

Mapping Feminist International Relations in South Asia

Past and Present

Edited by Shweta Singh and Amena Mohsin

First published 2025

ISBN: 978-1-032-94667-2 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-94666-5 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-58113-0 (ebk)

Chapter 8

Performative Act or Transformative Change

Punam Yadav

(CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003581130-11

The funder of the Open Access version of this chapter is
University College London



Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

8 Performative Act or Transformative Change

Punam Yadav

Introduction

It has been 24 years since the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 was adopted in 2000. Nine additional resolutions have been adopted since then, strengthening the provisions of UNSCR 1325, including 1820 (2009); 1888 (2009); 1889 (2010); 1960 (2011); 2106 (2013); 2122 (2013); 2242 (2015); 2467 (2019); and 2493 (2019)¹. These ten resolutions combined are called the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

UNSCR 1325 was an important step within the UNSC (despite its limitations, see Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011; Singh, 2017), as it recognized the disproportionate impacts of armed conflict on women and the importance of a gender perspective in peace and security. The follow-up resolutions strengthened the provisions of UNSCR 1325, recognizing women not only as victims but also as agents of change, including the roles that women could play in peacebuilding (Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011). UNSCR 1325 was a milestone achievement paving the way for incorporating the women's security agenda into the global peace and security discourse.

The UNSCR 1325 gained a lot of attention from the UN member states, who showed their commitment to the resolution by developing a National Action Plan (NAP) (Shepherd 2016). Over half of the UN member states (55%)² have now developed at least one NAP to implement the WPS resolutions, while some countries have already adopted their fifth NAP, such as the United Kingdom³. The WPS agenda brought attention to gender-specific needs in war and conflict, including increased funding for addressing gender-based violence in war and conflict. It also provided a tool for women's rights activists to advocate for the inclusion of women in peace processes (see Lesley Abdela 2011). However, despite its significance and the efforts made by the member states, the implementation of the WPS agenda has met with many challenges. Studies have shown both conceptual and operational challenges, including the lack of will and commitment from the local government, lack of support from civil society organizations, and lack of funding (see Beoku-Betts 2016; Basini & Ryan 2016; Shepherd 2020; Newby & O'Malley, 2021; Lyytikäinen & Yadav, 2021).

In this chapter, through the analysis of the first Nepal NAP, I argue that while having a well-funded NAP, developed through a consultative process, is important for the effective implementation of the WPS agenda, a good understanding of institutional “practice” of the NAP implementing bodies is essential. While theoretical and operational considerations play a crucial role in strengthening the WPS agenda, the local practices determine the success or failure of any NAP. For instance, although the inclusion of international experts, a consultative process, and funding are crucial, the NAP would still be at risk of failure if the existing institutional practices of the implementing bodies are not considered during this process. This chapter explores how a lack of attention to local practices impacted the effectiveness of the first Nepal NAP (2011–2016) (Yadav, 2020).

Theory of Practice

The reasons shaping human actions are relational, driven by a practical sense and by a degree of arbitrariness. This is why the social genesis of institutions is so central to understand any course of action.

(Bigo, 2011, p. 228)

According to Bourdieu, knowledge does not necessarily depend on the standpoint of an individual. The knowledge of an object depends on the individual who is observing it within a particular time and context (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 2). Hence, it is the condition which makes such knowledge possible (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 4). *Habitus* is central to Bourdieu’s theory of practice (Calhoun et al., 1993, p. 4). *Habitus* is the embodied knowledge, formed on the basis of the dynamic intersection between structure and agency (Calhoun et al., 1993, p. 4). Practice doesn’t follow objective knowledge, it is “a process of improvisation that, in turn, is structured by cultural orientations, personal trajectories, and the ability to play the game of social interaction” (Calhoun et al., 1993, p. 4).

Bourdieu’s theory of practice helps us understand that it is not only the norms/culture or the structure but also a practice that impacts people and shapes their worldview. Theory of practice helps us understand why even fully funded NAP may not necessarily bring about the anticipated transformative change, unless the institutional practices of the local implementing bodies are considered while designing the implementation plan for global policies, such as the WPS agenda, into the local context.

Why was UNSCR 1325 Relevant in Nepal?

Shortly after the establishment of parliamentary democracy in 1990, which replaced a 30-year of Monarchy, Nepal fell into a civil war in 1996 (Yadav, 2016). This was an armed conflict between the government of Nepal and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (CPN-M). With the aim of transforming the lives of people, especially of those marginalized groups

including women, the CPN-M announced a war against the government, leading to a civil war for ten years. Although the war started from the mid-hills of Nepal, it quickly spread to the entire country (Yami, 2007). The war lasted for ten years, killing thousands (over 13,000), displacing hundreds (150,000–200,000) and disappearing over 3,000 people (Lawoti and Pahari, 2010; Yadav, 2016; Manchanda, 2004).

