Peaceful Change initiative

Integrating Gender into community-level peacebuilding
Lessons from Libya

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Since 2013, Peaceful Change initiative (PCi) has been implementing a peacebuilding programme in more than 40 municipalities in Libya. Funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, the 'Social Peace and Local Development' (SPLD) programme seeks to strengthen relations between citizens and government authorities, and between different community groups.

The SPLD methodology is built on inclusion, dialogue, and collaboration: it brings together citizens and local authorities to map community relationships, identify the most urgent needs, and implement projects that encourage them to negotiate different interests. Over time, stronger relations between influential members of each group and increased trust in local authorities, consolidated through regular, constructive, and practical interactions and supported by greater conflict management capacities, help communities work more cohesively to prevent conflict.

This paper illustrates how gender has been integrated into the SPLD programme to achieve three main objectives:

1

understand the different experiences and the agency of women and men in conflict, and what implications these have on building peace

2

ensure that women's perspectives and needs are better reflected in decision making around security, stabilisation, local development, and governance

3

increase the inclusion of women in peacebuilding efforts

We support women's inclusion by strengthening four inter-dependent pillars:

- Representation: the involvement of women in key decision-making processes.
- Participation: a more active and meaningful contribution by women to decision making.
- Leadership: the ability and opportunity for women to lead on designing and implementing initiatives.
- Visibility: wider public awareness of women's leadership and contributions to peace efforts.

These four programme pillars are integrated across all SPLD activities. While promoting women's ownership, we also work with men throughout the process to encourage them to be 'allies' and advocate for women's inclusion.

Since the programme's inception, PCi has worked with staff, donors, consultants, partners, and a range of stakeholders participating in our initiatives to design a needs-based approach that is sensitive to the different contexts, cultures and social norms that coexist in the diverse communities and regions of Libya.

Within a common programmatic framework, colleagues working in areas where the programme is implemented take the lead in shaping and adapting methodologies and activities. This entails, for instance, describing gender issues using their own language and cultural references, working with partners and project participants to define relevant and realistic objectives, and designing viable activities that can make a difference in the communities involved.

As elsewhere, beliefs and attitudes towards gender issues in Libya differ across different regions, towns, and communities, and often even between members of the same family. Many of the challenges described in this paper are not unique to Libya, but are rather a product of patriarchal norms, which transcend cultures, societies, and religions. Neither Libyan women nor Libyan men are homogenous groups; when it comes to understanding conflict, it would be misleading to think merely of women as the victims and of men as the perpetrators of violence. For this reason, we work with both women and men to better understand how gender roles and norms in Libyan society may act as drivers of conflict or resources for peace.

In doing so, we use an intersectional lens, seeking to capture the complex ways in which multiple identities and social factors intersect with gender to shape experiences and power dynamics in Libya. This includes working with different groups of women and tailoring initiatives based on their needs. However, to date PCi has not identified opportunities to discuss gender issues in target communities constructively beyond the narrow and binary definitions of men and women. The programme, therefore, has not been inclusive of gender and sexual minorities. As the journey towards gender equality is not linear, we adopt an incremental approach, and constantly monitor and adapt our programme to respond to setbacks and new challenges as new evidence and learning emerge. In presenting key challenges and learning from PCi's journey, we hope to provide a useful resource for other organisations, practitioners and donors working in Libya and beyond.

CONTEXT[1]

Libyan women were at the forefront of the Revolution in 2011, participating in demonstrations and protests, working as aid providers and medical staff, and contributing to organising political activity. Throughout the different phases of conflict that Libya has faced since the Revolution, women have been prominent within civil society and in advocating for political change and a more inclusive transition to democracy. They have also demonstrated the ability to successfully mediate conflict and to contribute to economic recovery through entrepreneurial initiatives.

However, women in Libya continue to experience gender inequalities and systemic exclusion from decision making and the public sphere.

1. The Context section draws significantly on a background paper prepared by Zahra Langhi in 2021 for PCi's Conflict Sensitive Assistance (CSA) to Libya programme. For more information on gender and conflict dynamics in Libya, see the CSA's upcoming report on Conflict Sensitivity and Gender Dynamics in Libya, which will be available at https://peacefulchange.org/resources. For more information on the gendered impact of COVID-19 in Libya, see: COVID-19 and Gender in Libya Assessment, Peaceful Change initiative, December 2020, available at https://peacefulchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Gender-and-COVID-19-in-Libya-Assessment_PCi_2020-1.pdf.

EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

Although the majority of college graduates in the country are women, female labour force participation is only around 30%. Women who lost their male spouse during the conflict have shown higher vulnerability to poverty; widows experienced loss of income and were forced to sell their assets or use family savings as a coping mechanism.

