



**Prioritise Peace: challenging approaches to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism from a Women, Peace and Security perspective**

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## About GAPS

Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) is the UK's Women, Peace and Security civil society network. We are a membership organisation of 17 NGOs and experts in the fields of development, human rights, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding. We were founded to promote the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Our role is to promote and hold the UK Government to account on its international commitments to women in conflict areas worldwide.

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Page 9: ©UN Women/Ryan Brown. UN Women humanitarian work with refugees in Cameroon.

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Page 12: ©AMISOM/Omar Abdisalan. AMISOM Gender Officers attend the Women's Consultative Forum on Countering Violent Extremism held in Mogadishu, Somalia in 2016.

Back cover: ©UN Women/Urjasi Rudra. Girl guides from Nigeria learn how to develop an advocacy campaign to prevent a specific form of violence that they have identified as a priority.

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## Executive summary

Human rights and peacebuilding are the fundamental and indisputable foundations of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

To integrate WPS with or mainstream it through other policy agendas should only be done insofar as women's rights and principles of peacebuilding are not compromised or undermined. In this paper, GAPS outlines concerns that the preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) agenda is progressing in ways that are both harmful to the WPS agenda, and that have a negative impact on the situation for women's rights and women's rights organisations in conflict-affected contexts. The focus on WPS reflects our expertise as a network. There are other important and broader critiques of the P/CVE agenda offered by NGOs and development actors that complement and build on the themes discussed here.<sup>1</sup>

GAPS makes the case for protecting WPS as a framework for achieving women's rights as a standalone goal, rather than as a means to achieve national security objectives. Armed groups and violent conflict pose serious threats to women's rights; we believe efforts to prevent all forms of violence and conflict should draw on the best practice of peacebuilding and development practitioners.<sup>2</sup>

This means adopting long-term strategies that address underlying structural drivers of conflict such as gender inequality, poverty and poor governance. States, however, have long favoured hard security (or military) approaches that focus on short-term successes over long-term peacebuilding goals. Not only does this mean that P/CVE approaches are typically militarised, but also that P/CVE objectives are naturally

prioritised over those of the WPS agenda because of the current hierarchies of peace and security operations.

In the context of P/CVE, the interest in women's rights and gender equality falls into two strands. Firstly, States understand WPS as a *way of doing* P/CVE, rather than prioritising the achievement of women's rights. This is known as instrumentalisation, where work on women's rights and with women's rights organisations is valued because of perceived or real contributions to national security. This has wide-ranging consequences for the implementation of women's rights programming and the survival of women's rights organisations. Secondly, the political rhetoric on women and girls seen in statements, resolutions and policy documents rarely translates into action and does not seriously acknowledge that women's rights are a cornerstone of sustainable and genuine peace. While States understand that they must work harder to incorporate a gender perspective into their activities on P/CVE, references to women and girls tend to take a narrow approach to understanding the situation for women's rights, declarations of support are rarely backed up with the necessary funding, and there is little analysis of the complexity of gender as a system of social and political power relations.

The WPS agenda makes the clear case that peace and security are inextricably linked to gender equality. Countering armed and violent groups and preventing all forms of violence and conflict is vital work and – depending on its form and ultimate objectives – it makes sense that this work would have positive outcomes for gender equality and women's rights. However, the P/CVE agenda becomes self-defeating when its processes undermine the importance of women's rights. If we do not challenge current approaches to P/CVE, we will continue with policies and practices that are fundamentally incompatible with the pursuit of women's rights and sustainable peace.

1 Saferworld, 2017. "Shouldn't YOU be Countering Violent Extremism?" <https://saferworld-indepth.squarespace.com/shouldnt-you-be-countering-violent-extremism>; Mercy Corps, 2018. "How to Reduce Violent Extremism: Putting Peacebuilding and Development First"; Norwegian Refugee Council, 2017. *Countering Violent Extremism and Humanitarian Action*. <https://www.nrc.no/resources/position-papers/countering-violent-extremism-and-humanitarian-action>

2 International Alert, 2018. "Ask the right questions about gender and violent extremism." <http://www.international-alert.org/blog/ask-right-questions-about-gender-and-violent-extremism>

