Prospects for intergenerational peace leadership: Reflections from Asia and the Pacific

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Abstract

In this article, we develop a model of intergenerational peace leadership (IPL) with a particular focus upon young women's peace leadership. IPL remains under-theorised and under-recognised in both global policy and academic scholarship. We therefore outline and advocate for a young women-focussed IPL model as an opportunity for robust and sustainable peace leadership that aligns with broader UN-driven inclusive peace agendas. We begin the article with efforts to theorise IPL and situate it at the centre of inclusive and sustainable peace agendas. Second, we look at the challenges facing IPL, drawing from three case studies (Papua New Guinea/Bougainville, Nepal and Myanmar) of women's peace leadership in Asia and the Pacific. While we do identify commitments to IPL in the region, we find significant barriers that undermine its transformative potential. These emerge from contested power dynamics and hierarchies between older and younger generations, which result in young women being marginalised, ignored and silenced within ostensibly intergenerational peace forums. We therefore argue that while IPL is an important link necessary for advancing inclusive peace agendas, we must identify and engage with the hierarchies that hinder its transformative potential.

Keywords

Asia and the Pacific, intergenerational peace leadership, women peace and security, youth peace and security

Introduction

Popular ideas regarding peace leadership have undergone major transformations in recent decades (McIntyre Miller, 2016). Traditionally, peace leadership has been personified by well-recognised state, military or community leaders. These actors demonstrate their leadership through engagement in formal peace processes, such as diplomatic negotiations, to reach and implement agreements for ending political tensions or conflict. What typifies such accounts of peace leadership is that: the recognised instigators are already perceived as leaders; they operate in the public sphere, usually at the national or

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global levels; they work through formal forums and processes; they largely work after conflict has erupted and they are predominantly men. However, in recent decades, recognition has emerged that this is a narrow, exclusive vision of peace leadership. While formal leadership towards ending conflict remains essential to peace, recognition is growing around the value of local, grassroots and informal peace leadership that operates within communities to strengthen or build peace (see Porter, 2007: 27). Moreover, a range of community actors are increasingly recognised for leading such peacebuilding. Consequently, peace leadership is becoming accepted as a more diffuse concept and practice (see Khalil and Hartley, 2022). Many acknowledge that peace leadership can occur at any point in the conflict cycle, from before a conflict begins to long after a conflict ends (Lund, 2009). It can be performed in formal and informal spaces, by those with or without a formal 'leadership' role or title (see Murphy, 2020) and leaders may bring various approaches, qualities and traits (see McIntyre Miller, 2016). Increasingly, we have seen teenage girls, whole movements, youth, women and members of diverse ethnic, religious and other groups become widely accepted as legitimate, impactful peace leaders. This is no more evident than in the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize, which in the past decade has dramatically increased the diversity of its recipients to include young people, social movements and organisations, more women, and greater ethnic and religious diversity. This acknowledgement – that peace leadership is performed across multiple sites and by a diverse range of actors – reflects and informs broader global commitments, led by the United Nations, to inclusive peace.

The commitment from international bodies to adopt inclusive approaches to peace recognises that minimalist, technocratic and belligerent-focussed peace processes have poor success rates (United Nations and World Bank, 2018: 7–8; Westendorf, 2015). This is demonstrated by a conflict recurrence rate of approximately 50% for conflicts between 1989 and 2018 (PRIO, 2020). Alternatively, the UN promulgates that the key to sustainable peace lies in involving whole communities at all points in the conflict cycle (UN, 2023). Inclusive peace approaches consider an array of actors (armed groups, civil society, business groups, religious groups, ethnic minorities and political actors) across the political spectrum from conflict prevention to transition processes (including peace negotiations, peace operations and grassroots peacebuilding). This is promoted in the UN's sustaining peace and conflict prevention agendas. The first 'sustaining peace' resolution (see UNSCR 2282(2016)) attempts to shift the conceptualisation of peace towards more inclusive and interconnected practices. It not only elevates the role of non-state actors but also encourages co-ordination of responses and resourcing across peace, development and humanitarian sectors by adopting the core principle of inclusion. UNSCR 2258(2020) reaffirms: 'that "sustaining peace" should be broadly understood as a goal and a process to build a common vision of a society, ensuring that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account'.

The development of inclusive peace agendas (and inclusive approaches to peace leadership) provides an important landscape to advocate for incorporating groups previously excluded from formal and informal peace efforts. Foremost among these have been efforts to include women and young people. The past two decades have seen established literatures, policy frameworks and advocacy efforts around women's (Charlesworth, 2008; Porter, 2007; Shepherd, 2021) and youth (see Berents, 2018; Brown, 2020;

McEvoy-Levy, 2018; Pruitt, 2014) participation in peacebuilding. These are typified in the United Nations Security Council's Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agendas. Yet, while these agendas share similar trajectories towards inclusive peace and security, they have to some extent travelled parallel paths (Berents and Mollica, 2022: 3–7). The consequence of this can be that *young* women's peace leadership falls between the two agendas. In this sense, young women can often find themselves excluded from (older) women's peacebuilding projects while also being marginalised by an androcentric bias in youth peacebuilding efforts (Carson, 2018; Homan et al., 2018; Pruitt, 2013; Rouhshahbaz, 2022).

