Full, Equal, Meaningful, and Safe: Creating Enabling Environments for Women's Participation in Libya

Catherine Turner and Aisling Swaine | July 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Historically, the women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda's four pillars—prevention, protection, participation, and relief and recovery—have largely developed along separate trajectories. This has started to change with the UN Security Council's recent progress in recognizing the link between women's participation in peace and security and their protection, as well as the need to create "enabling environments" for women's participation. Nonetheless, there is often a gap between international frameworks on participation and protection and the realities experienced by women, especially in conflict-affected contexts. This gap is evident in Libya, where UN efforts to promote women's participation have not always accounted for the full range of protection-related risks women can face.

The 2011 revolution in Libya led to important strides for women's groups, who were at the forefront of the movement and active in peacebuilding processes and the advancement of women's rights. However, during the increasing political insecurity of recent years, there has been a marked decline in the state of women's rights. Violent attacks, threats, and sociocultural stigmas have barred women from participating effectively and safely in political processes.

Under the WPS agenda, the protection of women is often addressed primarily through the lens of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). However, women in Libya experience protection risks related to participation at a number of levels. These can be understood as an "ecology" of intersecting and interrelated risks related to women's participation.

At the individual, interpersonal, and community levels, gendered norms discourage women from participating in public life due to cultural ideas of a woman's "place" in the home as a wife and mother. Women who take on public roles can be verbally or physically attacked, with some hostile parties threatening their honor and

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their families. Their own families and communities may discourage them from participating, either due to cultural stigma or fear for their safety.

At the national institutional level, laws intended to protect women and enable them to participate are not adequately implemented, creating barriers for women in public life. Recent laws and policies have attempted to curtail their rights and freedoms. Research shows that state, state-affiliated, and non-state actors all engage in surveillance and harassment as a means of deterring women from participating. At the societal level, patriarchal and misogynistic social structures enable a culture hostile to women's participation, creating the conditions that expose women who are publicly visible to threats in both physical and digital spaces.

Finally, at the global institutional level, cultural backlash often makes the language of the WPS agenda unavailable to women's rights advocates in Libya, who are forced to work to advance women's rights without directly using the language of equal participation. Also at the global level, many women face direct and indirect online violence in poorly regulated digital spaces.

A failure to recognize these levels of risk creates additional barriers to women's meaningful participation in peace processes. Women are asked to participate in peace and security at every level in unsafe environments that expose them to intimidation, harassment, and violence. The case of Libya demonstrates that when promoting women's participation, it is crucial to ensure that participation is full, equal, meaningful, and safe. Protection-related risks cannot be ignored as soon as women are present in political processes.

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For the Security Council and member states:

1. Continue to build on progress on mainstreaming WPS in mission mandates: All mission mandates should include specific language addressing the nexus between participation and protection. This language should promote women's full, equal, meaningful, and *safe* participation. Toward this end, Security Council members should engage with local civil society actors through the IEG, mission reporting, and civil society briefing mechanisms to ensure that mission mandates are informed by local women's experiences. Language in mission resolutions should promote women's safe participation and ensure that related initiatives take into account and, where feasible, respond to protection-related barriers to participation.

2. Prioritize the implementation of Resolution 2493's provision on creating "enabling environments" for women's participation: This includes support to UN mission–led initiatives that promote women's inclusion in multi-level peace tracks facilitated by the UN and programming by donors, UN agencies, and partners that promotes women's leadership in politics and peacebuilding.

3. Ensure gender advisers with context-specific expertise are mandated and properly resourced in all UN missions: Gender advisers should be fully resourced to advise UN missions on initiatives that promote women's participation. The work undertaken by gender advisers to engage with civil society should be recognized and supported as a critical component of mission-led initiatives on women's participation. That engagement should ensure that these initiatives are informed by and undertaken in ways that respond to the reality of protection-related barriers to participation that women face.

For UN missions, agencies, and partners:

4. Conduct context-specific participation and protection analyses: Context-specific participation and protection analyses (using tools such as an ecological framework) should be used to inform the implementation of Resolution 2493 and wider initiatives that promote women's participation. The impact of gendered forms of harm, such as threats to reputation and honor, and how they relate to women's participation should be included in such analyses and in initiatives designed to address protection-related barriers to participation.

5. Strengthen coordination between UN missions, UN agencies, and other international organizations working on related issues to address the full range of protection-related barriers to women's participation: In Libya, UNSMIL, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN Women, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), and other UN entities should continue collaborating to support women's safe participation and address context-specific protection needs such as the impact of small arms on women's safe participation. Initiatives in this area could include the creation of mechanisms that enable staff, partner organizations, and activists to safely report threats and provide avenues for redress and action. These mechanisms need to recognize the risks posed by state and non-state actors, as well as the lack of confidence in formal institutions. UN entities could also collaborate in the provision of psychological support services to women participating in UN-led initiatives that recognize the realities of participation in a context of permanent risk. Throughout this work, they should pay particular attention to the risks associated with working for international organizations or using international frameworks and tools to promote participation in local communities.

6. Ensure a gender-sensitive approach to the use of digital tools for participation to reflect the increased risks to women in online environments: Further research and evidence are needed to understand the balance between the benefits and risks of online engagement for the promotion of women's rights and participation.