## Introduction

This joint paper from the Gender Action for Peace and Security network (GAPS) outlines the specific threats that the Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) agenda poses to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

It situates these threats in the context of an overarching trend of securitisation in the peace and security policies of the Global North, where P/CVE has progressed largely under securitised mandates.<sup>3</sup> We identify the threats on two levels:

- 1) attempts by States to bring WPS policy and programming under a P/CVE agenda rather than implementing it as a critical agenda in its own right;
- 2) use of gendered rhetoric in P/CVE policy and programming through references to women and girls that signals an understanding of the political expediency of this language, but that does not translate into gender-transformative practice. This results in and represents a deterioration in the

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3 Saferworld, 2017. "Shouldn't YOU be Countering Violent Extremism?" <https://saferworld-indepth.squarespace.com/shouldnt-you-be-countering-violent-extremism>; John Cosgrave, 2004. *The impact of the "war on terror" on aid flows*. Prepared for ActionAid. p.15; Nicolas de Torrenté, 2004. "Humanitarian Action Under Attack: Reflections on the Iraq War." *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 17. p.8.

protection of women's rights.<sup>4</sup>

The paper sets out GAPS' position on States' use of WPS initiatives and gendered rhetoric in efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism. It argues that current approaches to P/CVE do not take seriously the protection of women and girls' rights, and are inconsistent with peacebuilding processes that promote social empowerment and reform to address root causes of all forms of violent conflict. This paper does not elaborate on all criticisms of States' P/CVE policy and practice. It considers the position of women-led civil society in relation to States' P/CVE agendas. It makes recommendations for ways to ensure the protection and promotion of the rights of women and girls, and to address underlying causes of conflict in a way that promotes gender equality.

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4 Katherine E. Brown, 2013. "Gender and counter-radicalisation: Women and emerging counter-terror measures." *Gender, National Security, and Counter-Terrorism*. pp.36-59.



## Note on language and use of “violent extremism”

Where possible, GAPS has used “violent armed groups and actors” and “armed violence and conflict” rather than “violent extremism”.

At times, GAPS uses “violent extremism” when drawing on official documents that use this language and when referring to States’ decisions to distinguish between forms of violence under current P/CVE approaches.

## Women, peace and security

The WPS agenda is a human rights and women’s rights framework that recognises the link between gender equality and peace. It seeks to address gender inequality in fragile, conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts.

Women and girls face distinct struggles and challenges because of gender biases. These gendered social norms and attitudes are exacerbated in conflict settings, which disproportionately increase risks to women’s and girls’ rights. Similarly, recognising that gender inequality excludes women from influential political and social forums, the WPS agenda affirms the importance of women’s participation and gender perspectives at all stages of formal and informal peace processes and in conflict prevention more generally.

In 2000, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. It has since passed an additional seven resolutions: UNSCRs 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, 2242. These resolutions have underscored the significance of the WPS agenda, reaffirming the importance of its full and genuine implementation.

## Preventing & countering violent extremism

The P/CVE agenda was developed on the understanding that counter-terrorism measures had not been sufficient to prevent the spread of violent extremism. It is a security agenda that recognises the danger posed by violent extremism to: international peace and security; fostering sustainable development; protecting human rights; promoting the rule of law; and taking humanitarian action. It makes use of a combination of “hard” and “soft” security approaches to address the spread of extremist narratives that can incite terrorist acts.

In 2015, the UNSC passed resolution 2242 which highlights the importance of including women in CVE approaches.

In 2016, the UN Secretary-General presented a Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism to address drivers of violent extremism at the local, national, regional and global levels.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Information taken from United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee website: <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/focus-areas/countering-violent-extremism/>

## Current approaches to P/CVE & WPS

The P/CVE agenda first developed, for the most part, in silo to the principles of the WPS agenda. The inextricable links between gender equality and peace and security – the bedrock of the WPS agenda – were conspicuously absent from most initial approaches to P/CVE. This has changed in recent years, with a significant shift towards adopting a gender perspective as governments and donors recognise the opportunities between the two agendas.<sup>6</sup> However, the incorporation of language on gender in current approaches to P/CVE lacks the analytical insight and sophistication of a women's rights framework.<sup>7</sup> Governments, donors and other P/CVE actors integrate references to women, girls and/or gender-sensitivity into P/CVE narratives with little to no gender analysis or self-standing prioritisation of the achievement of gender equality. Women and girls' empowerment, when understood as a security sector concern, is valued in terms of and because of perceived potential contribution to peace and stability.<sup>8</sup> This framing alone neither gives due analysis to complex gendered power dynamics, nor does it promote a holistic approach to addressing women's and girls' rights. It further fails to address how some narratives used by violent groups actively use gender norms to exclude women and silence their political voice.