We propose that in order for peace leadership to be truly inclusive and sustained, peacebuilders must find ways to bring these two tracks of the inclusive peace agenda together. One way in which this can occur is through consideration of an intergenerational and gender-responsive model of peace leadership. In advocating for an intergenerational approach to peace leadership, we recognise that – in contrast to women's and youth peace leadership – it remains under-theorised, under-practised and under-developed in peacebuilding efforts.

To be clear, we do not seek to replace or overwhelm existing efforts to promote women's or youth peace leadership in their own dedicated spaces. The success of WPS and YPS as separate, but related, agendas remain central to inclusive peace. Moreover, in the face of existing hierarchies, young women may well wish to retain their own spaces, set apart from both youth's and women's peace leadership spaces to share and strengthen their leadership. Indeed, as our fieldwork demonstrates, there are times where separate spaces remain important for agenda building and action in peace leadership. Recognising this, we argue that intergenerational peace leadership (IPL) is an important addition to the inclusive peace toolbox that has the potential to increase genuine empathy and cross-sector dialogue in peace leadership, making it sustainable across generations.

With a focus upon women's IPL, we explore this case in two sections: first, drawing from nascent literature, we theorise a model of IPL. We examine the ways in which this model aligns with the goals of inclusive peace and addresses some of the challenges that have emerged through the separation of parallel youth- and women-focussed agendas. Second, we look to case studies in Asia and the Pacific to identify and explore the opportunities for IPL, drawing from fieldwork conducted with young women peace leaders across the region who have experience working in intergenerational contexts. Here, we find that while there is some recognition of the value of IPL among women's movements, there remain several general and context-specific challenges. In particular, our fieldwork reveals hierarchical power dynamics and community attitudes towards young women that undermine the transformative capacity of IPL to sustain peace across generations.

Theoretical framework and methodology

To advance a theory of IPL, we need to reconceptualise both peace and leadership to more readily include young people and women. To be inclusive, both peace and leadership need to be dynamic concepts that are alive to ways in which social power shape their meaning and enable inclusions and exclusions of particular actors. We therefore describe

peace as a socially constructed concept wherein context, material structures, beliefs, values and ideas all play a role in how different actors constitute their own understandings of peace (Wallis, 2021). We recognise that while peace may be broadly understood as lives lived free of violence and with security and dignity, the lived realties of this differs between individuals and groups. As a consequence, their priorities for peace may also differ. Yet, many still find that their experiences, priorities and voices remain marginalised from peace agendas (see Berents and Mollica, 2022). Therefore, we need to be more aware of the power dynamics that construct hierarchies around peace and its legitimate 'knowledge-makers'. This demands attentiveness to how – when it comes to determining whose peace matters – some groups may be de-legitimised, marginalised or silenced, while others are socially privileged (Wallis, 2021). Research into both young people's and women's conceptualisations of peace demonstrate this (see, e.g. Altiok et al., 2020; Altiok and Grizelj, 2019; Berents and McEvoy-Levy, 2015; Ensor, 2021; McEvoy-Levy, 2018; Özerdem and Podder, 2015; Podder, 2022; Porter, 2007; Pruitt, 2013; Ragandang, 2020; Schwartz, 2010; Sommers, 2015; Sukarieh and Tannock, 2018). This work shows the importance of reflecting upon both individual subjectivity and the politics of intersectionality when seeking to build inclusive peace agendas (see Smith and Stavrevska, 2022).

In a similar vein, conceptualisations of leadership must dismantle the hierarchies and social privilege that exclude women and young people from being considered legitimate or authentic leaders. Feminist scholars focussed upon women and leadership continually evidence the attitudinal and structural barriers that undermine women's claims to leadership in public spaces (see Chin, 2004; Collinson, 2011; Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly and Karau, 2002; Madsen, 2017; Sinclair, 2014, 1998). This literature challenges, among other things, the gender double-bind (Jamieson, 1997) that persists across cultures where women are perceived as weak leaders if they are too feminine and are rendered inauthentic women if they perform the masculine qualities associated with leadership. Young people similarly face barriers to their leadership. They are often seen as too inexperienced, ignorant, naïve or apathetic to be leaders and, like women, they too encounter structural and resource-based impediments to leadership (see Altiok et al., 2020).

Addressing these challenges remains central to ensuring diverse groups have access to formal leadership spaces. However, it is also important to recognise the ways in which these groups do lead, often in informal and unrecognised ways. To capture both formal and informal types of leadership, we describe leadership as 'as a process of identifying and articulating a vision for positive change that can be shared, validated, and supported by others' (Lee-Koo and Pruitt, 2020: 2). This broad conceptualisation can be inclusive of different styles, sites and situations, and better reflects 'the dynamic power relationships that shift upwards, downwards, sideways, backwards, and forwards' when it comes to leadership (Lee-Koo and Pruitt, 2020: 2). To that end, we also appreciate Howard's (2019: 3) theorising of leadership as: 'an ongoing process, rather than a tangible outcome at a set point in time' that 'occurs at many levels, including in formal and informal spaces, at national and sub-national levels, in institutions, organisations, communities and families'. Placing these conceptualisations together, we therefore understand peace leadership as activities – by individuals or groups – to pursue a shared vision that allows

people to live safe and self-respecting lives. In sympathy with MacGinty's (2021) conceptualisation of everyday peace, we recognise that peace leadership can be undertaken in the small acts and everyday interactions of people in their homes, schools, workplaces, places of worship and communities as legitimately as it can be in international forums and at the 'peace table'.