As a result of COVID-19, a large number of women lost their job and income; many chose or were pressured to prioritise their household and care duties over their professional careers. Both women and men were forced to accept unstable and low-paid jobs in the informal sector, often without employment contracts to protect their rights. Due to economic hardship, many households saw women take on new economic roles and become co-breadwinners. Economic pressures, feelings of emasculation and the failure of men to cope with these socio-economic changes have led to the emergence of 'failed households' with high levels of separation and divorce. Some women were not able to see their divorce rights granted due to a dysfunctional justice system, thus losing their personal belongings, housing or assets.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) AND CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE (CRSV)

Armed conflict and COVID-19 have exacerbated GBV and CRSV against women, men, boys, and girls. CRSV has been used as a weapon of war by most parties in the conflict. Domestic violence saw an increase, especially because of the prolonged stay of men at home. Female migrants and IDPs experience higher levels of violations and vulnerabilities. These crimes lead to social stigma and rejection, and reinforce the exclusion of women. Survivors rarely report incidents for fear of bringing shame on their families and communities; similarly, families often ask doctors not to report cases of rape out of fear of social stigma or revenge. Armed groups continue to recruit youth and male children; membership of armed groups represents a coping mechanism to secure an income and to achieve authority and power, and a sign of manhood. Toxic masculinity and militarisation are a driver for violence against women (VAW), GBV and CRSV.

PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING

National and local institutions are largely run by men, while women are rarely represented in leadership positions, including in the private sector. Health and Education are the main sectors in which women are concentrated and that support their promotion to senior roles. Reasons for failing to promote women to top administration positions include patriarchal conceptions that women are not able to govern groups of men, that these jobs require a lot of physical effort and long working hours, and that women do not stay in a company for a long time. In 2021, when forming the Government of National Unity (GNU), Prime Minister Dbaiba announced that he would not commit to the 30% women's quota established in the political roadmap. Under the pressure of LPDF women members and civil society groups, he eventually agreed to appoint five women to his cabinet, though this represented only a 14% quota, falling short of the initial 30% target.

Due to economic hardship, many households saw women take on new economic roles and become co-breadwinners.

PEACE LEADERSHIP

During the Revolution, female political and social leaders rose to prominence and contributed to mediating between different revolutionary factions to achieve a unified front against the former regime. Women were instrumental in organising the civil society space and mobilising networks of activists throughout the uprisings. In the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, women pushed for political inclusion and equal rights, promoting the themes of reconciliation and peace throughout the transition. Libyan women from various backgrounds have led numerous initiatives in their own communities and across divides. However, they continued to face challenges due to the absence of security, political marginalisation, patriarchal norms, glass ceilings and violent extremism.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE TARGETING WOMEN (PVTW)

There has been a systematic wave of assaults against women leaders, including through assassination and forcible disappearance. In June 2014, Salwa Bugaigis, a former member of the Libyan Transitional Council and Vice-President of the preparatory body for the National Dialogue Conference, was assassinated in Benghazi. In July 2014, Farisha Al-Barakawi, a member of the General National Congress, was assassinated in Derna. In February 2015, Intisar Al-Hasairi, one of the founders of the Tanweer Movement, was assassinated in Tripoli. In July 2017, Siham Sergewa was abducted from her home in Benghazi and is still under forcible disappearance. In November 2020, Hanan al-Bara'ssi was killed in Benghazi just as the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) was starting, which was interpreted as a threat to all women members of the LPDF. Women activists also experience slander, verbal abuse, sexual harassment, defamation, extortion, threats, detention and interrogation. Attempts to silence women have led to panic and fear, particularly among women participating in public life. Some withdrew from public roles and many others were pressured by their families to exit the public scene. Some had to flee the country altogether or change their place of residence for security. This pattern of violence targeting women activists, peace leaders, human rights defenders, and parliamentarians has been largely met with impunity and the lack of any independent investigations.

ACCESS TO SERVICES

The impact of conflict, social inequalities, and COVID-19 have deteriorated the availability and quality of accessible services across all segments of the population, including health, education, water, sanitation, food security and work. People with disabilities, women, children, the elderly, IDPs and migrants were among the most affected. In particular, divorced women and widows in female-headed households, women whose spouses do not hold Libyan citizenship, and women with disabilities, have experienced higher levels of vulnerability. Women were disproportionally impacted by the absence of the rule of law and a functioning justice system.

SPLD SUPPORTS WOMEN'S INCLUSION THROUGH:

	REPRESENTATION	**PARTICIPATION**
HOW	Ensures at least 30% female membership in SPPs and gender-balanced participation across programme activities	Ensures women feel confident and safe to speak freely and participate meaningfully
	Includes representatives of women's diverse social groups	Works with men to behave as allies and advocate for women's inclusion
	Supports female representatives through training and coaching	Ensures women's interests and needs are considered in decision making
WHAT THIS CONTRIBUTES TO	Creates opportunities for women to gain the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to participate meaningfully	Provides real opportunities to advance gender equality
	Normalises women's presence in traditionally men-dominated settings and builds critical mass	Creates tangible incentives for greater representation of women by demonstrating its benefits
	Is needed to achieve structural change	Provides platforms for women to strengthen and practise leadership skills
LIMITATIONS	Can be tokenistic; may not translate into meaningful participation, influence, or ability to set the agenda	Can sometimes be confined to parallel processes and not lead to more equal representation (glass ceiling)

	LEADERSHIP	**VISIBILITY**
HOW	Provides space and opportunities for women to strengthen and practise leadership skills	Supports communication strategies and media campaigns that amplify the voices of women leaders
	Funds and supports women-led initiatives	Facilitates networking among women leaders in different regions and sectors
	Facilitates knowledge sharing, peer support and mentoring of young women	Supports role models with diverse social backgrounds
WHAT THIS CONTRIBUTES TO	Places women's practical and strategic needs on the agenda	Contributes to shifting perceptions on gender roles through positive examples of women's leadership
	Supports more equitable and durable solutions to conflict by leveraging women's capacity to be resources for peace	Increases public awareness of women's experiences and needs
	Creates role models to inspire and motivate other women to participate	Creates role models for young and less active women
LIMITATIONS	Can be limited to privileged and empowered women and not be representative of women's diverse social groups	Can lead to backlash and increase the risk of violence against women