The appropriation of women's rights for the expediency of P/CVE policy and programming is at best an example of tokenistic inclusion. At worst, it incurs lasting damage to the situation for

- 6 Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, 2016. "The 'war on terror' and extremism: assessing the relevance of the women, peace and security agenda." *International Affairs* 92. p.277-278.
- 7 Ibid. p.289: "the superficial inclusion of references to women in the context of addressing terrorism and advancing counterterrorism strategies should not be read as a form of meaningful intersection between the WPS agenda and by now well-established post 9/11 international security regimes.... Now international security has discovered WPS, and it remains an open question whether this will serve the interests of women caught up in and affected by the new and ever-shifting battlefields of our age."
- 8 Quadrennial Diplomacy & Development Review, 2010. *Leading through Civilian Power: The First Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review*. US Department of State & USAID. p.23: "The status of the world's women is not simply an issue of morality – it is a matter of national security."

women's rights, with severe consequences such as exacerbated targeted violence against women human rights defenders. A 2017 report on key issues between the two agendas that emerged from a workshop held at the London School of Economics Centre for Women Peace and Security states:

**"There is a dearth of knowledge on the relationship between gender, agency and P/CVE which may explain the absence of an analytical gender perspective and reliance on gender stereotypes in P/CVE programmes. Existing evidence-based research predominantly focuses on the policy level or on country-specific examples, resulting in gender blind reports."**<sup>9</sup>

As a result, there is significant concern within civil society about the risks that current approaches to P/CVE pose to WPS and gender equality work. Martin Scheinin, former UN Special Rapporteur on the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, notes that:

**"One of the consequences of these gender-blind approaches is the resulting systematic ignorance of how terrorism and counter-terrorism measures impact the enjoyment of human rights by women or those who perform roles in society typically associated with women... [A] standard approach to human rights and counterterrorism has tended to render the full scope of gender-based rights violations invisible to policy makers and the human rights community alike."**<sup>10</sup>

- 9 LSE Centre for Women, Peace & Security, 2017. *Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism and WPS: Concepts, Practices and Moving Forward*. <http://www.lse.ac.uk/women-peace-security/assets/documents/2017/LSE-WPS-PCVE-Key-Issues-Report.pdf>. p.3-4.
- 10 Martin Scheinin, 2013. "Foreword: Gender and counterterrorism – reflections by a former United Nations Special Rapporteur." *Gender, National Security, and Counter-Terrorism: Human Rights Perspectives*. p.xi.



This standard approach focuses on forms of violence against women perpetrated by groups labelled extremist or terrorist at the expense of interrogating violence perpetrated by state forces or other groups.<sup>11</sup> It also creates a hierarchy of violence; States deeming so-called “extremist” violence more important than other forms of human rights abuses and violence against women and girls – such as intimate partner violence or early forced marriage – undermine fundamental WPS principles which necessitate listening to and addressing the needs of women and girls in communities affected by conflict and violence. In the 2009 report of the Special Rapporteur, Scheinin emphasised that “more is required to ensure that the voices of those affected by the gendered impacts of counter-terrorism measures are heard and the full range of human rights violations are acknowledged and addressed.”<sup>12</sup>

