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Women in Peacekeeping Missions: Examining the Impact of Gender Participation on Defense Diplomacy and Confidence-Building in the ASEAN Region

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Abstract

This study examines the expanding role of women in peacekeeping operations within the ASEAN region and their contributions to defense diplomacy and confidence-building measures (CBMs). Situated within the global Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, the integration of gender perspectives in peacekeeping enhances the legitimacy, effectiveness, and sustainability of missions. Anchored in feminist security theory and the defense diplomacy framework, the research analyzes empirical evidence from Indonesia, the Philippines, and Cambodia—three ASEAN member states that have increased female deployment in UN and regional peacekeeping initiatives. Employing qualitative case studies and policy document analysis, the findings demonstrate that female peacekeepers strengthen defense diplomacy by fostering interpersonal engagement, cross-cultural communication, and community-level trust-building. They positively influence local perceptions of security forces, improve access to vulnerable populations, and support post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation processes. Nevertheless, persistent institutional and cultural barriers, including tokenism, limited leadership

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opportunities, and inadequate gender-sensitive training, constrain the full potential of women's participation. The study concludes that mainstreaming gender perspectives in defense institutions, expanding capacity-building initiatives, and promoting regionally coherent ASEAN policies for inclusive peacekeeping are essential steps forward. The findings affirm that meaningful participation of women in peacekeeping is both a moral imperative and a strategic necessity for advancing regional peace, stability, and cooperation.

Keywords: Women in Peacekeeping; Defense Diplomacy; ASEAN; Confidence-Building Measures; Women, Peace and Security (WPS)

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the global peace and security agenda has increasingly emphasized the importance of gender inclusion, particularly in peacekeeping missions. The landmark United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) marked a paradigm shift by recognizing women not merely as victims of conflict but as critical agents of peace, diplomacy, and reconstruction (Aggestam & Eitrem Holmgren, 2022). This normative transformation has inspired regional organizations, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), to integrate gender perspectives into their security architecture and defense cooperation mechanisms. ASEAN's adoption of the Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security (2021–2025) reflects this commitment, promoting women's participation in peace processes, conflict prevention, and post-conflict reconstruction (Cárdenas & Olivius, 2021). Yet, despite these formal commitments, women's representation in ASEAN member states' peacekeeping contingents and defense diplomacy remains limited and often symbolic. Where women have been deployed in meaningful roles, however, they have demonstrated the capacity to transform peacekeeping dynamics by fostering trust with local communities, mitigating gender-based violence, and enhancing the legitimacy of missions (Vahedi et al., 2024).

Scholarly literature underscores the evolving role of women in peacekeeping from marginal involvement to strategic necessity. Research highlights that women enhance operational effectiveness by improving community engagement, facilitating access to vulnerable groups, and addressing gender-based violence more effectively (Blanton et al., 2023). Their participation contributes to the humanization of military operations and

strengthens civil-military relations, especially in culturally sensitive environments. In Southeast Asia, progress has been uneven: countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia have made efforts to deploy female peacekeepers, with Indonesia's Kartini Peacekeeping Center actively promoting gender-inclusive training. Nevertheless, the numbers remain below global expectations (Fitriani et al., 2025), and scholarship on this regional dynamic is still limited compared to studies in Africa or Latin America (Singh & Raj, 2025).

Within this context, defense diplomacy provides a valuable lens to assess the strategic significance of women's participation. Traditionally understood as the peaceful use of military resources to advance foreign policy goals through joint exercises, training exchanges, and peacekeeping deployments (Sufiuddin et al., 2025), defense diplomacy has increasingly expanded to include normative elements such as transparency, trust-building, and inclusiveness (Sumertha et al., 2020). Women's involvement in these activities not only enhances legitimacy but also projects soft power, positioning states as progressive and trustworthy actors in multilateral forums (Isnarti et al., 2023). In ASEAN, such efforts are evident in the gradual mainstreaming of gender considerations into defense dialogues, though implementation remains inconsistent across member states (Fadillah et al., 2020).

Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) are central to ASEAN's defense cooperation, functioning as mechanisms to reduce mistrust and prevent conflict through transparency, communication, and cooperation. Historically, CBMs in the region have included joint military exercises, information exchanges, and participation in defense dialogue forums such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) (Hadi & Soesilowati, 2018). Recent regional initiatives now indicate growing recognition that gender participation itself can serve as a CBM by signaling inclusivity, enhancing transparency, and strengthening legitimacy in defense cooperation. For instance, ASEAN's Regional Plan of Action on WPS underscores the role of women in defense policy dialogues, peacekeeping, and regional security governance (Armanto et al., 2024).

To analyze these dynamics, this study applies three complementary theoretical perspectives. Feminist International Relations (IR) theory challenges state-centric and militarized understandings of security, arguing instead for human security approaches that incorporate women's lived experiences and roles in conflict prevention and resolution

(Paramasatya, 2017). In peacekeeping, this perspective highlights how women's participation fosters community trust, facilitates dialogue, and provides gender-sensitive responses to local needs (Zahar & Deschamps-Laporte, 2023). The defense diplomacy framework advanced by Ilmi et al. (2023) further situates women's participation within broader patterns of military cooperation, emphasizing its role in building trust, enhancing transparency, and embedding cooperative norms in regional relations. Finally, normative institutionalism (Masyrofah & Lubis, 2022) helps explain how gender inclusion is diffused and institutionalized as a regional norm in ASEAN, as reflected in the adoption of WPS principles in defense and security dialogues.

Guided by these frameworks, the present study investigates how female participation in peacekeeping missions functions as a tool of defense diplomacy and confidence-building in Southeast Asia. Specifically, it examines the cases of Indonesia and the Philippines to explore how gender-inclusive deployments strengthen bilateral and multilateral military cooperation, project soft power, and contribute to ASEAN's security architecture. The research seeks to answer two key questions: (1) How does female participation in peacekeeping operations affect the conduct and perception of defense diplomacy among ASEAN member states? (2) In what ways does the inclusion of women in peacekeeping missions contribute to confidence-building measures (CBMs) and trust enhancement in ASEAN's regional security framework? By addressing these questions, the study aims to bridge the gap between gender studies and security studies in the Southeast Asian context, contributing to both theoretical debates and practical policy discussions on inclusive and legitimate security governance.

METHODS

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore how the participation of women in peacekeeping missions contributes to defense diplomacy and confidence-building in the ASEAN region. A case study approach was chosen to facilitate in-depth analysis of country-specific experiences, institutional practices, and normative developments related to gender inclusion in peacekeeping within ASEAN. This method

allows for contextual understanding of how women's roles influence diplomatic engagement and regional trust-building mechanisms.

Case Study Selection

The two primary case studies are Indonesia and the Philippines, selected based on their active involvement in United Nations peacekeeping missions and their institutional efforts to promote women in security and defense roles. Both countries are also signatories to ASEAN agreements on gender mainstreaming and have contributed to the development of the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security (ASEAN Secretariat, 2021). These cases provide contrasting yet complementary perspectives on how gender participation intersects with national defense diplomacy and ASEAN's multilateral security framework.

Data Collection

The study relies on secondary data collection from multiple reputable sources:

- Official government documents (e.g., Ministry of Defense white papers, peacekeeping deployment reports).
- ASEAN policy frameworks (e.g., ADMM statements, WPS action plans).
- United Nations peacekeeping statistics and gender disaggregated data.
- Reports from regional and international organizations (e.g., UN Women, ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation).
- Peer-reviewed academic literature and institutional studies on feminist IR, defense diplomacy, and peacekeeping.

Where available, qualitative interviews with policymakers, peacekeeping trainers, or deployed female personnel will also be included to strengthen contextual insights. Due to limitations in field access, interviews are supplementary rather than primary data sources.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis, identifying recurring patterns and themes across official documents and literature. Key analytical categories included:

1. Policy commitments to gender equality in defense;
2. Actual deployments and roles of women in peacekeeping operations;

3. Linkages between gender participation and diplomatic signaling;
4. Evidence of contribution to CBMs at bilateral or multilateral levels.

The analysis was guided by the theoretical lenses of feminist IR, defense diplomacy, and normative institutionalism, as detailed in the previous section. These frameworks informed the interpretation of how gendered practices are embedded in ASEAN's security discourse and operationalized through peacekeeping.

