



GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE PEACE: WHAT, WHO AND HOW

Lessons from the Philippines and West Africa



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MAY 2025

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda faces an uncertain future. Systemic and pervasive anti-gender backlash, rising militarisation and the decline of multilateralism pose a significant challenge to realising the vision of the agenda: a gender-transformative peace that addresses the underlying drivers of conflict which most heavily impact women and other minoritised and excluded groups and perpetuate their exclusion from peacebuilding processes. Furthermore, progress on the Participation pillar – fundamental to the achievement of the WPS agenda’s vision – is stalling.

In the 25th anniversary year of the WPS agenda’s founding United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, it is important to understand, and not let go of, what has worked in creating the right enabling environment for the WPS vision to take hold.

This study was therefore conceived to analyse and capture how to foster enabling environments for gender-transformative peace. It explores how predominant approaches to designing and managing peace processes enables or inhibits the meaningful participation of women and other minoritised and excluded groups in peace processes, and sets out practical, context-informed strategies for creating peace processes that facilitate gender-transformative outcomes.

WHAT: how the type of peace process or mechanism affects gender-transformative potential

The type of peace process deeply affects gender-transformative potential. Security mechanisms are rarely conducive to gender-transformative outcomes and cannot be considered ‘substitutes’ for peacebuilding processes. Local and sub-national peace mechanisms, meanwhile, can be highly effective at addressing gendered conflict drivers; but this must not be assumed, for they can be just as exclusive and elitist as high-level processes. Often two-way communication between different threads of peacebuilding is insufficient, particularly in contexts where conflict is deeply fragmented and there are many actors seeking to achieve peace and conflict resolution by different means.

WHO: how those with a role, or power, in a peace process affect gender-transformative potential

Women peacebuilders, and those from minoritised groups, continue to use their agency to play a critical role in the advancement of gender-transformative

peace. They contribute to this goal in myriad ways evidenced through this research, including through the contextualisation and localisation of global frameworks to support implementation of gendered peace agreement commitments. However, too often the onus is on them to advance this work – not enough attention is paid to the role of those in positions of power, including powerful men, and military and political leaders. This research shows that, while powerholders’ allyship can be deeply impactful, all too often they are not engaging closely enough with women peacebuilders to advance their meaningful participation, and not engaging in sufficient reflection on how their own role and power contributes to exclusion. The research indicates that a consensus-building and consultative approach could be used to ensure they do more in this regard.

HOW: how the peace process or mechanism is conducted affects gender-transformative potential

The way peace processes are designed and delivered is critical to the extent to which they are able to deliver gender-transformative outcomes. This research highlights how detailed, intersectional, gender-sensitive conflict analysis is critical to understanding the gendered drivers and effects of conflict – yet is still not consistently done well. Findings show that affirmative action by state institutions, civil society and international actors can contribute to ensuring women can have an influential role; and caution against ignoring, or insufficiently understanding, the barriers that affect the engagement of women and minoritised groups, including trauma and digital exclusion.

As part of this research process, participants were asked: “What strategies and actions could be taken by international peacebuilding and mediation actors to support inclusive and gender-transformative peace processes and outcomes?” The responses they gave, and the wider findings in this report, point to the following recommendations:



A participant presents their findings during a gender-sensitive conflict analysis workshop in the Philippines. © Emmanuel Sudario/Conciliation Resources 2024

Recommendations for governments and multilateral institutions

1. Integrate WPS objectives into security mechanisms.
2. Provide consistent funding and tailor funding modalities.
3. 'Impact multiply' existing funding and direct funding to grassroots peacebuilders.
4. Co-create rather than pre-determine project ambitions.
5. Exchange knowledge and experience on inclusion and peacebuilding.
6. Consolidate and expand good practice in creating enabling environments for gender-transformative peace.
7. Increase transparency and interaction between formal and informal peace processes.
8. Engage in 'minilateralism' on aspects of WPS where multilateral messaging is too challenging.
9. Build ownership of National Action Plans with civil society and across government.