SPLD AND GENDER

Gender sensitivity is embedded in PCi's Social Peace and Local Development (SPLD) programme.
This is based on extensive evidence from a range of different conflict contexts that women's inclusion in peacebuilding efforts is key to ensuring that peace agreements are more equitable and durable. Learning from multiple sources also shows that women's and girls' experiences and agency in conflict can be very distinct from those of men and boys. During and after conflict, therefore, both international assistance and national and local policy making require a deep understanding of different gendered needs, as well as of the impact that these policies and assistance may have on gender equality. SPLD encourages communities to use a gender lens to analyse and manage conflict; it provides a mechanism for women to be at the forefront of local efforts to improve social cohesion, inclusion, and security, while contributing to advancing gender equality.

SPLD has adopted women's inclusion and leadership in peace- and decision-making as a key social peace outcome.
As marginalisation represents a strong driver of conflict, SPLD aims to provide all community groups, particularly those that are more marginalised from decision making, with opportunities to participate in social peace and local development projects. These include women, young people, and underrepresented groups such as some ethnicities and tribes, more marginalised women, and other social groups that are disadvantaged because of displacement, low income, or disabilities. Men and women are encouraged to work together to promote a greater, safer, and more meaningful participation of women, strengthen their leadership skills, and enhance the visibility of women peace leaders. Within the SPLD programme, women's inclusion and leadership are seen as an outcome, rather than just as part of the process.

Women's participation and leadership are encouraged through the main mechanism of the SPLD methodology, the 'Social Peace Partnerships' (SPPs).
The SPPs are local committees usually composed of around 30 members, with elected chairpersons and designated leadership roles. The SPPs bring together different institutions and social groups, including women's and youth organisations, municipal authorities, elders, security actors, and others. PCi supports the SPPs to self-organise and work with other local partners to convene and facilitate dialogue around local issues, manage conflicts and crises, improve local governance, and promote gender equality and social inclusion. Women's inclusion within the SPPs is measured through both quantitative and qualitative criteria, with fair gender representation being a key competency area identified by PCi to support the SPPs' development. 30% represents the minimum threshold set by PCi to ensure that women are represented in the SPPs, while other qualitative mechanisms, such as regular 'inclusivity audits' that assess the quality of participation of women and marginalised groups, are built into ongoing support provided to the SPPs.

"I was not able to finish my studies as my father did not provide me with the necessary financial support. Now I have begun earning an income that allows me to progress with my education and support myself. I feel empowered and want to make other women feel the same."

Fadwa, winner of a youth grant, co-founded the Hanaya Centre in Bani Walid, which has provided hundreds of women with vocational training and income-generation opportunities.

The SPPs' initiatives address women's needs and enhance their inclusion in peace- and decision-making processes, for example through providing income-generating opportunities for more marginalised women, strengthening women's peacebuilding skills, and addressing the specific security challenges they face. The SPPs also act as local consultation bodies to identify the needs and priorities of women and girls, and help international agencies design more gender-responsive interventions. The SPPs facilitated a number of women's consultations that informed multi-year stabilisation and governance projects such as the Stabilisation Facility for Libya and Strengthening Local Capacities for Resilience and Recovery, co-implemented by PCi in partnership with the United Nations Development Program.

SPLD has been instrumental in promoting gender responsiveness in local service delivery. Municipalities and other local governance actors are represented within the SPPs, and local authorities often endorse and actively contribute to the SPPs' work. In some cases, they invest tangible resources into SPPs' initiatives, for example through the concession of public spaces to hold activities, the provision of security or cleaning services, or the allocation of long-term funding to ensure the sustainability of projects. Closer collaboration and stronger relationships with local authorities allow the SPPs to have a direct communication line with municipalities that they can easily access to raise issues that concern women and advocate for greater gender responsiveness when it comes to making decisions and delivering services.

A cadre of Libyan peacebuilding professionals (30% of whom are women) established by PCi continues to promote gender sensitivity. Known as 'Trainer-Mentors' (TMs) and geographically spread across the country, the TMs represent a key component of the peacebuilding infrastructure that PCi has built in Libya to strengthen communities' resilience to conflict. They have been instrumental in the dissemination of the SPLD approach in more than 30 Municipalities, in training and mentoring the SPPs to increase the participation of women in their ongoing activities, and, more broadly, in promoting gender inclusion among local authorities and civil society.

"Being back in schools and seeing things from the perspective of 'Social Peace' was very enriching. It showed me how much I had learned from being a member of the SPP and motivated me to develop a project aiming to spread a culture of social peace in our schools."

Alia, a retired teacher and Tobruq SPP member, designed her own project and trained hundreds of students in Social Peace through funding from a Dutch organisation.

CHALLENGES

Throughout the implementation of the SPLD programme, PCi has faced a number of challenges to women's inclusion.