Ethical Considerations and Limitations

This study maintains adherence to ethical research practices, including the proper citation of all sources and the anonymization of interview data, where applicable. A key limitation is the reliance on secondary data, which may not fully capture ground-level experiences of female peacekeepers. Moreover, cross-country comparisons are bounded by the availability and transparency of official data in Southeast Asia, where security information is often restricted.

Despite these limitations, the triangulation of multiple sources enhances the credibility and validity of the findings. The chosen cases provide valuable insights into the regional dynamics of gender inclusion in peacekeeping as a diplomatic tool.

RESULTS

Case Studies And Empirical Findings

This section explores the empirical dimensions of how women's participation in peacekeeping missions contributes to defense diplomacy and confidence building in the ASEAN region. It focuses on two illustrative ASEAN member states Indonesia and the Philippines which have demonstrated different pathways in integrating gender into peace operations and security cooperation.

a. Indonesia: Expanding Gender Participation for Strategic Signaling

Indonesia has consistently ranked among the top ASEAN contributors to United Nations peacekeeping operations, with increasing emphasis on female participation. The Indonesian Peacekeeping Training Center (IPTC) offers gender-inclusive modules in compliance with UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. Indonesia has deployed

female officers in UN missions such as MONUSCO and UNIFIL, which strengthens its image as a promoter of soft power and multilateral norms (Nurislamia, 2023).

Through regional defense diplomacy platforms such as the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM), Indonesia has advocated gender mainstreaming in defense cooperation. These efforts have elevated its role in fostering transparency and mutual understanding in ASEAN defense interactions (Erwan & Anindya, 2021).

b. The Philippines: Intitutionalizing Gender Norms in Military Peacekeeping

The Philippines was an early adopter of a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, which has influenced its military and foreign policy approach. Female personnel from the Philippines play vital roles in civil-military coordination, community engagement, and medical assistance in UN missions. The Philippine Army Peacekeeping Operations Center has institutionalized gender training that aligns with local conflict sensitivity and gender-responsive approaches (Malik et al., 2024). By engaging in ASEAN WPS Focal Points Network meetings and proposing joint gender-inclusive training modules, the Philippines contributes to regional defense diplomacy through norm-sharing and institutional trust-building.

Table 1. Comparative Table of Gender Participation Impact in ASEAN Peacekeeping Mission

Indicatior	Indonesia	Philippines
Female Deployment in UN Missions	Active in UNIFIL, MONUSCO, MINUSCA	Active in UNDOF, MINUSTAH, UNMIL
Gender Policy Framework	Peacekeeping curriculum integrated with WPS at IPTC	National Action Plan on WPS since 2010
Key Institutions Involved	TNI, Ministry of Defense, IPTC	Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), OPAPRU
Role in ASEAN Forums	Advocacy for gender in ADMM & ADMM-Plus	Leadership in ASEAN WPS Focal Points Network
Nature of Contributions	Military observers, engineers, medical units	Civil-military coordination, community outreach
Diplomatic Function	Strategic signaling and regional soft power	Norm entrepreneurship and regional trust-building
Impact on CBMs	Enhances interoperability and transparency in regional operations	Promotes inclusivity and legitimacy in ASEAN defense cooperation

Table 1. Comparative Table of Gender Participation Impact in ASEAN Peacekeeping Mission illustrates the comparative contributions of Indonesia and the

Philippines in mainstreaming gender within regional peacekeeping efforts. In terms of female deployment in UN missions, Indonesia has consistently deployed women personnel to missions such as UNIFIL, MONUSCO, and MINUSCA, particularly in technical roles such as engineers and medical units. Meanwhile, the Philippines has deployed women to UNDOF, MINUSTAH, and UNMIL, focusing more on civil-military coordination and community outreach. Regarding the gender policy framework, Indonesia has integrated the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda into its peacekeeping curriculum at the Indonesia Peacekeeping Training Center (IPTC). In contrast, the Philippines stands out as a pioneer in the region by adopting a National Action Plan on WPS as early as 2010.

In terms of key institutions involved, Indonesia relies mainly on the TNI, the Ministry of Defense, and the IPTC. The Philippines, however, engages both military and civilian actors through the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity (OPAPRU), reflecting a more integrated approach. With respect to the role in ASEAN forums, Indonesia positions itself as an advocate for gender issues within ADMM and ADMM-Plus, whereas the Philippines demonstrates stronger leadership through the ASEAN WPS Focal Points Network. This distinction highlights Indonesia's institutional advocacy and the Philippines' normative entrepreneurship within ASEAN.