Recommendations for INGOs and international civil society

10. Consider the political influence that governments and multilateral institutions can deploy to create enabling environments for gender-transformative peace.
11. Seize opportunities for normative change when governments take leadership.
12. Enhance the practice of trauma-informed peacebuilding through training and peer learning.
13. Partner with digital experts to understand how digital technology and artificial intelligence can support gender-transformative peacebuilding.

This report is the result of participatory, comparative research undertaken by Conciliation Resources in 2024. It draws on two analytical workshops involving peace practitioners, government representatives, and independent experts and academics: in Manila, focusing on the Bangsamoro region of the Philippines; and in Accra, focusing on the Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Ghana tri-border region in West Africa. Through triangulation with a literature review, and insights from two subsequent knowledge-sharing and sense-making workshops, the research seeks to draw conclusions of relevance to practitioners and policymakers globally.

2. RESEARCH RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 RATIONALE

Despite significant achievements, there is growing consensus that implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda has struggled to deliver on its ambitious vision: a gender-transformative peace that addresses the underlying drivers of conflict which most heavily impact women and other minoritised and excluded groups and perpetuate their exclusion from peacebuilding processes.¹ Critical to this is the stalled nature of work on the agenda's Participation pillar.

Data from analysis of over 50 peace processes indicates that women's participation is in fact taking a downturn.² When women have gained access to peace discussions, their presence has still too often been used to tick a box or legitimate decisions taken by others rather than meaningfully drive the agenda. Many of the reasons behind this are well documented.³ However, there is much less research on how predominant approaches to designing and managing peace processes have perpetuated these challenges. There is also growing demand for practical strategies to navigate these challenges and create a more enabling environment for peace processes that seek to be truly gender-transformative. While women and minoritised and excluded groups have deeply personal experiences and knowledge to contribute to this vision, the onus has for too long solely been on them to lead on this work. An enabling environment involves powerholders playing a more critical role.

While women have a critical role to play in realising the vision of gender-transformative peace processes, the onus has for too long solely been on them to lead this work. An enabling environment involves powerholders playing more of a role.

Conciliation Resources' interest stems from its experience in supporting participation and inclusion in peace processes and peacebuilding, and from research into how that happens. From our *Accord* on public participation in peace processes in 2002, to our *Accord* study of the roles women play in building peace in 2013, through to the *Accord* on navigating inclusion in peace processes published in 2019, participation and inclusion have been constant themes in our work.⁴

The following emerging challenges and opportunities for the meaningful participation of women and gender-transformative peace in 2025 have inspired this study:

2.2 A CHANGING PEACEBUILDING LANDSCAPE

Fragmentation of conflict and the rise of multimediation

Violent conflict is increasingly fragmented, operating as an intertwined set of local, national, transnational and geopolitical conflicts that form a complex and adaptive conflict system.⁵ This has given rise to 'multimediation': multiple overlapping mediation processes led, for example, by international organisations, individual and regional groupings of states, and private mediators. While these actors offer the potential to de-escalate conflict and unwind complex conflict systems, they often have competing or unclear positions when it comes to gender and the inclusion of minoritised groups' needs and perspectives.

The decline of the linear peace process and comprehensive agreements

The linear peace process model (of ceasefire, through to power sharing and political settlement, through to permanent conflict resolution and comprehensive agreement) is increasingly rare. This may reduce the space for wide-ranging negotiations between civil society, conflict parties and mediators, and the likelihood of 'formalised' inclusion in future peace processes. Indeed, the 2024 report of the UN Secretary-General on WPS indicates that the extent and level of detail to which gendered conflict drivers and effects are acknowledged in peace agreements is already reducing.