UNEQUAL REPRESENTATION

As SPPs were established across Libya, PCi worked with founding members to secure the participation of diverse groups of women. However, women remained underrepresented at best, while in some municipalities it was not possible to find women able or willing to participate at all. When women did join the SPPs, their representation was often tokenistic or limited to the 'more active' women who were already known in the public sphere. These were usually younger, more educated, employed women, or civil society activists. Leadership positions within the SPPs (e.g. Chairperson positions) were rarely held by women. When women rose to those positions, this at times led to a polarisation between women and men in the SPPs, reflecting different visions and with limited space for compromise. Men felt disempowered, in some cases interpreting these changes as a 'hijacking' of the SPPs by women to 'push their agenda'.

LACK OF MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION AND VISIBILITY

During workshops, town halls, consultations and other meetings held with both women and men, the latter dominated the debate and women's voices were often disregarded. The presence of men would significantly influence whether (and which) women would speak, as well as what they would be prepared to say in a gender-mixed environment. Similar dynamics applied between younger and older women, and between more- and less-educated women. While PCi's analysis revealed that women played an important role in peacebuilding and civil society at various levels, these contributions lacked visibility and recognition, and were rarely acknowledged.

"Our cultural differences are something special, something we should be proud of."

Mona, winner of a 'Bader' youth grant, leads the 'Voice of Peace' initiative, an online radio station promoting mutual understanding among different communities in Southern Libya.

IMPACT OF SOCIAL NORMS

When PCi sought to increase women's representation in the SPPs through dialogue with existing members, a common response from men would be that it was difficult to find women who had the skills required to participate in peacebuilding activities, that women were 'too busy' or 'not interested' in peacebuilding issues, or that men understood and could represent women's needs just as well, based on their regular interactions with female family members. Another argument would be that women were 'too emotional' to deal with conflict issues, or that it was not 'culturally accepted' for women to attend mixed social gatherings. Some would argue that women do in fact enjoy equal rights by law. Women themselves would sometimes agree that they lacked the skills and confidence to participate, or that participation would be incompatible with their household and childcare responsibilities.

Women often struggled to recognise the value of their participation, based on the assumption that their contribution would make no difference in decision making. Breaching social norms represented a key barrier for women's participation; as well as posing a reputational risk, this could lead to threatened or actual violence. Similarly, when working with men to promote 'allyship' with women seeking greater inclusion and equality, some men became reluctant to voice their support openly as their masculinity was questioned as a result.

LIMITED LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

Women, compared to men, had limited experience of leading on designing and implementing initiatives, conceptualising ideas, and securing funding for their projects. As a result, women's project ideas were often seen as less valuable than those presented by men. Often, projects designed by women focused on activities that reinforced gender roles and addressed practical gendered needs.

PRACTICAL AND STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

In areas where there was a limited presence of civil society organisations (which, in Libya, represent a key avenue for women's participation), this reflected negatively on the representation of women in the SPPs and in civic activities more broadly. In areas where social norms were more conservative, women would be mainly engaged in charitable activities focusing on helping children and families in need. When civil society space shrank for political or security reasons, women's inclusion suffered.

Particularly at times of live conflict or crisis, women faced greater practical barriers, such as limitations to their freedom of movement, particularly if they lived in rural and remote areas or belonged to displaced communities. This was reflected in a higher social isolation of women and girls compared to men and boys, including the inability to attend school, university or work, or to socialise. During COVID-19, many women chose or were pressured to give up their profession to prioritise care duties. COVID-19 restrictions caused setbacks in women's participation in the SPPs' activities.

When consultation processes targeted high-level formal or traditional authorities, this reflected negatively on women's inclusion, as leadership positions are dominated by men. In some cases, alternative processes were initiated to incorporate women's inputs through separate consultations; however, given the absence of women within formal authorities, women's demands could easily be ignored once the process reached the final decision-making and prioritisation stages, in which women remained largely underrepresented.

> At times of live conflict or crisis, women faced greater practical barriers, such as limitations to their freedom of movement, particularly if they lived in rural and remote areas or belonged to displaced communities.

LEARNING

This section illustrates PCi's experience and learning gained through integrating gender into the SPLD programme. A set of best-practice actions that have helped to achieve greater women's inclusion within the programme are outlined below.

USE A GENDER LENS TO UNDERSTAND CONFLICT

The first step was to conduct gendered analysis and disseminate the findings among the SPPs to make a strong case for more gender-sensitive initiatives, both based on evidence and specific to local communities' dynamics. The SPPs were key to facilitating such analysis, so awareness and capacity were developed in the process. Most importantly, SPPs were encouraged to apply a gender lens to their ongoing tension monitoring and conflict analysis, to their needs assessment processes, and to the design and planning of their initiatives. One of the first activities conducted was to train the TMs and the SPP members to conduct gendered conflict analysis.

The training introduced gender concepts and facilitated an analysis of the different roles and experiences that women and men had in the Libyan conflict, as well as in building peace. This analysis revealed why women's agency in local peace and conflict should not be underestimated. In many communities, women exercise this influence behind the scenes and in informal settings, for example through lobbying male family members or using their community management role to facilitate dialogue between families or different communities. For instance, the decision of a woman not to seek revenge for the killing of her husband by members of another community group prevented a violent escalation that would have likely led to more killings and further conflict.