The WPS and P/CVE agendas are becoming increasingly connected at the level of international multilateral decision-making. The most recent resolution of the WPS agenda – United Nations Security Council resolution 2242 adopted in 2015 – includes a call for “the greater integration by Member States and the United Nations of their agendas on women, peace and security, counter-terrorism and countering-violent extremism which can be conducive to terrorism.”<sup>13</sup> The text of the resolution explicitly addresses the harmful impact of violent extremism on the human rights of women and girls. It recognises that violent

extremism is a threat to international peace and security, and recommends that WPS should be a cross-cutting subject in this regard. However, the resolution only acknowledges indirectly that policy and programming on P/CVE can be harmful to the rights of women and girls, and largely ignores the multiplicity of violence and insecurity that they face. While its recommendations for Member States are welcomed,<sup>14</sup> the text of the resolution would be stronger if it addressed directly the negative impact of securitised and gender-blind approaches to P/CVE on women’s rights and urged action on all types of violence affecting women. The 2015 UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism makes brief reference to this fact.<sup>15</sup> It is not enough to recognise the links or complementarity between the two agendas: if the United Nations and its Member States do not *understand* the links, pursuing a joined-up approach to the implementation of these agendas leads to the risks outlined below.

14 Ibid. para.12: “Urges Member States and requests relevant United Nations entities... to conduct and gather gender-sensitive research and data collection on the drivers of radicalisation for women, and the impacts of counter-terrorism strategies on women’s human rights and women’s organisations in order to develop targeted and evidence-based policy and programming responses, and to ensure United Nations monitoring and assessment mechanisms and processes mandated to prevent and respond to violent extremism, which can be conducive to terrorism, have the necessary gender expertise to fulfil their mandates”; para.13: “Urges Member States and the United Nations system to ensure the participation and leadership of women and women’s organisations in developing strategies to counter terrorism and violent extremism”.

15 UN A/70/674, 2015. *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism*. para.53: “In line with Security Council resolution 2242 (2015), we must ensure that the protection and empowerment of women is a central consideration of strategies devised to counter terrorism and violent extremism. There is also a need to ensure that efforts to counter terrorism and violent extremism do not impact adversely on women’s rights.”

11 Saferworld, 2017. “Shouldn’t YOU be Countering Violent Extremism?” <https://saferworld-indepth.squarespace.com/shouldnt-you-be-countering-violent-extremism>

12 UN A/64/211, 2009. *Protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism*. para.19.

13 S/RES/2242, 2015. Resolution 2242. Adopted by the Security Council at its 7533<sup>rd</sup> meeting, on 13 October 2015. para.11.

## Risks to the WPS agenda & women's rights

Current approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism generate serious threats to the WPS agenda and women's rights. These include:

1. the instrumentalisation of WPS and undermining of women's rights
2. a lack of practical steps to support women and girls' genuine and meaningful participation
3. limiting narratives around women and girls' agency and victimhood
4. lack of support to women's rights organisations (WROs) and civil society organisations (CSOs)
5. increased militarisation of the peace and security agenda

### 1. Instrumentalisation of women's rights

Instrumentalisation happens when the WPS agenda is used as a tool for P/CVE rather than implemented as a critical agenda in its own right.<sup>16</sup> The instrumentalisation of the WPS agenda is directly harmful to women and girls in fragile contexts, as noted by the Global Study on UNSCR 1325.<sup>17</sup> Both states and violent armed groups can instrumentalise women and girls' rights for a specific purpose. There are documented cases of governments employing the rights of women and girls, and gender and sexual minorities as a bartering tool to appease violent armed groups and actors.<sup>18</sup> Conversely, these groups have demonstrated an understanding of women's desire for agency and empowerment, as well as how gender intersects with poverty and social status, in their recruitment practices.<sup>19</sup>

The threat to pursuing women's rights occurs when policy making on gender equality is tied to achieving national security objectives.<sup>20</sup> When women's rights serve a securitised purpose (as with P/CVE – see section 5), they will be embraced; as soon as they are perceived as counterproductive, they will be sacrificed.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> UN Women, 2015. *Preventing conflict, transforming justice, securing the peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325*. p.407.

<sup>18</sup> UN A/64/211, 2009. *Protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism*. para.36. Examples given from Somalia, Pakistan and Egypt.