In addition to the fatalities, injuries, disappearances, and displacements, people faced other impacts of conflict, such as the loss of livelihoods, psychological trauma, sexual violence, unwanted pregnancies, and more. The civil war also had long-term consequences on people's lives; young women became widows, and women who had never ventured outside their homes/villages had no choice but to find work for survival because they had lost the family breadwinners to war, exposing them to various forms of violence at work. Forced migration of youth due to the fear of being caught between the two conflicting parties left many villages with only women, children, and elderly people (Yadav, 2020). Some women and girls ended up in occupations they would never have considered if there were no war, such as engaging in sex work (Yadav, 2017).

Schools and health centres were destroyed during the war, preventing young children from attending school. The consequences of the war are still felt, even 18 years after its formal conclusion. When the war ended, the government encouraged people to return to their homes, providing financial aid, especially to internally displaced persons (IDPs). When the warring parties, the Maoists and the armies, returned to their villages, it created another dynamic in families and communities. For instance, revolutionary marriages between people from different castes and ethnic groups had been normalized during the war within the Maoist party (Riley et al., 2022). However, once the war ended, these inter-caste couples had to return to their homes and communities. Living with wartime revolutionary values, where inter-caste marriage was considered normal and everyone was seen as equal, was no longer possible as caste-based discriminations persisted in their communities. Hence, this created challenges for inter-caste couples, leading to many wartime marriages ending in separation and divorce.

The peace agreement included the establishment of two commissions: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission of Investigation into Enforced Disappearance (CIEDP), tasked with investigating war crimes. However, these commissions took nearly a decade to establish, and even after their formation, progress had been limited. Despite numerous advocacies on conflict-related rape and sexual violence, no perpetrators had been brought to justice, even 18 years after the war had ended. Families of disappeared people continued to wait for justice. Moreover, after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the government and CPN-M, many ethnic conflicts erupted, leading to the deaths of hundreds of people and displacing thousands. Although these ethnic conflicts were

resolved through various agreements with the government, these conflicts were not part of the first Nepal NAP. Hence, despite its relevance, the implementation of the WPS agenda in Nepal was exclusionary from the beginning.

Development of the Nepal NAP

The UNSCR 1325 was adopted in 2000 when Nepal was in the midst of a civil war. However, broader discussions and consultations on the relevance of UNSCR 1325 only began to take place in Nepal after the peace agreement was signed in 2006. A new Ministry, the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction (MoPR), had just been established in 2007 with a mandate for peacebuilding and reconstruction of the country. It also took charge of implementing UNSCR 1325 with support from various governmental and non-governmental organizations. Consultations on the development of the NAP started in 2009. Numerous consultations occurred from the central to the local levels, involving civil society actors, NGOs, bilateral donors, UN agencies, and survivors of conflict (see Yadav, 2017)⁴. After a year of consultations and deliberations, the NAP was adopted in February 2011, becoming the first NAP in South Asia and the second in Asia, after the Philippines. Nepal's NAP was praised for the inclusive approach it adopted for its development. The coordination between the government and civil society organizations was also appreciated by the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) community, nationally and internationally (Lyytikäinen, & Yadav, 2021). However, it is important to note that despite UNSC 1820 being mentioned in the first Nepal NAP, the document remained mostly silent on conflict-related sexual violence and rape due to its high political sensitivity at the time. This was something that local WPS activists aimed to include in the second NAP. The first NAP expired in February 2016. After persistent efforts from UN Women and civil society organizations, a second NAP was finally adopted by the government in 2022, six years after the first NAP had expired. The second WPS NAP is a three-year plan (2022–2025) that especially focuses on Resolution 1820, which was missing from the first NAP. The unstable national politics, changing local priorities, and lack of funding could be seen as some of the reasons why the second NAP took so long to be adopted. Additionally, there have been significant changes in the governance structure of Nepal since the first NAP. With the adoption of the 2015 constitution, Nepal became a federal state with devolved governments, which the first NAP had not envisioned.