On the flip side, some young women admitted that they avoid reporting incidents of verbal harassment to male family members because of fears that they would get involved in fights or retribution acts against the perpetrators, leading to dangerous escalations. Because of their community management role, women from different community groups often hold the common threads keeping the social fabric of communities together; in some areas, after conflict women were able to re-establish communication channels and, through personal ties, mend relations between communities that had been damaged due to the war. In some areas, women can access neighbourhoods where other community groups live that are considered off-limits for men. While access does not necessarily translate into direct influence, these can represent important entry points for re-establishing contact.

"When a woman comes from one tribe but is married into another, she faces a dilemma if tensions arise between the two tribes. When armed conflict breaks out, life in the city stops completely and it's difficult for women to leave the house."

Salma, a TM from Sabha, has been working with the SPPs in southern Libya to support women's inclusion in peace efforts and promote social cohesion among different community groups.

"A woman from the Municipal Council reached out to me and asked me to work with her on an advocacy campaign on the importance of women's participation in political life. This was because she was being excluded from the work of the municipality."

Zahia, a TM working in western Libya, led several initiatives to increase the participation of hard-to-reach women in the SPPs' activities.

CHANGE WHAT CAN BE CHANGED

The first trainings of trainers on Women's Inclusion in Peacebuilding were met with a rather defensive attitude from participants; some of them were adamant that the main cause for women's underrepresentation in peacebuilding is that women themselves are not interested in peace and conflict issues. None of the trainees was openly opposed to promoting greater inclusion of women in peacebuilding; however, it was clear that women's participation was not seen as a priority, but rather as something that would 'naturally' follow if Libya would stabilise and tackle the 'more urgent issues', namely the conflict.

The trainings first introduced the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, illustrating success stories of women's peace leadership in other contexts from around the world. This was a powerful tool to inspire trainees by providing tangible examples of what can be achieved in fragile and live conflict contexts to which they could relate. Another important component of the training was to analyse key barriers and incentives for women's participation in Libya, particularly at the local level, where the SPPs conduct their activities. Trainees were encouraged to reflect on practical barriers to women's inclusion using the Problem Tree Analysis tool. Through group work, they were asked to focus on the root causes leading to the exclusion or underrepresentation of women in the SPPs' activities, and to reflect on what can be changed within their power and scope of work. For example, culture or religion should be seen as the fertile soil in which some issues take root, rather than the roots of the problem itself. While it may take longer than a generation to change social norms according to which attending a meeting at a certain time of the day is not considered 'appropriate' for a woman, changing the time and place of a meeting to ensure that both men and women feel comfortable to attend can have an immediate positive effect on women's participation.

EXPLORE A WIDE RANGE OF INCENTIVES AND ENTRY POINTS

In the Libyan context, analysis conducted by the SPPs showed that widows and divorced women and those married to men without Libyan citizenship were at a higher risk of social exclusion and more vulnerable to poverty. Less educated women and those from a lower-income background were less likely to be involved in peace efforts or consulted in decision-making processes. These findings enabled a better understanding of the range of interests and needs that different groups of women in Libyan society have. As well as trying to address barriers, it was important to create incentives for women's participation through designing activities that address those interests and needs.

The SPPs led the way in finding entry points to mobilise more marginalised women and encourage their participation. Livelihoods projects that provided income-generating opportunities for women, for example, or literacy classes, were often used to get lower-income and less-educated women involved in the SPPs' work. Women's health, psycho-social support, or women's rights issues were also used to initiate conversations with them about social peace, and to strengthen their confidence and skills to participate in such activities. Finding culturally sensitive ways of communicating these issues was also key. One of PCi's TMs stood out for her ability to engage with women from more conservative backgrounds. She first held meetings at a local Quran school for women, where they regularly gather to attend religious classes, and introduced the concept of social peace and the work of the SPP. Gradually, she gained their trust and convinced some of them to join the SPP.

Once a few women got involved, they invited others to join; a small active group was formed, which eventually even went on to establish their own charitable organisation to work on women's issues in the town. Mosques, prayer rooms, and schools often represent places where women feel safe and comfortable to attend activities, if other public settings represent a barrier to their participation. In some cases, some intermediate steps were needed before women's direct participation in SPPs' activities was considered 'acceptable' by their families. For example, one SPP created a parallel women's association and worked closely with its members to include women's perspectives in, and facilitate contributions to, the SPP's initiatives. Gradually, members of this association started to join the SPP and became more visibly involved in its activities. In some other cases, the SPPs worked in tandem with existing women's organisations, gaining their trust and eventually seeing some members join the SPP as a result of practical collaboration.

Framing gender issues according to Libyan cultural references has been key to ensuring that these are not perceived as an attempt to impose foreign values. For instance, prominent women from the Islamic tradition are presented as role models. Umm Salama, one of Prophet Mohammed's wives, is considered to have been highly influential during her time; she played an advisory role in the negotiation of the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah between the state of Medina and the Qurayshi tribe of Mecca and was a vocal advocate for women's rights. Similarly, the Queen of Sheba (Bilqis) is considered a symbol of wisdom for going against her own Council's advice in favour of a more diplomatic solution that prevented a war against King Solomon. Another example is reported in a hadith according to which a woman challenged Caliph Umar's decision and managed to increase the value of her dowry.

LOOK AT BOTH QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF PARTICIPATION

Inclusivity, measured as at least 30% youth and women's membership, has been one of the key criteria used to track the progress of SPPs in developing a set of technical competences. Quotas represented a useful tool to normalise women's participation in the SPPs' activities, to ensure that women were provided the space to gain experience in social peace and local development initiatives, and to make women participating feel more comfortable and less isolated because of the presence of other women in the SPP. However, while quotas can help to address women's underrepresentation and are necessary to achieve structural change, these can become a mere box-ticking exercise if not accompanied by other actions to make women's participation meaningful.