<sup>19</sup> Sarah Ladbury, 2015. "Women and Extremism: the association of women and girls with jihadi groups and implications for programming." Independent paper prepared for DFID and the FCO. p.15-18 & 28-32; Cheludo Butale, 2017. "The Nexus between Gender Inequality and Violent Extremism in Sub-Saharan Africa." International Association for Political Science Students. <http://www.iapss.org/wp/2017/03/30/the-nexus-between-gender-inequality-and-violent-extremism-in-sub-saharan-africa>

<sup>20</sup> Brown, 2013. "Gender and counter-radicalisation." p.51.

<sup>21</sup> Margaret Satterthwaite, 2013. "Missing indicators, disappearing gender: Measuring USAID's programming to counter violent extremism." *Gender, National Security, and Counter-Terrorism: Human Rights Perspectives*. p.99; Sophie Giscard d'Estaing, 2017: "Engaging women in countering violent extremism: avoiding instrumentalisation and furthering agency." *Gender & Development* 25:1. p.109.

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<sup>16</sup> Saferworld, 2017. "The countering violent extremism agenda risks undermining women who need greater support." <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/news-and-analysis/post/221-the-countering-violent-extremism-agenda-risks-undermining-women-who-need-greater-support>



This undermines the fundamental importance of the rights of women and girls. Selective commitments to women’s rights under a P/CVE agenda mean that the broader picture of women and girls’ rights is not addressed. Communities affected by violent armed groups experience wide-ranging erosions of freedom and rights that also occur in conflict-affected and fragile settings *not* perceived to be at risk of violent extremism. Pre-existing gender-based discrimination, injustices and threats to women and girls’ rights are exacerbated by all forms of conflict, including: the right to education; freedom of movement; freedom of association; and all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) including early forced child marriage, abduction and intimate partner violence.<sup>22</sup> If governments only see these human rights violations as symptoms of violent extremism without recognising and addressing their root causes in all conflict contexts, this further undermines the pursuit of women and girls’ rights and WPS goals in their own right.

The instrumentalisation of women themselves in P/CVE policy and programming is often accompanied by limiting and stereotyped gendered narratives of women as mothers, wives, and/or innate peacemakers (see section 3). Women’s inclusion in approaches to P/CVE is instrumentalised when women are perceived as tools to influence male relatives who are likely to be radicalised, or when women are conceived of as means to access community networks.<sup>23</sup> This perception of women erases or limits their agency as actors in the context of violent armed groups.<sup>24</sup> It places the burden of responsibility on women to prevent violence and conflict – which risks over-estimating the influence women have in societies with high levels of gender inequality – without addressing the specific vulnerabilities that women and girls often face in their societies, such as: political, social and economic exclusion; lack of rule of law; patriarchal security and justice mechanisms; horizontal and vertical inequalities; VAWG; bad governance; and other injustices.

<sup>22</sup> UN A/70/674, 2015. *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism*. para.19.

<sup>23</sup> United States Department of the Army, 2009. *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*. FMI 3-24.2. p.C-6.  
<sup>24</sup> Brown, 2013. “Gender and counter-radicalisation”. p.51.



## 2. Meaningful participation

Decision-making on security-related issues, including P/CVE, comes from patriarchal and male-dominated structures. P/CVE policy and programming favour hard security approaches underpinned by national security objectives. This results in the systematic marginalisation of women's and girls' perspectives and stands in direct opposition to the WPS agenda.<sup>25</sup>

There is little to no understanding of the differential impacts of P/CVE approaches for women and girls. Gender analysis, a central element of WPS, is an essential tool for ensuring a holistic and women's rights-based approach to P/CVE policy and programming. The meaningful participation of women-led civil society and women's rights organisations (WROs) is key to any gender analysis. It allows women the autonomy and leadership to determine their priorities and strategies in countering violent extremism.<sup>26</sup>

Women's meaningful participation is also directly linked to mitigating the instrumentalisation of women and a women's rights agenda. Women and girls must be meaningfully consulted in the design and delivery of P/CVE policy and programming and in the decision-making institutions that develop these. They must have the space to be critical of ineffective approaches

<sup>25</sup> UNSCR 1325 "affirms the importance of the participation of women and the inclusion of gender perspectives in peace negotiations, humanitarian planning, peacekeeping operations, and post-conflict peacebuilding and governance."

