UNFPA’s Role in Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace

*The role of sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender-based violence prevention and response, and youth participation, for peace*

**Purpose**

As a contribution to the 2020 Peacebuilding Architecture Review, UNFPA submits this thematic paper on the importance of the thematic areas under its mandate to peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

**Key Messages**

- **Sustaining peace** requires greater attention to sexual and reproductive health and rights, adolescents and young people, prevention of and response to gender-based violence, gender equality and population data—lynchpin sectors on which broader peacebuilding outcomes depend.
- Programming within these sectors can help address long-term drivers of conflict caused by inequitable access to services, gender inequality, gender-based violence and youth marginalization. It can contribute to peace by improving access to justice, facilitating reconciliation, fostering community social cohesion and resilience, reducing violence, enhancing state legitimacy and promoting inclusive social contract.
- With decades of operational experience working across humanitarian, conflict and development contexts at the global, national, regional and local levels, UNFPA is present before, during and after crisis and is therefore well positioned to contribute to building and sustaining peace.

The sustaining peace agenda illuminated the crucial role that can be played by all UN entities, including those with dual humanitarian and development mandates, such as UNFPA. It advanced a broader understanding of peacebuilding, one that involves sustaining peace prior to outbreak; during conflict; and after conflict has abated. Peace is therefore a long-term process of social change that requires the engagement of every UN entity, particularly those present before, during and after conflict.†

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**2017 Independent Review of Peacebuilding Capacities in Agencies, Funds and Programmes: Key Recommendations**

A 2018 independent review of the peacebuilding capacities of UN agencies, funds and programmes made several key recommendations, which offer important guidance for UNFPA action. Several key recommendations include:

- developing an action plan for more systematic institutionalization of peacebuilding
- identifying programming relevant to sustaining peace

Conflict, Peacebuilding and UNFPA Mandate

Addressing the root causes of conflict and violence is at the heart of UNFPA’s mandate. This paper argues that the UNFPA mandate can contribute in important ways to people’s experience of peace and peacebuilding at local, community and national levels—through fair and equal access to basic services such as sexual and reproductive health services, the fulfillment of human rights including sexual and reproductive rights, protection from and response to gender-based violence, gender equality, disaggregated data, and the meaningful participation of young women and men.

Gender Equality and Women’s Participation; Gender-Based Violence

With the passage of Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, much has been achieved to amplify the role of women in peacebuilding. Recent research has demonstrated that the existence of independent women’s groups is the single most important factor in addressing violence against women and girls. A large body of evidence in the development sector has established that gender equality programming that ensures equitable access to services, empowerment of women and girls and sensitization of men and boys—including for men and boys to take on non-traditional gender roles—results in significant, concrete benefits for the entire community, including community resilience.

Moreover, evidence shows that states with lower levels of gender inequality are less likely to resort to the use of force. A review of large-scale research projects revealed that the security of women is one of the most reliable measures of the peacefulness of a state. The Global Study on Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 called for greater recognition of the influence of gender norms, gender relations and gender inequalities on the potential for the eruption of conflict.

Where peace is understood as being more than simply the absence of armed conflict, gender inequality—whether in relation to equal legal status for women, sex-selective abortion and infanticide, or the deliberate targeting of women for gender-based harms and murder—globally becomes a key indicator of a pre-conflict concept of security skewed in favor of men and toward the state.

3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
The systematic use of sexual violence as a tactic of war is well-documented in a number of conflicts. Rates of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls increase exponentially during conflict, and are compounded by pre-existing gender inequalities and discrimination. Forms of violence include rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, marital and child rape, early and forced marriage and forced, and unintended pregnancies. Intimate partner violence (IPV) accounts for the majority of women’s experience of violence. Intimate partner violence is also linked to poor health, adverse social outcomes, such as income inequality. And in some contexts, it can be more deadly than the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war.