Within the SPPs, these actions included working on men's attitudes and behaviours to ensure that women would feel safe and free to express their voices, and that they would be supported to gain the necessary experience, self-confidence, and leadership skills to feel that they could make a real difference through their participation. As well as quantitative indicators, regular analyses looking at the quality of women's participation within the SPPs have been an important monitoring and evaluation tool. For example, 'Inclusivity Audits' are held regularly by SPPs with PCi's support to reflect on their membership beyond the mere percentages, for instance by looking at whether any hard-to-reach community groups remain unrepresented, or whether any of the rotating leadership positions within the SPPs (Chairpersons, Heads of Working Groups, etc.) are held by women and young people. As a result, some SPPs recognised the need to diversify their women's membership to include more marginalised women (e.g. widows and divorced women who are heads of households and face specific socio-economic challenges).

CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN TO PRACTISE LEADERSHIP SKILLS

The provision of funding and opportunities for women to strengthen their leadership skills by designing and implementing their own initiatives has proven an important tool to increase women's representation and deepen their participation in the SPPs' activities. Workshops that involve women of different ages and backgrounds that are not yet members of the SPP are organised to expand women's representation in the SPPs. The workshops are usually divided into two parts: the first part is a training dedicated to introducing concepts and success stories around the importance of women's role in peacebuilding; the second part is dedicated to helping women conceptualise initiatives that address issues that matter to them as an incentive to join the SPP and participate in its activities. The first grants designed by women with limited experience in these types of initiatives usually focus on addressing practical gendered needs; over time, women's ideas start addressing more strategic gendered needs. A key component of this approach has been to provide extra support to women to translate their ideas into viable project proposals to apply for small grants provided by PCi. When open calls for proposals are launched that do not target women specifically to support individual projects, a percentage of available funding (30%) is earmarked to ensure that women are selected among the successful applicants and can benefit from these opportunities. This approach has demonstrated a certain level of sustainability to the extent that it was able to achieve a 'multiplier effect': some of the initiatives funded through PCi's grants saw women's groups build on their success by supporting similar projects financially, through in-kind contributions or peer-to-peer support. These initiatives often targeted more marginalised women, for instance through creating income-generation activities for widows and divorced women who are heads of their households.

> "I joined the SPP because of the successful projects that they were implementing. What impressed me the most was the way in which they cooperated with the Municipality and other actors in the city. I was also interested in learning more about social peace."

Ikram, one of the most active members of the Ajdabiya SPP, has played a key role in initiatives to renovate the local hospital, support women's livelihoods, and promote civic participation.

ENHANCE THE VISIBILITY OF WOMEN LEADERS

While women in Libya play a fundamental role in building and maintaining social peace and cohesion, this role is often performed in informal settings and does not enjoy the same visibility that men's leadership does. To shift social perceptions around the role of women and their potential, it is important to amplify the voices and stories of women leaders in peace and social initiatives. This is key to ensuring that a diverse range of women from different backgrounds can be models in their own communities and inspire younger and less active women to imagine a different role for themselves. At the same time, visibility poses significant risks for the women involved and should be supported by robust safeguarding considerations and risk management protocols. It is likely that because of higher visibility, particularly if they challenge social norms around gender roles, women may face increased reputational risks and threatened or actual violence.

To prevent and manage any potential backlash, working closely with women and men in target areas has proven effective in identifying initiatives and implementation modalities that mitigate such risks. In this process, leveraging the support and influence of 'male allies' and co-designing initiatives that are deemed safe by women themselves has been particularly important.

"Attending a workshop on peacebuilding and seeing all those women [from different communities] working together despite our differences motivated me to establish a centre that brings people from the different groups together for trainings and other social initiatives."

Khadija attended a PCi peacebuilding training for women in Ubari and established the Noor Al-Alam Centre, which among other activities provides psychological support to children affected by conflict.

WORK WITH MEN AS WELL AS WOMEN

While strengthening women's skills and opportunities to participate more actively in peace efforts, working with men is key to ensuring that they can play the role of allies in supporting greater inclusion of women. Different arguments were used to persuade men that were sceptical about women's participation. One argument is that many families have lost their male members in the war, and it would not be possible to have access to these households and understand their needs unless women are included in consultations and activities.

Another argument is that many of the needs of women can only be identified by women, so their absence would lead to overlooking important issues facing communities. It is also stressed that women's experiences and perspectives are often very different from those of men, and fresh, diverse ideas can contribute to making society prosper. A more pragmatic argument is that, without women's participation, SPPs would miss out on funding opportunities that are available for women-focused projects and activities, particularly from international donors. As explained in other sections, acceptance of women's participation is often promoted using pragmatic arguments and Libyan cultural references, including examples of influential women drawn from the Islamic tradition.