The nature of contributions also differs: Indonesia deploys female peacekeepers primarily as military observers, engineers, and medical personnel, while the Philippines emphasizes civil-military coordination and community engagement. From a diplomatic function perspective, Indonesia's contribution operates as strategic signaling and regional soft power, while the Philippines' role centers on norm entrepreneurship and building regional trust. These orientations shape their respective impact on Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs): Indonesia's participation enhances interoperability and transparency in regional operations, while the Philippines promotes inclusivity and legitimacy in ASEAN defense cooperation.

c. Synthesis of Findings

Both Indonesia and the Philippines provide empirical support for the thesis that women's participation in peacekeeping advances defense diplomacy goals in Southeast Asia. Their comparative approaches show that:

- Gender-inclusive operations improve operational legitimacy in host nations.

- Participation of women serves as a diplomatic asset in regional and international forums.
- Institutionalizing gender norms supports confidence-building measures by emphasizing shared values, norms, and trust.

These findings align with the emerging ASEAN security culture, which increasingly emphasizes human security, inclusiveness, and multilateral cooperation. Therefore, gender participation is no longer peripheral it is central to shaping ASEAN's defense diplomacy architecture.

Trends in Female Deployment in ASEAN Peacekeeping Missions

Female deployment across ASEAN peacekeeping missions has grown, but remains uneven. Indonesia leads with increasing female personnel in UN missions such as MONUSCO (Congo) and UNIFIL (Lebanon), while the Philippines and Malaysia have made moderate progress. Thailand shows promising normative support but slower operational advancement (UN Peacekeeping, 2022).

Table 2. Trends in Female Deployment in ASEAN Peacekeeping Missions

Country	Total Peacekeepers (2022)	Female Peacekeepers	Percentage of Female Participation	Key Mission
Indonesia	2,170	160	7.4%	UNIFIL, MONUSCO
Philippines	725	48	6.6%	UNDOF, MINUSCA
Malaysia	630	36	5.7%	UNIFIL, UNMISS
Thailand	455	22	4.8%	UNMISS, MINUSCA

Sources: UN Peacekeeping Data (2022)

These figures highlight a growing awareness of the importance of gender inclusion in operational missions, but also indicate a substantial gender gap compared to the UN target of 15% women in peace operations by 2028 (UN Women, 2023).

Role Specialization on Operational Integration

Women in ASEAN peacekeeping missions are frequently assigned to roles such as medical personnel, civil-military coordinators, community liaisons, and military police (Davies et al., 2014). However, combat leadership and tactical operational planning remain predominantly male-dominated. This limits the transformative potential of gender participation and slows institutional change. Despite these structural limitations, women peacekeepers are instrumental in enhancing civil-military relations, mediating community grievances, and promoting cultural sensitivity in areas of operation key components of confidence-building between military forces and civilian populations (Bove et al., 2024; Davies et al., 2014).

Impact on Defense Diplomacy

ASEAN countries have increasingly utilized female peacekeepers as instruments of normative signaling in both regional and global arenas, particularly in support of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. This strategic incorporation of gender into defense diplomacy reflects not only a commitment to international norms but also a calculated soft power maneuver. By showcasing female participation in peacekeeping operations, ASEAN militaries aim to project an image of progressive, inclusive, and responsible security actors. This normative signaling helps legitimize the role of armed forces in non-traditional security domains and situates ASEAN member states as contributors to global peace frameworks, thereby enhancing their reputational capital in multilateral forums (Bergman Rosamond & Kronsell, 2018).

The soft power implications are particularly significant in the context of defense diplomacy. Female peacekeepers symbolize a shift from hard power posturing to dialogue-oriented, trust-building engagement, which aligns closely with ASEAN's emphasis on consensus, non-intervention, and peaceful conflict resolution. Their presence contributes to reshaping the perception of militaries from warfighting institutions to peace-supporting actors, thus broadening the diplomatic maneuverability of defense establishments. This expanded diplomatic space allows military actors to participate more actively in Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogues, humanitarian missions, and civil-military coordination efforts domains where traditional military presence may otherwise be politically sensitive or restricted.

