

CASE STUDY

Garissa County Women's Peace Movement:

Women peacebuilders driving inter-county peace in north-eastern Kenya

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In north-east Kenya, the Garissa County Women's Peace Movement (GCWPM, or Garissa Women), a women's network of representatives from local peace committees of Garissa County, facilitates dialogue to support peaceful coexistence between communities. Through the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund Rapid Response Window (RRW) grant, and with support from Conciliation Resources, they worked to increase women's leadership in implementing two inter-county peace agreements: the 2016 Nanyuki 2 Peace Accord between Garissa and Isiolo Counties, and the Tana 1 Declaration between Garissa and Tana River Counties. These agreements had previously been negotiated between the county governments to address outbreaks of violence between communities from the inter-county borders, arising from boundary and resource disputes and access to pasture and water sources. However, the implementation of the agreements had stalled, with regular – often monthly – outbreaks of inter-county violence, due in part to a lack of advocacy and ownership over the agreements and increasing climatic stress on resources.

“There were a lot of community clashes and conflict between the community living in Isiolo County and Garissa County, but recently, GCWPM brought us together. We had several meetings and forums concerning the peace and security issues in our area. We formed a committee that lies between the two communities [that comes] together in case of any conflict.”

Abdikadir Abdullahi, Senior Chief from Gabatulla, Isiolo county

To support implementation of the agreements, GCWPM led dialogues and advocacy sessions within and between the conflicting counties and national government representatives. Throughout, they worked to ensure that women were involved in advocacy efforts with policymakers and in leading community engagement to support implementation of the agreements.

Achievements

- **GCWPM progressed implementation of the terms of the 2016 Nanyuki 2 Peace Accord and Tana 1 Declaration, between Garissa County and Isiolo and Tana River Counties.** Since Garissa Women's efforts to support implementation of the agreements, no new cross-border conflict incidents have been reported between July 2023 and November 2024 in the three Counties.
- **GCWPM has strengthened its reputation as a trusted and legitimate mediator.** Following their work with the Garissa County Commissioner and local communities, the Commissioner and two communities in conflict requested that GCWPM mediate an emerging conflict between two sub-clans.
- **GCWPM has enabled the meaningful participation of women in county-level peace processes.** After GCWPM's meetings with Garissa, Isiolo, Tana River and national government administrative officers, the government provided assurances that women will be meaningfully included in the County and Sub-County Peace Committees convened by the Ministry of Interior. Women are also now fully represented in Lagdera, Garbatula, Ijara, Tana River and Garissa township Sub-County Peace Committees.



Funded by



Women-led strategies to implement stalled peace agreements

GCWPM worked to address the obstacles that had hindered implementation of the peace agreements, and revive the accords. They convened women-led dialogues and activities to translate the terms of the agreements into practical, on-the-ground actions that addressed root causes of the conflict. Specifically, they focused on less politically contentious issues around land access and resources – rather than the more sensitive boundary dispute – and were able to establish interest and engagement from local leadership and communities. By facilitating dialogues outside of drought periods to agree on practical approaches to water and pasture management across conflict lines, Garissa Women helped to establish a water and pasture management agreement in July 2023, which has since reduced the incidence of cross-border conflicts.

GCWPM also created Joint Community Peace Structures composed of men and women from all sides of the conflict, to generate community buy-in for the peace agreements. These groups plan and facilitate community dialogues, identify opportunities for cross-community cooperation and resource sharing, and hold open discussions on reconciliation and the implementation of peace agreements. The Peace Structures also promote the active participation of women in leadership positions, involving women in decision-making processes and peace negotiations.

Recognising potential resistance from traditional power holders and peace actors to women's participation in peacebuilding, Garissa Women worked to secure buy-in from these stakeholders. They collaborated with male local peace committee members, heads of counties, and representatives from the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) and National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management.

They also explained to the male-led Local Peace Committees that women were not trying to take on the 'role' of men, but that men and women could work together to enhance ongoing peacebuilding activities. Continuous engagement led to an agreement between GCWPM and the NCIC to collaborate on advocacy campaigns encouraging the role of women in peace agreements.

ABAAY-ABAAY

Abaay-Abaay (sister-sister) meetings were critical in building trust between conflicting communities. GCWPM organised these meetings to bring women from the conflicting counties together in a neutral space to share their stories and food. Food and storytelling are particularly significant within local Somali (and other Cushitic groups') culture in north-east Kenya, and a highly relevant way to build and strengthen relationships. *Abaay-Abaay* meetings helped foster a sense of solidarity among women from conflicting communities, provided a space to share their different experiences of conflict, and helped to 'demystify' the other side.

Abaay-Abaay spaces were an important first step in enabling implementation of the stalled peace agreements. In *Abaay-Abaay* meetings, women were encouraged to pass on messages of peace to their families, in particular male relations, to help establish trust before other cross-county dialogues with men and other groups in these communities.

“Since the Abaay-Abaay experience, the communities feel the women are more free with each other and women are empowered”

Rukia, RRW workshop participant

The Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) Rapid Response Window (RRW) is a funding mechanism that addresses urgent funding gaps with targeted, short-term support to increase women's participation in peace processes and the implementation of peace agreements. RRW is a flexible financing tool supporting quality interventions to enhance the capacity of local women to prevent conflict, respond to crises and emergencies, and seize key peacebuilding opportunities.

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Cover photo: A GCWPM member highlighting the positive role women can play in peace and mediation process. © GCWPM

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