally understood as a better vehicle for women's political participation), protected women's rights, and helped women realize their citizenship.[12]

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9   Ibid., p. 1.
10 Ibid., p. 2.
11 World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law: Getting to Equal*, 2015, available at
    http://wbl.worldbank.org/~/media/WBG/WBL/Documents/Reports/2016/Women-Business-and-the-Law-2016.pdf .
12 UN Development Programme, *Africa Human Development Report*, 2016.

and/or sub-national elected office according to their respective share of the population." Quotas can be a valuable tool to ensure women's participation in key decision-making, implementation, or monitoring bodies. However, quotas alone may be insufficient to harness the preventive and stabilizing power of women.

Metrics compiled by the IEP in 2016 show, counterintuitively, that increased women's participation in parliament achieved through quotas is not necessarily correlated with peace, despite significant evidence otherwise demonstrating that inclusive national institutions with equal gender representation have positive effects on peacefulness and prevention. This finding, far from discrediting the usefulness of quotas, demonstrates the need for multidimensional indicators. According to the IEP, "A much clearer relationship between peace and women's participation in leadership in political, economic and public life emerged using a multidimensional indicator of gender equality."[13] The IEP's data show that countries with a broad range of gender-equal outcomes in 2010 were more peaceful in 2015.

Similarly, the implementation of Target 5.5 involves diverse indicators, which range from perceptions of gender roles to education access and economic opportunity. States are drafting and adopting plans to translate and incorporate the SDGs into their national strategies, and in so doing have started developing further strategies to fully integrate women in policy and practice (see Box 2).

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to help facilitate a discussion on how the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can serve as a strategic entry point to prevention for sustaining peace. It explores the links between the SDGs and their potential for creating the social, economic, and political conditions that may prevent the outbreak of violent conflict and lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development. The compelling empirical research presented in the paper shows that investment in Target 5.5 could unleash the leadership potential of women, facilitate their meaningful participation in decision making, and thus advance sustainable peace and development.

Box 2. National implementation of the SDGs in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone has linked the SDGs to its national Agenda for Prosperity, which includes a pillar on "gender and women's empowerment."[14] In order to achieve this pillar, the national plan calls for a variety of key indicators to be met. These include: the proportion of women aged 15–49 with secondary and higher education; the share of women employed in non-agricultural activities; the proportion of women aged 20–45 married before/at age 18; the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament; the proportion of women mayors and local councilors and chairpersons; laws and regulations that guarantee women aged 15–49 access to sexual and reproductive healthcare; and information, education, and legal frameworks (including customary law) that guarantee women's equal right to land ownership and other entitlements. This is one example of a national plan that integrates or "domesticates" the SDGs in detail, and that links to prevention: the plan highlights the importance of a "robust peace infrastructure" for ensuring sustainable development.

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13 Institute for Economics and Peace, "The SDGs as a Prevention Agenda for Sustaining Peace," p. 3.

14 Government of Sierra Leone, *Advanced Draft Report on Adaptation of the Goals in Sierra Leone*, July 2016, available at
     https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/10720sierraleone.pdf .

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