Since Security Council Resolution 1325 was adopted, global attention to sexual and gender-based violence in conflict situations has risen dramatically. However, funding for GBV is disproportionately lower to funding for overall humanitarian response, which explains why programming often remains inadequate and uneven. Too little attention is paid to addressing the root cause of the violence, such as social and gender norms, including norms around masculinity and women’s and girls’ status and behaviour, as well as women's sexual and reproductive health and rights.

**Sexual and Reproductive Health**
There is a clear link between violent conflict and the denial of sexual and reproductive rights. A lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services and information leads to greater risk of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, unintended pregnancies, maternal morbidity and death, as well as other risks to the health of mothers and newborns. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to violence, poverty, separation from families, sexual abuse and exploitation. In addition to putting women and girls at greater risk as violent conflict also leads to a breakdown or disruption of critical sexual and reproductive health infrastructure, resulting in limited access to reproductive and sexual health services when they are needed most.

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9 Global Study on Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 (p 65-74)
11 Ibid, 38.
12 Ibid, 68.
The contributions of essential social services, such as sexual and reproductive health, to sustaining peace are increasingly being recognized in research and international policy. Inequitable, discriminatory or lack of access to public social services can be a key trigger or driver of conflict. As a multi-sectoral intervention, family planning also contributes to reaching vulnerable populations, mitigating conflict, and achieving state stability and peace. The SDGs explicitly recognize sexual and reproductive health as essential to health, development and women’s empowerment.

Recent research has suggested that countries with higher access to sexual and reproductive health services have a lower risk of conflict. Sexual and reproductive health programmes can build resilience of health systems to ensure that women and girls have access to quality, rights-based reproductive health services that are adapted to conflict-affected settings. Women’s equitable access to health and reproductive services facilitates their participation in the economy, which in turn supports a key peacebuilding outcome of economic recovery, as well as household and community resilience.

Adolescents and Youth
The situation and role of youth in conflict-affected countries has risen atop the global agenda. Security Council Resolution 2250 was adopted in 2015. The Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, co-chaired by UNFPA, was launched in 2016 at the World Humanitarian Summit. The 2018 Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security, mandated by Security Council Resolution 2250, urged agencies to avoid hard security and reactive approaches that primarily viewed young people as a threat to peace, and to place young people and their diverse peacebuilding capabilities at the centre of peacebuilders’ thinking.

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16 In connection with the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly (2019), world leaders made a political declaration recommitting to achieving UHC by 2030. The declaration further re-emphasizes the right to health for all and a commitment to achieving universal access to sexual and reproductive health services and reproductive rights as stated in the SDGs. As such, UHC and SRHR are intimately linked. See: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: An Essential Element of Universal Health Coverage, UNFPA 2019.

17 An analysis of the results of national health surveys conducted during and after conflicts in 13 countries in sub-Saharan Africa with major armed conflicts during 1990–2016 provided substantive evidence of a negative association between armed conflict and national indicators of reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health service coverage, child growth and under-5 mortality in most countries. Boerma, T. et al. Armed conflicts and national trends in reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health in sub-Saharan Africa: what can national health surveys tell us? BMJ Global Health Journal.

18 The impact of women’s participation on economic growth was recognized by the Peacebuilding Commission in a 2013 Declaration in which the Commission reiterated that “the economic empowerment of women greatly contributes to the effectiveness of post-conflict economic activities and economic growth, and leads to improving the quality and social outcomes of economic recovery measures and policies as well as to sustainable development.” Global Study on Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325, Peacebuilding Chapter, see note 12.

programming. The study argued that it is only ever a small minority of young people who engage in violence, and that the majority are not only peaceful but also demonstrate exceptional resilience to conflict and insecurity.

Youth consultatations undertaken for the Progress Study revealed that peace was seen as fundamentally gendered, particularly in relation to personal safety, with sexual and gender-based violence as a core concern. Yet a tendency persists in traditional youth programming to prioritize young men and overlook the issue of gender, and the role of young women.