To that end, our theorisation of IPL draws from an analysis of the lived experiences of 30 young women in the three post-conflict contexts of Papua New Guinea (PNG), Myanmar and Nepal. These countries have been chosen because of their intergenerational experiences of conflict and community-based efforts in peacebuilding. Through peer-to-peer key informant interviews and focus-group discussions, young women were asked to explore their understanding of, attitudes towards and experiences with, intergenerational leadership. While we recognise and endorse locally owned conceptions of youth,[1] we worked with young women aged between 18 and 30 years. In contacting potential interviewees, we were mindful of diversity issues within each country and sought to have a broad geographic, religious and ethnic representation of respondents, where possible. Given our commitment to making space for young women's leadership, and ourselves being situated as researchers who are women over the age of 30 primarily residing outside the countries considered, our study benefitted from recruiting and working with young women peer researchers based in-country, as well as with young women research assistants who were able to spend extended periods in-country working on data collection. All peer researchers were trained by the authors in gender-responsive data collection and attended workshops on the project and process for data collection, including workshops on research ethics, confidentiality and data storage. Older women involved in peace advocacy (10 in total) in these countries were also interviewed. While the focus remains on young women, older women's views provide insights into the intergenerational tensions and dynamics, as well as broader shifts in peace advocacy in the three countries.

Theorising intergenerational peace

We describe IPL as an approach that meaningfully includes diverse people across multiple age cohorts who work together – on an equitable footing – in formal and informal peace activities. It is an approach that is explicit in its inclusive, sustainable and dialogic ethic with the intention of creating approaches to peace that are dynamic, but nonetheless sustain momentum across generations. Importantly, the model of IPL we advocate is transformative in actively challenging established age-related hierarchies of knowledge production and power relations. The advancement of this model requires a number of commitments. First, it requires recognising that young people experience conflict differently (see Baker, 2019; Gordon and Lee-Koo, 2021; Lederach, 2020; Özerdem et al., 2010; Pruitt, 2015, 2021; Ungerleider, 2012; Utas, 2005). For example, in conflict or crisis scenarios, young women (and girls) may become more vulnerable to early and forced marriage, more likely to experience disruptions to education, have unique sexual and reproductive health needs and challenges, and will be vulnerable in different ways to gender-based violence. Similarly, young men may have different experiences than older generations with regards to issues, such as forced recruitment, demobilisation and

gender-based violence. Likewise, young people may hold different priorities for peace based on these experiences and their ambitions and priorities for post-conflict communities. An intergenerational approach to peace leadership must recognise that all conflict experiences are relevant to understanding the barriers to and needs for peace. This draws from Podder (2022: 7), who describes intergenerational peace 'not simply as peace between generations but at a more practical level, as the designing of peace interventions that can cater to the needs of different generations during the post-war phase'. As part of this, IPL recognises that different age groups have devised different skills and strategies for navigating conflict settings and conflict transitions. These skills and strategies should be identified and deployed in efforts to achieve an inclusive peace.

Second, the IPL model we propose seeks to transform power hierarchies based on age. In particular, it aims to dissolve binaries, such as 'current'/'future' leaders or 'mentor'/'mentee' relationships where the former imparts a static trust of wisdom, knowledge and only eventually power and legitimacy to the latter. Rather, IPL is a shared journey and shared learning experience. It does not measure capacity to build peace only through traditional frameworks like time-served, formal education, professional networks or accredited technical expertise. In addition to focussing upon age-based hierarchies, IPL is simultaneously committed to dismantling exclusionary power structures that are created when age intersects with other identity points, such as gender. As one young woman in our research noted:

> Well, there's so many challenges for young women, I would say. Intergenerational power sharing, as a whole, there are so many challenges. Everything starts in the home, so even [me], like I'm an educated woman. It took a while for my dad to actually allow me to be able to speak in the house . . . (Young woman, Papua New Guinea, Interview number 8, hereafter YWPNG8).

Third, we describe intergenerational peace as something that is shared and collectively owned. Peace leaders necessarily act in complex, ephemeral conditions and IPL can only be declared a success when it has been successfully passed on to others. As one young woman explained to us:

> So when . . . I move on and when I'm doing something else these other young people . . . tak[e] my place and when he moves on or she moves on [they] will . . . mentor upcoming young generations of young people so we continue that intergenerational leadership . . .. (YWPNG1).

Our primary aim here is to advocate for and advance efforts to provide equitable access and inclusion for young women in peace leadership, rather than to make an instrumentalist case about the benefits that doing so will bring for wider populations. However, the research referenced earlier demonstrates that greater inclusion of young people and women in peace processes will contribute to more robust peace for all.

Finally, our model of intergenerational peace is attentive to place. Suggestions that peace leadership can or should only occur in formal, public or 'sanctioned' settings can easily undermine the leadership of young people. When formal and public peacebuilding sites are closed to young people, young people seek other community sites to engage in peace work. As Lee-Koo and Pruitt (2020) have argued, much of young women's leadership is peer leadership that occurs in the home, school, religious or community centres or

in online spaces. These are important places where cultures of peace, social justice and gender equality are fostered and developed. Consequently, it is important to dismantle false dichotomies presumed to exist between private and public spaces with respect to acknowledging where peace is fostered and built.

