INTRODUCTION

The links between women’s participation and mass atrocity crime prevention, particularly within the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP, RTP) norm, become more and more relevant as conflicts worldwide continue to erupt and instances of mass atrocity crimes—of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and ethnic cleansing—continue to surface without a clear path of resolution. Positive references have been made, especially in relevant RtoP reports, recognizing sexual and gender-based violence as a threat to international peace and security as well as the importance of women’s civil society organizations in the prevention of mass atrocity crimes. But as all the previous chapters have highlighted, much remains to be done in the implementation of the norm, especially in ensuring that responses to mass atrocity crimes, whether economic, political, humanitarian or military, are effective and legitimate. Complementary to such implementation challenges should be ensuring that the RtoP and Women Peace and Security (WPS) agendas are aligned, including determining the application of RtoP in instances of conflict-related sexual violence, and integrating women in the design and implementation of protection and prevention policies.


Written from the perspective of an advocate of both agendas, based with the transnational network Global Action to Prevent War and Armed Conflict (GAPW), in this Chapter I outline how a variety of international and domestic actors may begin to overcome some of the challenges with implementation, understand the structural and technical challenges of how the norm works, identify the tools necessary for the effective and legitimate use of the RtoP third pillar (see Chapter One), and highlight some of the political dynamics that currently divide the RtoP and WPS norms (see Chapters Three and Four).

Over the past year, GAPW has co-organized workshops and participated in international conferences on RtoP to increase awareness on the links between these two norms. Most recently, GAPW facilitated a workshop in San Diego at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for the Breaking Barriers: What will it take to achieve Security, Justice and Peace conference, focusing especially on Integrating Women’s Participation in the Third Pillar of R2P. With women’s civil society leaders from Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Liberia, Bosnia, Kosovo in the audience, the workshop placed significant emphasis on detecting the root causes of violence at an early stage in order to prevent tensions from escalating to the level of mass atrocity crimes: this would require that economic and social challenges are also addressed at an early stage. Questions and concerns were also raised regarding efforts by women’s groups and missed opportunities by the international community to empower women’s participation in mass atrocity prevention.

From Global Action’s perspective, the issues raised in the San Diego conference are not only at the heart of WPS, but also of the RtoP norm—mainly, in ensuring that signs of conflict are detected and addressed at an early stage effectively, practically and legitimately so that use of the norm, especially the most coercive aspects of the third pillar, will only rarely be necessary. An additional component for the legitimate and effective use of the norm involves including a balance of voices in protection and prevention strategies, especially gender voices, to ensure that the diverse needs of both women and men are addressed. Women should not be included in the RtoP discussion because “they are more affected by mass atrocities than men,” but because “women constitute half of the world’s population and thus half of what needs to be understood.”

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5 Ibid.