

Arts Activities for Women, Peace and Security

Arts practitioners have a long history of contributing to peacebuilding initiatives. Theatre, dance and visual arts are all platforms for addressing topics such as gender equality, social inclusion and conflict resolution to engage wide audiences. In Southeast Asia, these creative tools have been an undervalued – but vital – mechanism in advancing the goals of the Women, Peace and Security agenda (WPS). WPS is a policy framework established in 2000 through UN Security Council Resolution 1325 to address conflicts and their aftermath by focusing on the inclusion of women in peace and security efforts. Women's civil society, including artists and activists, are key actors in bringing WPS to local communities and ensuring that women's voices influence peace efforts.

How does art contribute to WPS?

Social cohesion and inclusivity: Creative activities can be a powerful tool for social cohesion and for strengthening communities. In Myanmar, artistic initiatives supported the Civil Disobedience Movement bringing students together in protest at mandated military conscription. Across the region, theatre, exhibitions and dance have all been used to challenge harmful social norms and promote peace and tolerance.

Space for civil society expression: In many contexts across the region, civic space for freedom of expression is constrained. Art can present an alternative platform for raising awareness on issues such as gender-based violence and social inequality in a way that mitigates the risk to individual artists and activists.

Advocacy and influencing at scale:

Through using radio, social media and other platforms that attract a broad audience, arts activities offer the opportunity for social and political issues to reach a diverse range of community members. In Indonesia, Arts for Peace initiatives were able to reach over 23,000 on and offline viewers. Participating in arts activities is widely accessible and may require minimal financial investment.

Leadership and confidence-building:

Artistic practices provide a platform for advocacy among women and other community members that may otherwise lack established opportunities for influence. Digital rights activities in Timor-Leste have focused on targeting youth for engagement. Participation in creative initiatives can build the confidence of individuals to take on leadership roles in their communities, and to perceive themselves as capable of representing their lived experiences and advocating for their needs.

Psychosocial support: Engaging individuals and communities in artistic activities is an impactful method of psychosocial support. Working on creative initiatives can provide a safe space for victim-survivors of violence and can encourage therapeutic recovery in parallel to counselling support. This is particularly beneficial in societies in which there may be resistance or stigma in response to direct clinical psychology interventions. In the Philippines, communities impacted by violence in Mindanao have benefit from the collective support of working collaboratively on weaving and textile production.

Recommendations for future support to Arts Initiatives to advance WPS

- 1. Invest** in meaningful arts activities that address harmful gender social norms and promote conflict prevention and resolution, and that engage communities to facilitate social cohesion and behavioural change.
- 2. Engage** policymakers and national and regional actors as active audiences and participants in arts initiatives and provide platforms for exchange between artists and decision-makers.
- 3. Strictly enforce** 'do no harm' principles throughout the activity cycle to ensure the safety of artists and communities.
- 4. Support** artists at the individual and organisational level to produce work promoting gender equality and peace, and provide platforms for this work to be shared with a broad audience.
- 5. Explore** opportunities for psychosocial programs including for victim-survivors of conflict, disaster and conflict-related sexual violence to engage in trauma-informed creative activities as a therapeutic and restorative practice.

AMPLIFY is a five-year regional initiative by The Asia Foundation and the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade working to strengthen women's engagement in peace, and security action efforts across ASEAN. In Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar the project engages women at three levels: in conflict-affected and insecure communities, within women's civil society organizations, and among national decision-makers. focusing on enhancing women's security through a holistic approach.

Case Studies

Weaving for conflict recovery in the Philippines

In the aftermath of the siege of Marawi City in Mindanao, the Philippines in 2017, Sinagtala Center for Women and Children in Conflict provided displaced women the opportunity to learn and participate in traditional weaving, gaining economic empowerment alongside trauma-informed psychosocial support. The artistic practice of the weaving allows victim-survivors to express their experiences of conflict on the path to recovery.



Sinagtala also works with women from rebel families in Sulu, including war widows and the families of active fighters, to

provide counseling and skills training, and works to tackle the root causes of violence.

Women weavers of Sinagtala had initially resisted weaving in black and white as these colours were associated with the symbols of the militants that had led the Marawi siege. Alongside the counseling and therapeutic support they received from the program, the weavers reclaimed these colours and designed and produced patterns and textiles that represented their response to the conflict.



Case Studies

Cartooning for change in Myanmar

"For me, using art as a weapon is a beautiful way to advocate for change. I'll keep fighting until the last drop of my blood"

Michi Emma, Political Cartoonist

For political cartoonist Michi Emma, art has the capacity to build an audience's empathy and their care about social and political issues through a single image. Her cartoons respond to the political crisis in Myanmar and the plight of student members of the Civil Disobedience Movement that refuse to support the military. Through her cartoons she urges communities to play a role in demanding change.

"In Myanmar, peace is not just about stopping bullets. It is about justice, safety, and giving women a seat at the table where decisions are made"



This cartoon 'Who to blame?' depicts members of the Civil Disobedience Movement in Myanmar returning to school after three years of military rule. It highlights their difficult decision to quit the protest movement and the loss of hope in fighting against the coup. The cartoon emphasises the impact of the political crises on their education and future.

Doodle art in Indonesia



Doodle Art Jember, is a mobile community that focuses on developing fine arts practice in Jember, Indonesia through hosting workshops, exhibitions and school visits.

As a winner of the 'Art for Peace' grant supported by the Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN) Indonesia, Doodle Art Jember organised a doodle art competition that allowed participants to address themes of bullying and victimisation, encouraging participants to advocate against these harms through their art.

Podcasts for peace in Timor-Leste

"Digital rights are human rights"

- Juvita Pereira Faria, Founder of JPF Podcast



As digital connectivity in Timor-Leste rapidly expands, the JPF Podcast identified the need to support young people to safely navigate social media and the online world and to counter technology-facilitated gender based violence and other online harms.

To achieve this, JPF has supported the creation of a cohort of digital advocates who can provide education on the safe use of digital technology and promote digital rights in supporting gender and equality and women's empowerment.

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