In conceptualising IPL in this way, we recognise that cohort specific spaces for peace (e.g. women's or youth-focussed spaces, etc.) remain relevant. Cohort specific spaces are often safe spaces where confidence can be built, discussions among peers can take place, and agenda building and skills development can occur. However, at the same time, we suggest that seeking common spaces across social differences, such as age, is essential to inclusivity. In terms of strengthening approaches to inclusive peace, this is about a both/and, rather than an either/or, approach.

Furthermore, we recognise that age-based power relations can be complex and context-specific, and we must be mindful of this as we seek to navigate and transform them. For example, in reflecting on our conceptualisation of IPL, we understand that social, cultural and traditional practices in many communities incorporate practices of elder respect. Noting this, our aim is not to suggest a neo-imperial/liberal imposition of values that seek to flatten long-held community structures. Rather, we seek to promote a dialogic approach that highlights cultures of listening and understanding of experiences that may differ based on identity. We also seek to highlight the whole-of-community benefits that intergenerational approaches generate in not just seeking peace, but also intergenerational justice.

While our IPL model draws from our own observations across Asia and the Pacific, research on youth peacebuilding have identified examples of an intergenerational approach. For example, Grizelj's (2019: 182) research in Myanmar considers prospects for including youth in peace negotiations, and argues that sustainable peace will necessitate aiming for 'intergenerational ownership of a peace agreement'. Meanwhile, Bräuchler's (2019) research in Maluku, Indonesia, demonstrates how young people play important roles in peace activism through promoting justice; and, in doing so, they engage intergenerationally to reflect on ways traditional Moluccan practices contribute to peacebuilding. Carson (2018) interrogates gender-responsive youth activism for peace and in doing so, suggests the importance of working intergenerationally and demonstrating respect for the preceding generations who have paved the way for today's young people to engage in peacebuilding. Moreover, she says young people must also pass 'knowledge and experiences onto the next generation' (Carson, 2018: 269). To that end, Djohar and Pruitt's (2021) reflections on creative writing workshops with young people in the conflict-affected setting of Aceh, Indonesia provided a concrete example of young people engaging intergenerationally in pursuing a gender-just approach to peacebuilding.

IPL in practice

Overall, our research found few examples of IPL operating in the ways we have just outlined. Instead, our data reveals *rhetorical* commitments to IPL and a *desire* to see it clearly articulated and undertaken by women's peacebuilding groups across the region. As one such stakeholder recognised:

> Many of the people in global policymaking are older and think they know the needs of young people. But to actually hear it from the young people themselves is really important, and particularly young women who we know often don't have a voice in their own countries and in their own families, and to make sure that their voices are actually heard (Regional stakeholder 01).

Similarly, another described IPL as essential to the future stability of the region: 'To me what intergenerational leadership offers is the opportunity to learn from each other. It's working together and it's learning from each other, I don't think mentoring is only from old to young' (Regional stakeholder 02).

Such views recognise the central roles that youth play in sustaining peace across Asia and the Pacific, the most youthful region in the world. In fact, 25% of the region's population is aged between 15 and 29 years. Moreover, the region is home to 60% of the world's young people, with over 350 million of those being young women. It is also a region where numerous countries experience intergenerational peace processes. Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Timor L'este, PNG and the Solomon Islands are among the countries in the region engaging in ongoing peacebuilding following national conflict. Moreover, the region faces numerous current and recurrent challenges, including conflict, political violence, violent extremism and geo-strategic tensions. Taken together, intergenerational leadership on peace and the prevention of conflict has the potential to play an important role in the region, now and in the future.

However, in practice, we observed numerous barriers that undermined opportunities for intergenerational cooperation for peace. While these are detailed in their specific contexts below, we found that intergenerational tensions and power relations, as well as the socially defined structures of peacebuilding, impeded the ability of older and younger women to work together. This manifested in several ways. First, older women routinely identified different priorities for peace. In some cases, this was a failure to recognise the subjective and intersectional ways in which young women were impacted by violence, and a subsequent unwillingness to legitimate their priorities for the peace agenda. Consequently, young women routinely expressed the belief that their needs and visions for peace were not understood or respected by older women. Second, these intergenerational tensions manifested from different lived experiences of the conflict. In cases, such as PNG, the older generation had lived through the active conflict phase, while the younger generation lives with its aftermath. This creates differences in experiences of conflict-related trauma as well as different opportunities for education, socio-economic stability and freedom of movement. These factors can also shape attitudes and priorities for peace. Finally, across the region there was evidence of strong territorialism with regards to leadership roles. Older women noted that their ability to access peace leadership roles – particularly in formal peace processes – had been hard fought and remained both limited and tenuous. Consequently, many older women were not prepared to stand aside in order to create opportunities for younger women, who they saw as less experienced and less deserving. These factors have led to young women's exclusion from peace leadership roles in formal peace processes, and also in social movements and civil society spaces dedicated to peace advocacy. Across the region young women reported that they often have not been given the space to share their ideas within these settings. For

many, this was reinforced by broader societal contexts where elders are accepted as having more power and authority to speak and be heard than younger people and where women are not broadly accepted as community leaders. While there were important nuances in each of the contexts that will be considered below, these themes were present throughout the sites. Our data reveal that, because of these barriers, many young women preferred (or retreated to) 'youth-only' spaces.