Implementation of the First Nepal NAP (2011–2016)

Despite having a well-structured NAP, there was no implementation plan in place for NAP or the mapping of resources. The onus of implementing the NAP was predominantly attributed to the Nepal government, while

development partners assumed a supporting role (Yadav, 2020). Funding for NAP implementation came from the Nepal Peace Trust Fund (NPTF), allocating just over \$7 million⁵. Proposals were sought from ten government ministries for NAP projects, resulting in ten funded projects. However, a lack of coordination between ministries led to similar projects receiving funding, which did not fully align with the needs identified during the NAP consultations (Yadav, 2020). Additional NAP projects were implemented by the development partners, but these supports were ad hoc and were never integrated into the monitoring framework of the NAP. Despite efforts to localize the NAP, the NAP projects followed a similar approach to that of non-governmental organizations, a disconnect from how local government operated. In summary, although the development of the NAP followed a systematic approach, its implementation devolved into an ad hoc process. As the NAP projects concluded, the first NAP expired, and the Ministry for Peace and Reconstruction dissolved, the government believed the peace process had concluded, despite the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission of Investigation into Enforced Disappearance (CIEDP) still working on over 60,000 complaints. With 18 years passed since the war ended and the country experiencing various political instabilities, the government prioritized other pressing needs.

Moreover, the non-binding status of UNSCR 1325 meant that the government of Nepal had no obligation to implement this resolution. It was a goodwill gesture not only towards the UN but also to its development partners in Nepal, who had strong involvement in peacebuilding and reconstruction initiatives post-peace agreement. For instance, Nepal Peace Trust Fund (NPTF)⁶ was established for the implementation of the comprehensive peace agreement (CPA), which was heavily supported by the donors. The government funding for the first NAP also came from NPTF and, hence, it mirrored NPTF's priorities, with most funding going to the security sector.

The lack of knowledge about WPS resolutions in the government, especially at the local level, meant a lack of ownership of the NAP (see Yadav, 2017). The scope of the WPS agenda and synergies with other existing commitments of the Nepal government to gender equality were not part of the discussion during the development of the first NAP. This resulted in only a small number of organizations being involved in both the development and implementation of the first NAP. Others felt left out or did not take ownership of this initiative (Yadav, 2020).

WPS Agenda in Practice

Despite its late start, the WPS agenda in Nepal garnered significant attention from the government compared to other international commitments to gender equality. The timing was also right for the advocacy of the WPS agenda in Nepal as the country had just come out of conflict. Being a UNSC resolution, the government was receptive and showed great commitment to the

implementation of UNSCR 1325. The tenth-anniversary resurgence of interest in the WPS agenda brought renewed support from the international community, backed by available funding. However, this enthusiasm waned as soon as the funding diminished.

As time passed, other pressing needs emerged. Nearly a decade after the peace agreement, peacebuilding fatigue was observed within the government, leading them to believe they had fulfilled their obligations, and the focus should shift to the country's reconstruction. Moreover, despite receiving praise for its consultative process, the NAP was crafted by a small group of people. This excluded many non-governmental organizations, who had also been working with conflict-affected women. Operating like a project with a fixed budget and timeframe, the NAP projects concluded when the funding ran out. In a 2016 interview with the Ministry for Women, Children, and Social Welfare (MoWCSW), they asserted they did not have anything to report on NAP as their NAP project had finished, and the report had already been submitted.

Despite receiving attention, the WPS agenda in Nepal did not challenge the existing structure; rather, it sought to integrate into it. An example is the decision to strategically move away from the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare (MoWCSW) and attempt to mainstream the WPS agenda into the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction (MoPR). This "strategic move" aimed to gain more exposure for the agenda and avoid being perceived as just another "women's project" (Swaine, 2009). Instead of attempting to change old structures and perceptions about gender issues in peace and conflict, the WPS agenda attempted to fit into the same structure, a move that, as Goetz points out, failed to "transform structural inequalities and their cultural foundation" (2020, p. xxi). The WPS agenda in Nepal resembled any other humanitarian project; it was emergency-led, donor-funded, and initiated as a (radical) movement, but it quietly faded as funding concluded.

Despite significant efforts and praise, Nepal remained a translation of the international agenda rather than achieving the transformative change expected (see Singh, 2020). The WPS agenda arrived in Nepal as an international project, aligning with the country's well-established practice of donor-funded projects. The conversation around the WPS agenda followed a similar nature. The NAP came as a project and concluded as a project, never becoming embedded in the government structure. Hence, it remained a performative act rather than a government programme for transformative change.

Conclusion

The success of a NAP depends on the extent to which the practices of the local implementing bodies are considered during the development and implementation of the NAP. While conceptual and operational challenges are important elements, the practices within the local institutions

responsible for implementing the WPS agenda determine the success or failure of any policy or programme. In the case of Nepal, the WPS agenda arrived as a global project, an international peacebuilding initiative with special funding. It was not integrated into the local government's structure. The Nepal government has its own programme cycle aligned with its budget and a long-term plan. However, the WPS agenda was introduced as an add-on, not as an integral part of the government's long-term plan. The NAP did not consider the existing practices of these implementing bodies, which had many challenges of their own. The process adopted for the development and implementation of the NAP resembled projects funded by international donors rather than the government. Due to the lack of attention to local practice and integration into the institutional structure of the implementing bodies, the first Nepal NAP was unable to bring about the transformative change it had envisioned.