Once a good number of women members is secured, men within SPPs are encouraged to reflect on specific behaviours they can adopt to practise allyship, for example through creating an enabling environment during meetings for women to express their views comfortably and safely, or using their community influence to promote wider acceptance of women's inclusion. An example of men behaving as allies was the support provided by the SPP to the candidacy of one of its female members, who then became the first woman ever elected to the Municipal Council in her town. Another SPP facilitated dialogue with religious leaders who were opposed to the participation of girls in a local clean-up campaign organised by the SPP to promote civic engagement and environmental awareness among young people. Having gained the trust of SPP members on issues relating to women's inclusion, some activities have been initiated to promote discussions around positive masculinities and how men's attitudes, values and behaviours can contribute to building more peaceful societies and a safer environment for women.

An opportunity arose when, as part of a COVID-19 and Gender Assessment conducted in six Municipalities, a series of focus group discussions revealed that men and women had very different understandings of the security threats women face in Libya. For instance, men did not always recognise catcalling, harassment in public settings, online bullying and other forms of gender based violence (GBV) as 'security threats', and became defensive when asked to talk about issues relating to violence against women in their communities. Building on this learning, a dialogue session between young men and women focusing on gendered notions of security and how men's behaviour can contribute to a safer environment for women is being piloted. While the discussion is framed in the context of women's safety around elections, participants are encouraged to reflect more broadly on different gender roles in Libyan society and how certain aspects of people's characters and behaviours are usually associated with a specific gender. For example, kindness, emotivity, and compassion are often associated with women, while physical strength and courage are usually associated with men. Positive masculinities (when men use their physical and emotional strength to champion healthy and peaceful behaviours) – as opposed to negative or toxic masculinities (e.g. dominance, aggression, violence, etc.) – represent a useful concept for a constructive discussion on men's behaviours in relation to peace and women's security. The dialogue session will generate joint proposals for initiatives to be implemented by young men and women together to promote a safer environment for women.

BE CREATIVE WHEN ENGAGING WOMEN TO OVERCOME STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

Structural barriers, such as women's unequal access to resources (land, property, capital, etc.) and power, can hardly be changed within the life of a project. Therefore, while we work towards addressing these macro issues in the long term, it is important that alternative avenues be created for engaging women outside of those institutions that are traditionally male-dominated. For example, a gender-blind approach to designing community consultations would most likely exclude women, who are largely underrepresented in leadership positions and among high-level government officials, business leaders, traditional leaders, the media, and other institutions that are usually engaged in these processes. Creative ways to engage women by making an extra effort to ensure that they are consulted through alternative channels can be built into projects, if the formal and most obvious ones do not provide sufficient space for a fair and meaningful participation. An effective way of ensuring that women's voices and perspectives are included, for example, has been to engage community-based and civil society organisations led by women or working on women's issues. However, it is important that certain gender-mainstreaming mechanisms are also built into the process to avoid women's inputs being ignored or their proposals discarded, for example once the consultation reaches the prioritisation or final decision-making stages, which usually involves formal institutions where women remain strongly underrepresented. Best-practice actions such as establishing gender-responsive selection criteria, earmarking funding for women-focused projects, and setting quotas for women's representation in high-level committees and working groups can lead to more gender-responsive planning – provided that, in parallel, efforts are made to ensure that women's presence does not just become a box-ticking exercise.

BUILD IN RISK MANAGEMENT AND SAFEGUARDING PROTOCOLS

Women and men involved in activities that challenge gender norms are exposed to a higher reputational risk and to threatened or actual violence. To mitigate against these risks, a context-specific approach has been key, whereby activities are designed, tested, and adapted with team members, partners and project participants who have a deep understanding of the specific challenges and risks that may be faced in different communities. This is to ensure that programme activities are first and foremost deemed 'safe', particularly by women, and that the risk of a backlash is minimised. In this process, men can play the role of allies by ensuring that a certain level of buy-in from influential actors within communities is obtained before implementation.

As explained in previous sections, it is also important to ensure that activities are framed according to Libyan (sometimes even local) cultural references and not perceived as an attempt to impose foreign values. Safeguarding channels are created to ensure people can flag and report any new risks or threats. Throughout implementation, regular monitoring of activities and ongoing consultation with those involved can help identify and promptly manage any risks or threats. If any incidents are reported, these are investigated and, by working closely with the SPPs, support is provided to the people affected. Learning is then reviewed to assess any implications for both programming and safeguarding and risk protocols, with a view to preventing similar incidents happening again.

"Political participation is the responsibility of every citizen. It is the women's responsibility to raise awareness and support other women."

Nour, a professional trainer from Benghazi, developed a curriculum to train the TMs and SPPs in promoting greater participation of women and youth in elections.

PROGRESS AND IMPACT

"Sharing my story shows other young Libyans what is possible to achieve."

Rabha, a Tobruq SPP member, was a speaker at the Youth Camp held by PCi in Zuwara in 2020, which brought together 100 young peace leaders from across Libya.

Evidence collected through our ongoing monitoring shows that PCi's approach has been successful in achieving greater inclusion of a more diverse range of women across all aspects of the SPLD programme. Women are now represented in all SPPs, where they make up 39% of members on average. In most SPPs, the quality of women's participation has also improved, and women now play an active role in the regular planning and implementation of activities. The SPPs' membership and outreach have become more inclusive of the diversity of women's social groups. In some SPPs, women were elected to leadership roles such as Chairperson positions.

SPPs have demonstrated an increased ability to understand the different ways in which women and men can fuel conflict or be resources for peace, and how women and men's experiences of violent conflict, displacement, and other issues such as COVID-19 differ. The choice by several SPPs to design, implement and support initiatives that address women's needs, such as providing livelihood opportunities for marginalised women, improving women's health services, or investing in women's leadership, shows how this increased awareness and understanding are informing their action.