Indonesia, in particular, stands out as a regional leader in institutionalizing gender-sensitive defense practices. Its defense white papers have increasingly incorporated gender language and WPS-related goals, reflecting a deliberate narrative shift toward inclusive security. Moreover, Indonesia has prominently featured the role of its female peacekeepers during ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) forums and United Nations briefings, portraying gender inclusion as a cornerstone of its inclusive defense diplomacy (Ministry of Defense Indonesia, 2021; Storey, 2021). By doing so, Indonesia not only reinforces its image as a normative middle power but also contributes to confidence-building efforts, signaling openness, transparency, and a commitment to multilateralism through gender-inclusive security practices. In this way, the deployment of female peacekeepers in ASEAN is not merely a matter of representation, but a strategic diplomatic asset one that strengthens defense diplomacy by integrating gender as a vector of legitimacy, trust, and norm diffusion across security institutions.

DISCUSSION

The findings presented in Table 1. Comparative Table of Gender Participation Impact in ASEAN Peacekeeping Mission highlight important dimensions in which women's participation in peacekeeping contributes to ASEAN's defense diplomacy and confidence-building measures. The evidence shows that both Indonesia and the Philippines have strategically deployed women in different UN peacekeeping missions Indonesia through UNIFIL, MONUSCO, and MINUSCA, and the Philippines through UNDOF, MINUSTAH, and UNMIL. While Indonesia's deployment is oriented toward technical and medical roles such as military observers, engineers, and healthcare providers, the Philippines places stronger emphasis on civil-military coordination and community outreach. This indicates that the two states conceptualize the role of women in peacekeeping differently, aligning with their national priorities in defense diplomacy. For Indonesia, the deployment of women represents an extension of its strategic signaling and projection of soft power, while for the Philippines, it functions more as norm entrepreneurship and regional trust-building. These findings directly address the research objective of identifying how gender participation contributes not only to operational effectiveness but also to ASEAN's broader security architecture.

A closer analysis reveals that women's participation is gradually reshaping how regional security is defined in ASEAN. Traditional notions of deterrence and state-centric security are increasingly supplemented by human security perspectives that emphasize protection of civilians, local engagement, and gender sensitivity. This trend resonates with ASEAN's Comprehensive Security vision and the APSC Blueprint 2025, which explicitly promotes "inclusive, people-oriented, and people-centered" approaches. Women in field operations foster empathy, build community trust, and reduce miscommunication between military personnel and local populations factors that are particularly vital in conflict-prone areas. Such outcomes validate the argument by Davies et al. (2014) that the integration of gender perspectives into peacekeeping operations can enhance legitimacy and effectiveness. Thus, the presence of female peacekeepers is not merely symbolic but substantively contributes to stability and confidence-building in regional operations.

When compared to previous studies, the present findings show strong consistency with global and regional scholarship. Sufiuddin et al. (2025) emphasizes that female peacekeepers are often perceived as neutral actors capable of diffusing tensions, which aligns with the Philippine experience in deploying women for community liaison and early warning roles. Similarly, Davies et al. (2014) argue that ASEAN states utilize peacekeeping participation as part of their defense diplomacy portfolios, a dynamic also reflected in Indonesia's strategic use of female deployments to signal commitment to global peace norms while enhancing credibility in ADMM and ADMM-Plus forums. However, the research also reveals challenges that mirror those identified by Pratt and Richter-Devroe (2011) and True (2013), namely the persistence of gender stereotypes, insufficient infrastructure such as separate facilities and protective equipment, and the lack of mentoring systems for women officers. These barriers hinder the sustainability of women's integration in peacekeeping and defense diplomacy, showing that despite policy commitments, institutional implementation remains uneven across ASEAN.

The implications of these findings extend to both theory and practice. From a theoretical standpoint, the results strengthen the argument that gender inclusion should be viewed as a strategic asset rather than a symbolic gesture. As Huber et al. (2022) demonstrate, women's meaningful participation can alter institutional cultures and diplomatic practices, thereby transforming security cooperation into a more inclusive and legitimate process. In practice, this study highlights the potential for ASEAN to position itself as a leader in the Global South by institutionalizing gender-sensitive defense

diplomacy guidelines. Such initiatives would not only enhance ASEAN's credibility in global forums such as the UN but also demonstrate normative leadership in inclusive governance, consistent with Kronsell (2012) and UN Women (2021). Furthermore, enhanced collaboration among ASEAN Peacekeeping Centers, defense academies, and the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation could create standardized training modules and professional career pathways for women in military diplomacy, ensuring that WPS principles are embedded into long-term institutional structures.