Bougainville/PNG

Of the three cases considered in this article, intergenerational tensions were most evident in Bougainville and PNG. Now known as the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, from 1989 to 1998, the island was the site of a secession conflict that took place primarily between the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) and the PNG national government (Boege et al., 2017: 9). A roadmap for independence for Bougainville was included as part of the 2001 peace agreement. In 2019, an overwhelming majority of Bougainvillieans voted for independence in a non-binding referendum. In 2021, the PNG and Bougainville governments agreed on a pathway to independence in 2027. Consequently, this remains an intergenerational peace process, with many of today's youth having little or no memory of the conflict but nonetheless having been raised in its shadow with the peace process being an active, ongoing task with recent research suggesting that the referendum mobilised a new emerging generation of political leaders and engaged citizens (McKenna et al., 2021).

At the same time, research in Bougainville has found that trust between younger and older women can at times be hard to develop or maintain, as diverging understandings emerge from differences of culture, education, experiences and expectations (Eves and Koredong, 2015). More broadly, research in PNG has found that while intergenerational leadership is greatly needed, young women are often marginalised or even excluded from women's organisations, which are often dominated by older women, who may at times refuse to share power (Spark et al., 2020). This was observed by an older woman, who noted that there were so few leadership positions available to women – and older women had fought so hard to secure them – that they were unwilling to relinquish them to young women. She described this as 'almost like jealousy or territorialism because the space is so small for women in leadership' (Stakeholder 01 PNG). In a similar account, another older woman described the intergenerational tensions within the Pacific region more generally as 'a large amount of – I don't know if gatekeeping is the right word – a large amount of oversight and control and investment by the older generation of women's leaders' (Stakeholder 02 Pacific). She further noted that as a result, 'there were much fewer spaces' for young women within women's peace activism and for these reasons 'young women were having to find alternative pathways either in regional youth forums' or other youth groups (Stakeholder 02, Pacific). Another older woman stakeholder reported that she did see evidence of changing rhetoric around the inclusion of young women in peace advocacy. However, she felt that this did not always move beyond rhetoric and was sometimes accompanied by ongoing efforts to stifle young women:

> Sometimes there [are] genuine attempts at mentoring, but because of the nature and structure of civil society organisations, those older generations still need to remain the figurehead and are

happy to mentor younger people but are a bit reluctant to totally give over the reins themselves (Stakeholder 03, PNG).

In our interviews with young women who were based both in Port Moresby (PNG's capital) and Bougainville, these tensions were confirmed. With regards to the peace process, the young women we interviewed felt that because they did not have a living memory of the conflict, they were being actively marginalised by older women: As one young woman noted:

Most of the young women now, in this generation, most of them were small when the crisis happened. [However, it is still important to] get their views on what they think. But maybe I'm going [speaking] out of context . . . (YWPNG7).

Similarly, Spark et al. (2020) describe intergenerational power relations where older women expect younger women to passively accept the wisdom of their elders. One young woman from Port Moresby noted that: 'Older women will – sometimes . . . like us to accept or just to follow what they are doing. They will not [allow] us to give *our* opinion' (YWPNG3). An older woman noted that this sense of elder respect could be disempowering for young women:

The younger women feel that they respect the older women so much that they think that their opinions are sometimes not good enough for the older women to take into consideration. Sometimes it hinders young women's leadership because it puts them down (Stakeholder 04 PNG).

For at least one young woman, this generated a sense of hostility, as the agendas and priorities of the older generation were not relevant to her:

I'm saying, I wouldn't attend an [event] with older women, because I think they're boring, and another thing is, I feel that they look down on us as young women, and so I wouldn't attend or sit down for any of their workshops, or trainings, or meetings (YWPNG5, Interpreted).

More broadly, young women identified an unwillingness for older generations to accept them as equals or as leaders. A young woman from Bougainville told us:

As a young woman there will be more problems or challenges [to becoming a leader]. Because in our community elders always . . . look down on a young lady [who seeks] to become a leader. Sometimes they will say, 'you cannot be a leader like that' (YWPNG2).

This power dynamic was evident in the women's peace work. During the conflict women played a significant role in grassroots peacebuilding and were further 'involved in many of the formal peace negotiations that occurred during the conflict' (George, 2016: 172). A number of young women noted that older women felt that they 'owned' the peace process and did not want to relinquish control of the agenda to a new generation. As one young Bougainvillean woman noted:

> We have to pass [the peace agenda] on, but when it comes to people owning things, it's very hard to let go. We had a lot of challenges with that, that people [feel like they] own things: 'I've started this and I'm not giving it away. This is *my* child. I'm not giving it away'. But then that's not inter-generational leadership. We have to pass [it] on. We should have this willingness that, okay, we move on and we allow others to come and continue the work (YWPNG8).

Another young woman noted that many older women see participation in peacebuilding activities as a competition for space and voice, telling us that while some older women do support younger women's participation in peace '. . . some see it as competition . . . and [us] just taking up their opportunities for older women. That's why [we] wouldn't be supported' (YWPNG3).