The SPPs have provided an enabling environment for women to strengthen and practise their leadership skills across a range of activities, from peacebuilding to crisis management, local development, and governance. Women have successfully conceptualised, designed, and implemented initiatives funded by PCi that address their interests and needs. Women's leadership and contributions to projects implemented by the SPPs have been crucial in gaining wider acceptance among male peers of the need for greater women's participation. Within many SPPs, women's leadership in the design and implementation of projects is now considered key to making initiatives more effective and sustainable. For example, SPPs' initiatives led by women that have received long-term funding by government institutions have played a major role in positively shifting perceptions about women's participation. Similarly, many male SPP members recognise that projects implemented with active female members are often delivered more efficiently and on time. Some of these projects have become self-sustainable through income generation and have gone on to support other initiatives run by women for women.

Gender, Peace and Security has become one of the key competences and focus areas for the cadre of Libyan 'Trainer-Mentors' established and developed by PCi to provide ongoing support to the SPPs. Working both with PCi and independently, the Trainer-Mentors promoted gender sensitivity and women's inclusion across a range of activities both within the SPLD programme and beyond.

In areas where social norms were less accepting of women's presence in the public sphere, the SPPs were able to build trust with key local actors and secure a somewhat higher acceptance of women's role in peace- and decision-making processes. This was evidenced through an increased willingness by many male SPP members to be women's inclusion advocates and allies. Generally, most SPPs have taken ownership of promoting greater women's inclusion in local decision-making processes. In some cases, the SPPs have concretely supported women leaders in their communities, for example through backing their candidacy in local elections.

The SPPs were instrumental in facilitating a range of gendered analyses, women's consultation processes and need assessments, which informed the planning of more gender-responsive projects, local services and international assistance. However, this was at times achieved through the creation of side processes that had a limited impact on women's underrepresentation in key decision-making positions.

While the SPPs' initiatives may not always have had a transformative impact on gender roles, important changes were observed within gender roles, for instance through economic empowerment and increased leadership and social capital among marginalised women.

LOOKING AHEAD

Building on the results achieved and the learning gathered to date, PCi has identified a set of areas that present opportunities to further integrate gender into the SPLD programme:

Continue to integrate gender-sensitive analysis into the SPPs' tension monitoring and conflict management practices. Gender analysis competencies will continue to be consolidated to ensure that the local tension monitoring and conflict management mechanisms established by SPPs are able to understand and identify gendered conflict drivers and resources for peace. This will include gendered analysis of climate and environmental issues in Libya and how these relate to conflict and peace.

Challenging gender roles: through an incremental approach, aim to support projects and initiatives that, over time, can have a transformative impact on gender roles, as well as within gender roles. Further analysis will be conducted of what 'transformative' means in the Libyan context and for different demographics and social groups among Libyan women and men, with a view to more consciously tailoring interventions and forms of support.

Continue to support livelihood projects designed and led by women. As a way of contributing to the wider social and economic inclusion of women, particularly the more marginalised, projects designed and led by women that focus on creating livelihood opportunities will continue to be supported.

Contribute to local efforts to address GBV and women's access to justice issues. Through collaborations between SPPs and local CSOs that are active on these issues, joint initiatives will be supported that can enhance these efforts, while also strengthening working relations between CSOs and SPPs on broader social cohesion initiatives.

Preserve and expand the civil society and civic space to support women's inclusion. The development and capacity of CSOs will be supported as a way of contributing to expanding the civil society space, which in Libya has proven to be an enabling environment for women to gain experience, develop and practise leadership skills, and participate in peace and decision-making processes.

Facilitate dialogue between men and women aimed at developing community notions of 'security' that better reflect gendered experiences and needs. Dialogue between men and women will be facilitated to promote a greater understanding of the range of gendered security threats and challenges faced in Libya, encouraging reflections on 'positive masculinities' and changing women's and men's attitudes and behaviours to increase security.

Media & visibility: enhance public recognition of women leaders' role in peace efforts. A range of nation-wide media campaigns will be supported, with the aim of amplifying success stories of women peace leaders representing different communities and social groups in Libya. This will contribute to shifting perceptions about gender roles, particularly to increasing public recognition of – and support for – women peace leaders.

Enhance women's political participation. Efforts aimed at increasing the participation of women in political processes, both as candidates and as voters, will be supported. This will include raising awareness about the importance of women's participation, addressing practical barriers to participation, and strengthening the skills and knowledge to participate.

Contribute to informing a National Action Plan to implement UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. In partnership with international and Libyan stakeholders leading on this process, community consultations and advocacy initiatives will be facilitated through the network of SPPs, with a view to gathering and amplifying the needs and demands of local communities and women's groups across Libya.

Support women's leadership and greater participation in Climate & Peace and Environmental Governance. As part of broader efforts to enhance women's leadership and participation in peace and decision making, women's capacity will be strengthened to analyse climate and environmental issues and their connections to peace and conflict in Libya, and to design and lead on initiatives that address these issues.

Adopt a holistic approach to enhancing the safety and security of women peace leaders (and male allies). PCi will conduct a comprehensive review of existing security and safeguarding protocols and regular risk assessments to mitigate risks associated with the increased visibility of women and male allies and their involvement in programme activities.