<sup>26</sup> UN Women, 2015. *A Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325*. p.231.

that do not protect the rights of women and girls. Furthermore, the rationale for inclusion should be based on non-discrimination, equality, and the protection of rights.<sup>27</sup>

## 3. Limiting narratives & gender stereotypes

The exclusion of women's voices and gender analysis means that P/CVE has approached women's participation through a narrow lens, i.e. looking to women and girls to discourage extremism. This logic relies on limiting gender stereotypes of women and girls as innately peaceful and relevant only in relation to men – relegating them to roles of mother, daughter, sister, etc.<sup>28</sup> – and obscures their diverse roles and identities in countering, mobilising against, or participating in violent armed groups.<sup>29</sup> Women and girls are understood as tools for P/CVE approaches, and programming on women's rights is justified under a P/CVE framework. This risks the diversion of resources from genuine empowerment building, as well as deprioritising the achievement of women's rights and

<sup>27</sup> Duke Law International Human Rights Clinic & Women Peacemakers Program, 2017. *Tightening the Purse Strings: What Countering Terrorism Financing Costs Gender Equality and Security*. p.75.

<sup>28</sup> For more analysis see Giscard d'Estaing, 2017: "Engaging women in countering violent extremism." p.103-118.

<sup>29</sup> Saferworld, 2017. "The countering violent extremism agenda risks undermining women who need greater support." <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/news-and-analysis/post/221-the-countering-violent-extremism-agenda-risks-undermining-women-who-need-greater-support>

gender equality. It also places disproportionate responsibility on women to counter radicalisation rather than sharing it among a range of actors.

P/CVE approaches have also reinforced the narrow international focus on women and girls as victims of conflict and armed violence, particularly of sexual violence.<sup>30</sup> Common examples include the systematic sexual violence perpetrated by Boko Haram and the Islamic State. This narrow focus creates disempowering narratives of victimhood, and misses the realities for women in conflict.<sup>31</sup> Women's rights activists have worked hard to gain recognition of women in global peace and security spheres as more than victims. Superimposing limiting gender stereotypes onto women's participation risks curtailing gains in their representation. Women play diverse, multiple and complex roles in conflict-affected contexts; failing to acknowledge and understand this leads to simplistic notions of women's empowerment that do not address underlying causes of armed violence and conflict.

## 4. Support to WROs & women-led civil society

The international community has acknowledged the essential role of civil society organisations (CSOs) in preventing conflict and addressing root causes of violence and insecurity. However, a growing interest in the specific role of WROs has not been matched with sufficient resources. As noted by a Duke Law International Human Rights Clinic and Women Peacemakers Program report – *Tightening the Purse Strings* – counter-terrorism financing regulations do not have a gender-neutral impact on the distribution of foreign resources.<sup>32</sup> WROs operating on or in contexts of violent armed groups are doubly affected. Pre-existing gender inequalities result in a reliance on foreign funds,

but access to foreign funds is restricted on multiple levels by counter-terrorism financing rules. This includes: restrictions on humanitarian funding in contexts where funds are perceived to be at risk of diversion;<sup>33</sup> increased administrative burdens and reporting requirements that threaten operational capacity; a trend towards project funding rather than long-term, core flexible funding; adaptive strategies such as cash-carrying that put WROs at heightened risk and create a profile unfavourable to donors.<sup>34</sup>

CSOs and WROs have also been affected by the increased funding to P/CVE – which is often projectised, short-term and difficult for CSOs in fragile and conflict-affected states to access directly – at a cost to conflict prevention funding.<sup>35</sup> Donor funding is not designed to support WROs or civil society in areas “at risk” of or controlled by violent armed groups and/or where CSOs are working with victims of or potential recruits to these groups. Projectised funding, for example, undermines the ability of WROs to continue with core activism on women's rights and gender equality, as they are forced to spend their resources on achieving P/CVE outcomes only. Accepting this funding, on the other hand, is the only way to guarantee organisational survival: WROs and CSOs are often required to frame their work around P/CVE to be able to continue to operate in the increasingly constrained funding environment. However, WROs that accept P/CVE funding can face exacerbated risk of violence and recrimination from those who perceive P/CVE to be a hostile foreign agenda. This is against a backdrop where WROs are already targeted for the work they do, and a restricted funding environment for women's rights and gender equality.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Ní Aoláin, 2016. “The ‘war on terror’ and extremism”. p.275: “[T]he weight of international attention laid on sexual harms to women in war without due consideration to the conditions and inequalities that produce such harms in the first place.”