Another noted that:

> I think young women have been left out for a long time. Most of the opportunities were taken by older women. We should realise that they [young women] are the future generation of Bougainville and they need to have a voice. They need to be empowered and given the right sort of information so that they make the right decisions. I think they should be included (YWPNG8).

Given this, many young women felt that they alone carried the burden of promoting IPL, which required agitating and insisting on their place in peace activities. One noted that being present in spaces dominated by older women is important:

> I will attend a training that has more participants, older women, and that is facilitated by older women . . . not for my own interest, or for myself, but because I will be carrying, or representing, all the other young women where I come from, so that I can sit in the room, and to show the older women that us young women can do what you older women are also doing. So, I will be representing all the other younger women in that group (YWPNG4).

Among many young women there is also evidence of an emerging confidence that allows them to challenge existing power dynamics and insist upon being heard:

> So within the youth program we work also with older women. But with myself, I have standards. I have my space, I have boundaries, I have my limitations. I know where I stand. So, when it comes to working with senior women: I respect them but when there's decisions made or when things are said, we have to work together in a way where we understand each other (YWPNG6).

That said, there were discernible differences *within* the group of young women we spoke to and their broader attitudes towards what constitutes peace and security for themselves, Bougainville and PNG more broadly. We found that opportunities for education were a key dividing factor shaping these attitudes. Some young women had opportunities for higher education, others had been supported by local and international organisations to participate in regional and global peace activities. These young women were able to deploy and explain concepts, such as human rights and gender equality and speak of their relevance to peacebuilding, while also demonstrating a working knowledge of global frameworks, such as WPS, YPS and the sustainable development goals. Young women

who had fewer opportunities – while nonetheless committed to their own peace leadership – showed less 'globalised' attitudes to peace. One young woman noted the difference that education made to peace leadership. She noted that there was a clear distinction between young women like herself, who had lived in urban areas after the conflict, had the privilege of stable education, spoke English as well as Pidgin, and in some cases had travelled globally, and young women who had lived entirely in their rural villages. She noted:

> when we go back to the village setting it's so hard to communicate with people. You've got to explain to them women's rights. You can explain to them over 10 to 20 times the same thing and it's very hard. You can even lose your voice! (YWPNG6).

As Bougainville continues its roadmap towards independence, the role of young peacebuilders becomes increasingly important. The IPL model we have outlined in this article supports opportunities for younger and older peacebuilders to work with and learn from each other in terms of their experiences and priorities for peace. Rather than reinforcing a hierarchy of needs and voices, the IPL model encourages all peacebuilders to seek the skills, knowledge and experiences of different age groups through intergenerational dialogue. It further encourages a dynamic peace agenda that evolves with the changing needs and interests of the communities involved.

Nepal

A country with multiple ethnicities, languages and religions, Nepal began an electoral democracy in the 1990s, yet political instability reigned with 12 governments failing successively between 1990 and 2002. Following ongoing corruption and a culture of impunity for abuses of power, identity movements erupted, demanding representation and autonomy. Building on the resulting disenchantment, the Maoist Party, or Community Party of Nepal, began a decade-long war of violent insurgency in 1996, with the conflict resulting in 13,000 deaths and over a half million people being displaced (Thapa, 2009).

Young people, defined in Nepal as those aged 16–35 years, faced difficulties in relation to the conflict, including: being conscripted as combatants, as well as experiencing human rights violations perpetrated by state security forces and disruptions to their education. To compound this situation, Nepalese young people simultaneously encountered a worsening economic situation, which offered them few prospects, often leaving them displaced or needing to migrate to cities to search for opportunities. In this state of constricted options, many young people turned to becoming soldiers or were forcibly recruited and in both cases often were involved in horrific acts that destroyed bonds with their communities and families. Following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006, several peacebuilding programmes have worked to incorporate youth, who have taken on active roles in their communities and engaged in a range of peace education initiatives (McGill et al., 2017; Thapa, 2009).

Like PNG, given the years that have passed since the formal conflict, many young people in Nepal today have little to no direct memory of the war. Yet research suggests that '[y]oung people who fought the war in Nepal have an overwhelming feeling of

having been used and forgotten, and that their sacrifice has not yielded the results they were hoping' (Dahal and Chapagain, 2017: 5). Indeed, recent research suggests that young people are too often seen as responsible for upholding peace, yet simultaneously underestimated in their capacity to act (Deo, 2018). Nevertheless, research also documents how Nepalese youth have continued to perform important roles through their long-standing participation in formal and informal peacebuilding across the country (Dahal and Chapagain, 2017; Deo, 2018).

For these reasons, according to the young women we spoke with, attitudes towards young women's peace leadership is mixed. In some cases, young women report receiving strong encouragement for their peace leadership. They spoke about their work being supported and respected by their immediate communities, including their families, school peers, community or religious groups. This suggests that there has been a positive impact emerging from long-standing efforts to support youth peace work. One young woman who had undertaken a leadership programme focussed upon community-based social justice (including peace) issues reported:

> Every day [that] I returned from the training, I used to share my experiences with my family, with my mother and sister and whoever – we would sit in the kitchen together and we'd talk during dinner. I would just share what I learned (Young woman, Nepal, Interview 4, hereafter YWN4).