Demographic Data
Understanding population dynamics is a peacebuilding matter. These dynamics can include changes in population growth rates, age structures and distributions of people, as well as polarization of abundance, deprivation and inequalities. Identifying who is marginalized or left behind, and where, is a first step to identifying solutions to sustain peace. However, in conflict-affected countries, demographic data is often severely lacking. Some research argues the importance of “demographic resilience” or the ability of a government to harness its age structure and gender dynamics for its overall well-being. Unless policies specifically incorporate strategies to manage these dynamics, efforts to mitigate conflict and build peace will be undermined.

One specific example of crucial demographic data is the census, which is the most complex and massive peacetime data exercise a nation undertakes. A population and housing census is an enumeration of the total population of a country and provides data on numbers of people, their spatial distribution, age and sex structure, their living conditions and other key socioeconomic characteristics. Such data are critical for good governance, development planning, risk reduction and crisis response, social welfare programmes and business market analyses. However, when a census is perceived to be flawed, or when it is politicised, this can drive grievance and division.

A country’s civil registration and vital statistics system—particularly birth and marriage registration—can offer notable contributions to gender equality, economic growth and peacebuilding. Marriage registration helps women access resources, and can confer ownership of property and land. Birth registration plays a primary role in peacebuilding by ensuring individual rights and access to justice and social services. Birth registration provides the official ‘proof’ of a child’s existence before the law. This is particularly crucial during times of armed conflict or civil unrest, where birth registration is fundamental to the lives of displaced or refugee women and adolescents, facilitating tracing and family reunification, as well as the search for durable solutions. The ‘invisibility’ of non-

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21 Ibid, para 51
registered children increases their vulnerability and the risk that violations of their rights will go unnoticed. A lack of registration also creates barriers to access basic services, such as education and health care. Furthermore, because registration establishes proof of age, it provides children with a degree of protection against trafficking, child labour, early marriage, illegal adoption, sexual exploitation and recruitment into armed forces or armed groups.

UNFPA Action

UNFPA’s Contributions to Building and Sustaining Peace

UNFPA is already heavily invested in countries affected by conflict, violence and fragility. UNFPA works across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, and is positioned to support the sustaining peace agenda and its emphasis on a broader understanding of peacebuilding—from prevention, post-conflict peacebuilding to longer term recovery and reconciliation.

UNFPA specializes in key demographic groups in conflict-affected countries—women, adolescents (especially adolescent girls) and young people—which can represent the largest demographic group in a conflict-affected country. UNFPA leverages population-based and other forms of data for advocacy and programming on eliminating gender-based violence. The strategic positioning of UNFPA at the intersection of sexual and reproductive health and rights and the elimination of gender-based violence is also a core comparative strength.

UNFPA programming engages partners at the individual, community and national levels, including by strengthening the capacities of local women and youth groups and government authorities to enhance basic services and address inequalities. In this way, UNFPA offers a unique platform for action that can facilitate the voices of the largest demographic groups—including those who are marginalized—at scale and at multiple levels into peacebuilding processes. Moreover, the services that UNFPA programming supports or provides are in heightened demand in contexts affected by conflict, violence and fragility.

UNFPA is making significant contributions to peacebuilding. UNFPA is primarily recognized in the peacebuilding world for its work on youth, peace and security, but its broader mandate offers crucial support to sustain peace. UNFPA wider programming—such as youth participation and leadership, but also equitable access to sexual and reproductive health, population data, women’s empowerment and participation, GBV prevention and response have critical contributions to peace by addressing long-term drivers of conflict caused by inequitable access to services, gender-inequality and GBV, youth marginalization; and by improving access to justice, facilitating reconciliation, fostering community social cohesion and resilience, reducing violence, and enhancing

24 UNICEF Innocenti, 2007
state legitimacy and promoting inclusive social contract,. UNFPA programming addresses rights, social norms and relationships, and builds systems and capacities in institutions and service delivery systems at the national, community and interpersonal levels which can help the resilience and the legitimacy of national partners and their ability to mitigate and manage future stresses and shocks. Often overlooked as specialized, stand-alone sectors, UNFPA programming in fact represents investments into “lynchpin” sectors upon which broader peacebuilding outcomes depend (e.g. women’s participation, leadership, economic recovery, demographic dividend, etc.).