<sup>31</sup> UN Women, 2015. *A Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325*. p.226: “Any attempt to constantly portray women in non-western societies within an extremist frame, as one monolithic group of helpless victims or resistance fighters in states of terror is both incorrect and misses an important dynamic.”

<sup>32</sup> Duke Law, 2017. *Tightening the Purse Strings*. p.45.

<sup>33</sup> Lama Fakh, 2013. “Soft measures, real harm: Somalia and the US ‘War on Terror’.” *Gender, National Security, and Counter-Terrorism: Human Rights Perspectives*. 2013, p.193.

<sup>34</sup> Duke Law, 2017. *Tightening the Purse Strings*.

<sup>35</sup> UN A/64/211, 2009. *Protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism*. para.24: “the privileging of a militarised response to terrorism has meant that funds to combat terrorism have been diverted from addressing the socio-economic conditions that may be conducive to terrorism, such as those involving gender inequalities.”

<sup>36</sup> Duke Law, 2017. *Tightening the Purse Strings*. p.69; Jayne Huckerby & Lama Fakh, 2011. *A Decade Lost: Locating gender in US counter-terrorism*. Centre for Human Rights and Global Justice. p.26.

## 5. Militarisation & securitisation

States prioritise hard security approaches when implementing a P/CVE agenda. This often means a focus on a narrow set of short-term, pre-determined national security objectives rather than prioritising a long-term peacebuilding approach that seeks to prevent violent conflict by addressing underlying structural drivers such as gender inequality.<sup>37</sup>

Hard security approaches undermine efforts to build sustainable peace and promote gender equality, with severe and distinct impacts on women and girls. As recognised by the LSE key issues report, “short-term security objectives are often at odds with the goals of the WPS agenda.”<sup>38</sup> This includes, for example, the use of profiling, restrictions of freedoms, and crackdowns on civil society groups that challenge the status quo, for example WROs that promote gender equality. While securitisation may be required in cases of imminent threat, when used too widely it can exacerbate the perceptions of marginalisation and persecution that allow violent groups to operate.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Saferworld, 2017. “Shouldn’t YOU be Countering Violent Extremism?” <https://saferworld-indepth.squarespace.com/shouldnt-you-be-countering-violent-extremism>

<sup>38</sup> LSE Centre for Women, Peace & Security, 2017. *Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism and WPS*. p.1.

<sup>39</sup> International Alert. “Supporting vulnerable communities and conflict-sensitive reintegration in northeast Nigeria.” <http://www.international-alert.org/projects/14239>; “New counter-extremism laws must not cut out spaces for dialogue.” <http://www.international-alert.org/blog/new-counter-extremism-laws-must-not-cut-out-spaces-dialogue>

Securitized approaches that include WPS in P/CVE (and vice versa) also risk backlash for women human rights defenders and heightened insecurity for women.<sup>40</sup> Perceived association with a “Western” or “foreign” agenda can leave organisations working towards gender equality more susceptible to targeted attacks.<sup>41</sup> The Global Study on UNSCR 1325 cites the use of women and women’s equality in military planning as a short-sighted tactic that “puts women at risk and alienates them from their communities as well as their families.”<sup>42</sup> Militarised hard-security approaches have been used to justify heavy-handed crackdowns on civil society, with negative consequences for women’s rights advocacy and activists.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> UN A/64/211, 2009. *Protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism*. para.35 & para.53.e; UN Women, 2015. *A Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325*. p.222.

<sup>41</sup> Jayne Huckerby & Lama Fakhri, 2011. *A Decade Lost: Locating gender in US counter-terrorism*. Centre for Human Rights and Global Justice. p.75.

<sup>42</sup> UN Women, 2015. *A Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325*. p.228.

<sup>43</sup> Saferworld, 2017. “The countering violent extremism agenda risks undermining women who need greater support.”