Another young woman who had attended the same training programme reported similar support from peer groups, saying:

> First, when we were participating in this program . . . We went to college . . . and we shared . . . everything we learned the day before. We would share with our friends in classrooms, and they would listen to us. They were so curious, because there were a lot of things that even we didn't know and they didn't know. When we shared those things, they listened to us and when we went to take classes in schools, they're also very curious and they listened very attentively. They expressed their own ideas and we got to learn new things from them (YWN3).

Another young woman agreed, saying: 'My parents think I am a leader because I share my learnings with my community'. In discussing the impact of her peace work as a young leader, she continued: 'The community does listen to me. Because I have conducted [interactive] sessions in my community and people were so interested to listen to my words. We can see they tried to listen to me as a leader' (YWN2).

However, the persistence of gender-based inequality in many parts of Nepal impacted young women's capacity to be heard as peace leaders, particularly in formal settings. Like PNG, the data revealed the rural/urban divide to be a major feature in young women's experiences of peace leadership. In rural areas, certain persistent social norms left many disinclined to see younger women as legitimate peacebuilders or leaders in either formal or informal settings. In urban centres, young women were more likely to report access to peacebuilding programmes, yet found that formal and higher levels of peace leadership and influence upon peace processes were still inaccessible. This reflects findings by Dahal and Chapagain (2017: 29), who note in their study that 'young women have limited opportunities for leadership development. Despite their interest, most of the

women consulted felt unable to contribute to, initiate, lead or sustain peacebuilding initiatives'. In a similar vein, one young woman told us: 'I don't think high ranking policy people listen to young people' (YWN5).

In this way, considering the Nepal context, our research suggests that young women there are active and capable leaders for peace, yet a range of factors continue to limit their access to the recognition and support they deserve for their peacebuilding efforts. Likewise, work to advance IPL remains crucial in this context.

Myanmar

Following decades of violent conflict and military control, in 2011, Myanmar began a political transition to democracy, which in 2015 resulted in 'the first reasonably free and fair elections' since 1990 being held (Hald and Smith, 2018). However, further outbreaks of violence, uncertainty and volatility followed (Oosterom et al., 2019: 1717). Armed conflicts throughout the country have featured religious and ethnic tensions and resulted in extensive displacement of local populations (Hald and Smith, 2018). Against this already unstable backdrop, a 2021 military coup initiated the Myanmar Civil War, which remains ongoing. Likewise, in contrast to the previous two case studies in which the formal conflict has ended, the Myanmar conflict continues, and young people have an everyday experience and understanding of conflict and related displacement, crisis and suffering (Olivius and Hedström, 2020).

Although no formal definition has been adopted in Myanmar, 'youth' is typically taken to mean those people between the ages of 18–35. Given that around 60% of the population in Myanmar are under 35 years of age, youth clearly make up a significant cohort affected by the ongoing conflict, and young people have worked in many ways to actively support informal and formal peacebuilding (Grizelj, 2017; Hald and Smith, 2018; Oosterom et al., 2019). While noting that youth have been typically denied formal access to participation in the peace process in Myanmar, Grizelj (2019) argues 'that recognising youth as key stakeholders in the peace accord' remains crucial for sustainable peacebuilding (p. 164).

Sustainable, inclusive peace in Myanmar will also no doubt require further attention to gender justice, given that while already being marginalised for their youth, young women have reported facing additional gender-based barriers to their participation in peacebuilding (Grizelj, 2017: 24). Olivius and Hedström (2020) have found that even though young women leaders displaced by conflict in Myanmar were able to build skills, experience and leadership while living in exile in Thailand, upon return to Myanmar they faced challenges to their leadership based on norms of age and gender (Olivius and Hedström, 2020). Despite this, young women have skilfully adapted to continue their work for peaceful social change, but should nevertheless be granted further support and respect in these endeavours to help them continue to overcome challenges and work to build peace (Olivius and Hedström, 2020).

Myanmar provides the most promising examples of IPL of the three case studies, but they were by no means consistent. In our interviews, we found that young women are routinely confident leaders, though they do identify gender- and age-based barriers to their leadership. Throughout our discussions, there was general acknowledgement that young

women have had different life experiences when it comes to their relationship with the conflict and the pursuit of peace. One young woman told us: 'According to their life experiences, their performances [with regards to peace and social justice] must be different' (Young woman, Myanmar, Interview 1, hereafter YWM1). Similarly, another noted that:

> Young women leaders are different to other kind[s] of leaders particularly in experience and maturity. Some young women leaders are different in, well, organizing, good networking with other groups and taking feedback from others, as well as their optimism and capability to work [on] any tasks . . . (MYW2).

Similarly, there was recognition of the different skills that each generation may bring. One young woman told us that:

> Although young leaders are less experienced, they are energetic but still need to learn more skills, such as organizing and decision making. However, older leaders and young leaders can work together as if they have mutual respect and peer learning as well as common value (MYW1).

Views on whether young women leaders are taken seriously as peace leaders within their community were mixed. Many noted that things were starting to change in Myanmar, and that their broader communities were beginning to take their contributions to peace seriously. One young woman told us that:

> Young women leaders have sympathy and therefore they [are] taken seriously in their community. And also there are people who believe in them [and enable] them to work with confidence in their community. Therefore, these young women leaders are taken seriously in their community (MYW3).