Examples of Peacebuilding in Current UNFPA Policy

Strategic Plan
Peacebuilding and sustaining peace represent one of the overall guiding principles of collaboration for UNFPA in its Strategic Plan 2018-2021. Violence and violence prevention—inherently linked to sustaining peace—also permeates UNFPA’s Strategic Plan. Notably, the Plan commits the organization to promoting and supporting the participation of young people in civil and political life, preventing and addressing sexual and gender-based violence, supporting national partners on population data systems to map and address inequalities, vulnerabilities, civil registration and vital statistics.

Youth feature at the center of the Strategic Plan, which includes commitments to forge partnerships to obtain recognition for young people as positive agents of change, including in sustaining peace and resilience, to uphold the rights of youth in development, to capitalize on the potential of youth to contribute to positive social transformation, and participate in the design of policies. The Strategic Plan supports the fundamental right of young people—particularly girls—to participate in civil and political life, and commits to promoting youth-oriented, multisectoral policies and programmes to address central issues affecting young people.

Illustrative Programming Contributions to Sustain Peace
The following section offers examples of UNFPA programming that can contribute to sustaining peace.

Illustrative UNFPA Programming Contributions

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme Activity</th>
<th>Contribution to Sustaining Peace</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender-Based Violence</td>
<td>Enhances recovery and well-being of victims of violence</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supports access to justice</td>
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<td>Increases community social cohesion and resilience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strengthening of national referral system for victims of sexual and gender-based violence through community involvement, and capacity building of institutions and data collection and collaboration within and between institutions</td>
<td>Increases community social cohesion and resilience</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Improves state legitimacy and inclusive social contract</td>
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| Integration of sexual and gender-based violence in transitional justice and judicial reform and planning processes, including capacity building of judicial and security sector institutions on related topics | Enhances recovery and well-being of victims of violence  
Supports access to justice for victims of sexual violence, including through participation in transitional justice and peace processes  
Increases awareness of sexual and gender-based violence as part of the foundation for reconciliation |
| Prevention and awareness programmes with ministries of education, boys and men’s groups, religious institutions, private sector | Supports access to justice for victims of sexual violence, including through participation in transitional justice and peace processes  
Addresses conflict factor of perceived injustice and improves access to justice  
Increases awareness of sexual and gender-based violence as part of the foundation for reconciliation |
| Comprehensive programmes to change underlying social norms behind gender-based violence and barriers to eliminating gender discriminatory practices | Increases community social cohesion and resilience  
Improves state legitimacy and inclusive social contract  
Addresses conflict factor of gender-based violence |
| Document and promote recognition of incidence of sexual and gender-based violence | Increases community social cohesion and resilience  
Improves state legitimacy and inclusive social contract  
Addresses conflict factor of gender-based violence |

**Sexual and Reproductive Health**

| Enhance health system stakeholder accountability (including communities) mechanisms to strengthen services and the demand for sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, combined with mobilization of community/users, especially women and young people, in developing, reviewing and monitoring national health plans. | Addresses conflict driver of inequitable access to health services  
Builds capacity of women and young people to participate in advocacy and national planning.  
Improves government legitimacy through enhanced service accountability |
| Strengthening national health systems for access by marginalized groups, first time mothers, adolescent mothers, especially those living in poor urban settings, indigenous women, women living | Addresses conflict driver of inequitable access to services  
Supports livelihoods opportunities of women and their participation in economic recovery |
with disabilities, and populations living with or at risk of HIV.