Beyond advancing operational effectiveness, gender participation in peacekeeping also contributes to strengthening Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) within ASEAN. Indonesia's deployment of women enhances interoperability and transparency in multinational operations, while the Philippines' approach promotes inclusivity and legitimacy in defense cooperation. This dual contribution suggests that women's participation can act as a bridge between traditional military diplomacy and the people-centered approaches envisioned in ASEAN's regional security framework. By advancing both state-level defense cooperation and community-based trust, gender inclusion reinforces ASEAN's layered security architecture and deepens the political legitimacy of defense dialogues under ADMM and ADMM-Plus.

Nonetheless, the research also identifies clear institutional and structural barriers that limit the full realization of these benefits. Many ASEAN member states, aside from the Philippines, still lack fully operationalized and adequately funded National Action Plans (NAPs) on Women, Peace, and Security. Without such frameworks, women's participation risks being ad hoc and symbolic rather than institutionalized and sustainable. Additionally, the absence of gender-sensitive infrastructure, limited career advancement opportunities, and entrenched stereotypes reduce the retention and promotion of female personnel in peacekeeping roles. These challenges resonate with the critiques raised by True (2013) and Pratt and Richter-Devroe (2011), who underscore the importance of structural reforms to transform gender inclusion from rhetoric into practice.

Finally, the limitations of this study should be acknowledged. The analysis is based primarily on two case studies Indonesia and the Philippines which, while illustrative, do not fully represent the diversity of ASEAN member states. Countries such as Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia may have different institutional contexts and policy orientations that merit separate analysis. Moreover, this research relied heavily on documentary and

secondary sources, which may not capture the lived experiences of female peacekeepers in field operations. Potential biases also arise from the reliance on official policy documents, which tend to overstate progress while underreporting institutional resistance. Future research could address these limitations by employing field interviews, conducting comparative studies across a wider range of ASEAN states, and adopting longitudinal approaches to assess how gender participation evolves over time in both peacekeeping missions and defense diplomacy.

In summary, this discussion underscores that women's participation in peacekeeping missions is not a peripheral issue but central to ASEAN's efforts to build a comprehensive, inclusive, and legitimate security architecture. By enhancing trust, transparency, and people-centered approaches, female peacekeepers contribute both to operational effectiveness and to broader diplomatic objectives. However, realizing the full potential of this contribution requires overcoming entrenched institutional barriers and embedding gender inclusion into ASEAN's security governance structures.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that the inclusion of women in peacekeeping missions within ASEAN is not only a normative imperative of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda but also a strategic asset that strengthens defense diplomacy and confidence-building measures (CBMs). By drawing on the cases of Indonesia, the Philippines, and Cambodia, the analysis demonstrates that female peacekeepers contribute to improved civil-military relations, operational effectiveness, and trust-building with local communities, thereby advancing ASEAN's comprehensive security vision. The integration of feminist security perspectives with defense diplomacy frameworks highlights that gender participation is transformative: it enhances transparency, promotes multilateral cooperation, and embeds human security into ASEAN's evolving defense architecture.

At the same time, the study acknowledges important limitations. The analysis was primarily based on documentary and secondary sources, which may not fully capture the lived experiences of female peacekeepers in the field. In addition, the scope of the study was limited to a small number of ASEAN member states, reducing the generalizability of findings to the broader regional context. Institutional differences among countries such as

Thailand, Vietnam, or Malaysia, which were not covered, may reveal alternative pathways or challenges in mainstreaming gender within defense diplomacy.

Future research should therefore expand the empirical base by incorporating field interviews with female peacekeepers, defense officials, and community stakeholders to provide richer, firsthand insights into gendered experiences of peacekeeping. Comparative studies across a broader range of ASEAN member states, as well as longitudinal analyses tracking the implementation of National Action Plans on WPS and ADMM-Plus initiatives, would further illuminate the sustainability and depth of gender integration in regional defense cooperation. By addressing these gaps, subsequent research can strengthen the theoretical and practical foundations for embedding gender participation as a permanent feature of ASEAN's security architecture.

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