Adding to this, another reported that:

> For young women leaders to be taken *more* seriously, they should change themselves to be more skilful, more decisive to do right, shar[e] knowledge with others and to be prepared for all the challenges that might come unexpectedly. And in order to change the male perspective and community perspective, young women leaders should stand as a role model for others (MYW5).

However, older women did not necessarily share this optimism. In interviews with older women peace advocates from, or working in, Myanmar, they noted that younger women were being excluded from peace leadership roles. One older woman stated: 'In Myanmar, people usually undermine young people. I do not see much intergenerational leadership for young women and girls' (Stakeholder Myanmar 01), while another noted that:

> So, the older women are reluctant to give space to young women, they are reluctant to empower young women. Young people who are around 30ish, they are so smart, but they are not able to come up because people are not giving a way (Stakeholder Myanmar 02).

In a similar vein another noted that 'Older women do not want to pass on the leadership and do not want to give space to young women. But I think it is not only women. Older men also do [things] like that' (Stakeholder Myanmar 03). While most of these

stakeholders were sympathetic to young women's leadership, some were not. In one case, an older woman noted:

> The younger generations are more accessible to IT, but their interest is not in the social politics and leadership. There are only a handful of young women who are working in UN, NGOs, and INGOs who are interested in social politics. That's a very low number comparing to the whole nation (Stakeholder Myanmar 04).

While another reported that 'Existing old/senior leaders do not trust young people since young people lack experience, and young people usually do not convince senior leaders enough to trust them' (Stakeholder Myanmar 05).

It is also important to note that views across the country varied with ethnic identity, geographic location and experience with conflict playing important roles in young women's experiences of leadership. Both young and older women noted that gendered norms and stereotypes persist, particularly in rural and high conflict areas. In speaking about her village, which experienced ongoing conflict, one young woman noted:

> There is no gender equality, and gender discrimination stops women leading in the society . . .. Women leaders receive no respect [from] men, and also they are pressured by experienced and elder ones. Thus, the young women leaders are not taken seriously in their community (MYW4).

This negatively impacted opportunities for intergenerational leadership among women. An older woman confirmed this:

> When existing women leaders want to pass on the leadership, it depends on the geographic location. It depends on the recipient's experience of being oppressed in conflict. For example, a woman with experience of extreme oppression, she won't take up the leadership position even if she is given that position (Stakeholder Myanmar 06).

Similarly, another noted that, particularly in high conflict areas, 'We still do not see clearly that – women passing on their leadership to one another' (Stakeholder Myanmar 06).

Overall, of the case studies presented here, even in the face of ongoing conflict and significant challenges to women's peace leadership generally, Myanmar in many ways demonstrates a promising case for advancing efforts towards IPL. Nevertheless, the ongoing challenges young women leaders face serve as a crucial reminder that even in spaces where young women peace leaders may be confident, experienced and even in some cases well supported, attention to addressing persistent, intersecting inequalities remain crucial to effectively advancing IPL.

Conclusion

Our three case studies suggest that IPL among women peacebuilders remains nascent, and is largely advanced by younger – rather than older – women. According to the young women with whom we spoke, age-based hierarchies remain the primary barrier for young women's inclusion in women's peace leadership, while a combination of gender- and age-based power dynamics undermine broader community efforts for IPL.

Furthermore, the examples of IPL we found were far more likely to be among informal activities, rather than in formalised structures of peace practice.

Yet all three cases, in different ways, are at critical points in their peace journey. As Bougainville moves towards independence, Myanmar experiences renewed violence, and Nepal experiences stable national leadership born after the signing of the peace agreement, ensuring that structures that will sustain peace are in place is critical. Noting this, we advocate for local, national, regional and global actors to look to IPL as a structure for enduring peace. We agree with Podder (2022) that, for sustainable intergenerational peacebuilding to occur, older generations must enable and facilitate youth inclusion, while youth will need to collaborate purposefully with older generations 'to create the necessary changes in the organisational, institutional, and societal politics, structures, values, and norms' (p. 17). This will inevitably and inherently be a long-term process, as even in settings where formal peace agreements have been signed, the fundamental changes needed to solidify peace will take generations (Podder, 2022: 11). Our research suggests a broad range of efforts in formal and informal settings could contribute to these aims. These include, but are not limited to: wider community membership of both formal and informal leadership roles; reserving spaces for young women to actively contribute at national, regional and global events aimed at peacebuilding; supporting dedicated programming for young women, especially featuring peer leadership models in which young women can share skills and knowledge and ensuring access to safe spaces for young women to discuss issues uniquely impacting them across a range of formal and informal settings (e.g. policy forums, schools, workplaces and community groups). These are real prospects for IPL as an approach to formal and informal peacebuilding efforts that are inclusive and promote sustainability. However, all actors involved in peacebuilding will be required to make concerted efforts to join the dots that will enable better theorising, researching, supporting and practicing IPL.

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Note

1. For example, ASEAN's first Youth Development Index defined people aged 15–35 years as youth (The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), 2017), whereas the State of the Pacific Youth Report highlights that national policies in the Pacific have minimum ages for youth as young as 12 and maximum ages as high as 35 (Clarke and Azzopardi, 2019).

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