Notes

- 1 <http://www.peacewomen.org/why-WPS/solutions/resolutions>.
- 2 [http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/#:~:text=107%20UN%20Member%20States%20\(55,expired%20in%202022%20or%20before](http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/#:~:text=107%20UN%20Member%20States%20(55,expired%20in%202022%20or%20before).
- 3 <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/645d2d94ad8a03001138b33c/uk-women-peace-security-national-action-plan-2023-2027.pdf>.
- 4 Also see http://www.rrcap.ait.ac.th/cc/pam/activities/nap1/Documents/2-3_Karuna_Adhikaree-ME%20NAP%20Nepal.pdf.
- 5 See <https://www.nptf.gov.np/uploads/files/Review%20Report%2C%20April%202012.pdf>.
- 6 "The NPTF is a joint government-donor initiative that is operated by the Peace Fund Secretariat (PFS) of the Ministry for Peace and Reconstruction (MoPR)". <https://www.nptf.gov.np/uploads/files/Review%20Report%2C%20April%202012.pdf>.

References

- Abdela, L. (2011). Nepal and the implementation of UNSCR 1325. In Olonisakin F., Barnes K., & Ikpe E. (Eds.), *Women, Peace and Security: Translating policy into practice* (pp. 66–86). London: Routledge.
- Basini, H., & Ryan, C. (2016). National action plans as an obstacle to meaningful local ownership of UNSCR 1325 in Liberia and Sierra Leone. *International Political Science Review*, 37(3), 390–403. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01925121166636121>
- Beoku-Betts, J. (2016). Holding African states to task on gender and violence: Domesticating UNSCR 1325 in the Sierra Leone National Action Plan. *Current Sociology*, 64(4), 654–670. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392116640459>
- Bigo, D. (2011). Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations: Power of Practices, Practices of Power. *International Political Sociology*, 5(3), 225–258. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-5687.2011.00132.x>
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice* (Vol. 16). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Calhoun, C. J., LiPuma, E., and Postone, M. (1993). *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Lawoti, M., & Pahari, A.K. (Eds.). (2010). *The Maoist insurgency in Nepal: Revolution in the twenty-first century*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Lyytikäinen, L., & Yadav, P. (2021). Capitalising on UNSCR 1325: The Construction of Best Practices for the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 16(2), 123–141. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2021.1913566>
- Manchanda, R. (2004). Maoist insurgency in Nepal: Radicalizing gendered narratives. *Cultural Dynamics*, 16(2–3), 237–258.
- Newby, V.F., & O'Malley, A. (2021). Introduction: WPS 20 Years On: Where Are the Women Now?, *Global Studies Quarterly*, 1(3), 17. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksab017>
- Pratt, N., & Richter-Devroe, S. (2011). Critically Examining UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 13(4), 489–503. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2011.611658>
- Riley, H., Ketola, H., & Yadav, P. (2022). Gender, Populism and Collective Identity: a Feminist Analysis of the Maoist Movement in Nepal. *Journal of Human Security*, 18(2), 35–46. <https://doi.org/10.12924/johs2022.18020035>
- Shepherd, L.J. (2016). Making war safe for women? National action plans and the militarisation of the women, peace and security agenda. *International Political Science Review*, 37(3): 324–335.
- Shepherd, L.J. (2020). Situating Women, Peace and Security: Theorizing from “the local”. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 22(5), 456–461.
- Singh, S. (2017). Re-thinking the ‘Normative’ in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325: Perspectives from Sri Lanka. *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, 4(2), 219–238. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2347797017710749>
- Singh, S. (2020). In between the ulemas and local warlords in Afghanistan: critical perspectives on the “everyday,” norm translation, and UNSCR 1325. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 22(4), 504–525. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2020.1810587>
- Swaine, A. (2009). Assessing the potential of national action plans to advance implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. *Yearbook of International Humanitarian Law*, 12, 403–433. https://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/Resources/Academic/1325_assessingthepotentialofnaps_aislingswaine_2009.pdf
- Yadav, P. (2016). *Social Transformation in Post-Conflict Nepal: A Gender Perspective*. London: Routledge.
- Yadav, P. (2017). Can IDP women in the entertainment sector be part of the WPS agenda? <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/wps/2017/09/28/can-idp-women-in-the-entertainment-sector-be-part-of-the-wps-agenda/>
- Yadav, P. (2020). When the personal is International: implementation of the National Action Plan on resolutions 1325 and 1820 in Nepal. *Gender, Technology and Development*, 24(2), 194–214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09718524.2020.1766187>
- Yami, H. (2007). *People's War and Women's Liberation in Nepal*. Janadhvani Publication.