| Advocating for avenues for young people to put forward their priorities, including sexual and reproductive health and rights in post-conflict recovery and national planning | Improves inclusivity of national contract and perceived legitimacy of the state  
Builds capacity of young people to engage in civic purpose and have a sense of constructive agency  
Addresses conflict driver of youth marginalization |
|---|
| Strengthening policies and advocacy for sustainable sexuality education that reaches young people in and out of school. This includes teaching, teacher training, the development of curricula, and community engagement, outreach to the most vulnerable adolescent girls, who are at high risk of unwanted pregnancies, sexual exploitation and abuse. | Addresses conflict driver of inequitable access to services  
Community engagement offers platform for integrating peacebuilding and social cohesion components  
Supports educational, livelihood and economic potential of young girls |
| Evidence-based advocacy, policy engagement and programming to strengthen international and national commitments to prioritize, invest and empower adolescents and youth, especially adolescent girls to exercise autonomy and choice with regard to sexual and reproductive health and rights, and well-being. |  |
Support national partners to mainstream the use of demographic data in formulating and implementing development strategies, policies and programmes, including: trends of population growth, health, ageing, distribution, mobility, family life and household structures, shape social, economic and environmental development, risk reduction and humanitarian preparedness and response.

| Enhances equitable access to services by building national capacity in demographic data analysis and utilization across government |
| Enhances perceived legitimacy of the state |
| Builds national capacity to ensure quality, international standards, and identify and understand population trends—such as migration, fertility rates, and urbanization—which can be conflict drivers. |

### Census

**Support**

- Strengthening national capacity in conducting a census, including developing technical and operational guidance tools on measuring disability, migration and marriage registration in censuses, and migration analysis.

| Addresses conflict driver of grievance over marginalization, inequitable access to resources and services |
| Builds national capacity in conflict management and mitigation, inclusive social contract |
| Enhances perceived legitimacy of the state |

**Promoting dissemination and open access to census data.**

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<th><strong>Youth</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promoting and supporting the right of young people to participate in civil and political life, through supporting local, youth-led initiatives and organizations that promote the equal participation of diverse young men and women, including those with disabilities</td>
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| Enhances national capacities to address drivers of conflict and foster inclusive social contract. |
| Builds capacities of youth organizations in reconciliation, conflict mitigation |
| Addresses the conflict driver of youth un-engaged in constructive, positive civic purpose. |

**Promoting youth-oriented, multisectoral policies and programmes to address central issues affecting young people.**

| Enhances national capacities to address drivers of conflict relating to youth and foster inclusive social contract. |
| Builds capacities of youth organizations in reconciliation, conflict mitigation |
| Increases social cohesion at community and national levels |

**Support to youth reintegration and social cohesion, including advocacy on incorporating youth priorities in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes.**

| Enhances national capacities to address drivers of conflict and foster inclusive social contract. |

**Incorporate youth and gender perspectives in conflict analyses, assessments, peacebuilding priority plans**

| Enhances national capacities to address drivers of conflict and foster inclusive social contract. |
| Addresses conflict driver of marginalized youth and unattended youth issues |
| **Support to citizen clubs and to the integration of citizenship and human rights education in schools and the promotion of nonviolence in schools** | **Builds capacities of youth organizations in reconciliation, conflict mitigation**  
**Addresses the conflict driver of youth un-engaged in constructive, positive civic purpose.**  
**Addresses the conflict factor of violence in schools and conflict insensitive education (discriminatory, divisive curriculum, etc.)** |
|---|---|
| **Identify and support young people and youth-led organizations to work on peacebuilding and participate in national peacebuilding processes (such as peacebuilding and recovery planning, and national dialogue and truth and reconciliation processes).** | **Builds capacities of youth organizations in reconciliation, conflict mitigation, advocacy, negotiation, strategic planning**  
**Addresses the conflict driver of youth un-engaged in constructive, positive civic purpose.**  
**Addresses the conflict driver of marginalized youth**  
**Addresses the conflict driver of inequitable services**  
**Addresses the conflict driver of marginalized girls and women** |