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## Conclusion

Unchallenged approaches to P/CVE risk co-opting the WPS agenda. WPS activists must be afforded the space and dialogue with States and other security actors to challenge and influence P/CVE policies and practices that are fundamentally incompatible with the pursuit of women's rights and sustainable peace. State policy and programming that treat P/CVE and WPS as complementary understand WPS as an element or tactic of P/CVE rather than as a self-standing women's rights and peacebuilding framework.<sup>44</sup> Instrumentalisation and marginalisation of the WPS agenda under P/CVE approaches are also evident in the peace and security architectures of the UN,<sup>45</sup> with wide-ranging negative implications for women

<sup>44</sup> Christine Chinkin, 2018. "International Human Rights, Criminal Law and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda." <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/wps/2018/01/11/international-human-rights-criminal-law-and-the-women-peace-and-security-agenda-christine-chinkin-122018/>: "It seems that WPS has been drawn upon as a solution to terrorism, but without any assurances that it will not be discounted when other imperatives so demand."

<sup>45</sup> Ní Aoláin, 2016. "The 'war on terror' and extremism". p.290-1.

and women's rights (outlined above). Under this rubric, work towards WPS becomes a means to a securitised end.

Countering violent armed groups and preventing all forms of violent conflict is essential work. However, approaches to this work should follow and invest in peacebuilding and development practices that have women and girls' rights at their heart. The political, social and economic empowerment and realisation of the human rights of women and girls are ends in themselves and not means to bolster national security, prevent violent extremism or indeed to further any other agenda. GAPS' recommendations below, fronted by a call to implement WPS as a critical agenda in its own right, will help to ensure that the protection and promotion of women's rights are present throughout P/CVE programming and the prioritisation of a WPS agenda towards gender equality and peace. These recommendations are targeted at governing bodies and decision-makers at the State level on P/CVE policy and programming.

# Recommendations

## Implement the WPS agenda in its own right:

- Develop, fund and implement National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security in consultation with WROs, women human rights defenders and CSOs that prioritise their pursuit of peace, women's rights and leadership, and sustainable development.
- Invest in long-term programming in conflict contexts to promote sustainable change in gender norms and relationships. These should address the underlying drivers of conflict, including gender inequality, poverty, lack of opportunity, poor governance and corruption.

## Undertake gender analysis:

- Develop a comprehensive understanding of the diverse roles women, girls, men and boys may take in conflict, of pre-existing gender norms, and of the specific gendered impacts of conflict;
- Map and understand the structural barriers in any given context to women's exclusion from peace and security decision-making and activities at all levels before, during and after violent conflict, and take appropriate measures to mitigate them;
- Identify and avoid policies, programmes and communications that presuppose or define the role of women in P/CVE, that reinforce limiting gender stereotypes of women and girls or undermine the critical work of WROs and CSOs.

## Include women and adolescent girls:

- Promote their equal, active and meaningful participation in decision-making structures and ensure that they have an equal role in setting the agenda, including the strategic direction of P/CVE policy, decision-making on funding, and in programme design;
- Advocate for the right of women to be included equally in the breadth of decision-making on peace and security at all levels, regardless of the impact on P/CVE outcomes.

### **Support women's rights organisations:**

- Provide flexible, long-term funding to enable their work to prevent conflict and all forms of violence, build peace and transform societies beyond a narrow P/CVE agenda;
- Undertake assessments of the impact of P/CVE funding on WROs and CSOs, including how donor communications may put organisations at risk;
- Guarantee humanitarian funding in areas “at risk” of violent armed groups and actors by ensuring it remains impartial and is not tied to P/CVE aims;
- Promote and deliver capacity building and technical support, and support platforms for sharing findings, lessons learned and best practice amongst WROs and CSOs working to prevent all forms of violence in conflict.

### **Prioritise community-based approaches:**

- Place emphasis on respecting the autonomy of local women, peacebuilders and civil society, and ensure that women's rights programmes are not compromised by hard security approaches in order to avoid backlash against WROs and women human rights defenders;
- Invest in research to build a more nuanced understanding of the roles of women and girls in both preventing and participating in violent armed groups and of the impacts of P/CVE programming on women's lives and their human rights.