Emergence of regional mediation powers

Western states' engagement in peace processes and as signatories of peace agreements has decreased since the passing of UNSCR 1325.⁶ Conversely, states such as Kenya, Qatar and Türkiye, and regional and sub-regional organisations, are playing an increasingly influential role as mediators and third-party signatories.⁷ The UN's predominant role in mediation has also decreased in some cases (as demonstrated by the Russia, Türkiye and Iran-led Astana Process in Syria, which overtook the UN-led Geneva Process).⁸ This could signal a turning point – or at least a departure from unity of purpose – in mediation actors' commitment to normative frameworks around gender equality.⁹ Nevertheless, this cannot be assumed: Qatar, for example, has sought to deepen capacities of both male and female mediators while creating opportunities for younger diplomats' engagement through its Foreign Ministry's Diplomatic Institute.¹⁰

Decolonisation

Despite being conceived and driven by women in the Global Majority world, WPS has faced criticism for being applied in Western-centric ways that can be regarded as incompatible with local norms and counterproductive to local women peacebuilders' efforts.¹¹ Such narratives have been used to justify resistance to its goals. In recent years, the decolonisation agendaⁱ has gathered pace as a paradigm shift affecting the peacebuilding, humanitarian and development sectors. It presents a number of potential opportunities for advancing women's meaningful participation, for example by expanding local financing for and ownership of peace processes, advocating for intersectional approaches to inclusion (which move beyond the participation of 'elite' women such as those from wealthy or politically well-connected families), and promoting care-centred peacebuilding approaches.¹²

Militarisation and securitisation

In 2023, world military expenditure increased for the ninth consecutive year.¹³ Since 2018, the share of women uniformed personnel deployed in UN and EU peace operations has also increased.¹⁴ WPS has been criticised for moving away from its feminist and anti-war roots – with its focus on women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution – to a focus on 'making war safe for women' by increasing their participation in militaries and the security sector.¹⁵ WPS has also been increasingly instrumentalised against this backdrop, as seen in Afghanistan where the protection of women was used to justify military intervention.

Anti-gender backlash

Anti-gender backlash – pushback against gender equality and gender justice – is not new.¹⁶ Indeed, a lot can be learned on how to navigate this from gender practitioners in conflict contexts whose work has been defunded and subject to deep resistance for decades. However, in recent years anti-gender backlash has become more pervasive and systemic at the international level, manifesting through a variety of channels. These include misogyny online and the politicisation of WPS work as a 'Western agenda' used to discredit efforts and block funding for local organisations. Women and other minoritised groups, including gender and sexual minorities, face gender-specific threats to their safety, which can cause them to self-censor or withdraw from their peacebuilding work. In some cases the anti-gender backlash is state-sponsored; for example, use of the term 'gender' was banned in Iraq and Libya in 2023, and in Security Council debates around the introduction of UNSCR 2467 on conflict-related sexual violence, the United States threatened veto unless references to sexual and reproductive health rights were withdrawn.¹⁷

It is also important to note that some gender work is highly performative, with some so-called allies of gender equality undertaking primarily tick-box exercises to signal their support without deep and meaningful engagement.

2.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

As we approach the 25th anniversary of UNSCR 1325, the WPS agenda needs to identify concrete strategies for adapting to these trends and advancing women's meaningful participation and, subsequently, gender-transformative peace outcomes. This report's research objectives are therefore:

OBJECTIVE 1: Understand how predominant approaches to designing and managing peace processes enable or inhibit the meaningful participation of women and other minoritised and excluded groups.

- To what extent are gendered drivers and effects of conflict acknowledged, analysed and addressed in peace processes?
- What are the enabling factors that mean women and minoritised and excluded groups are able to meaningfully participate in and influence peace processes?
- What are the barriers that prevent the meaningful participation of women and other minoritised groups in peace processes?
- How do emerging trends, and the design, management and leadership of peace processes, enable or impede gender-transformative outcomes?

OBJECTIVE 2: Identify practical, context-informed strategies for creating peace processes that facilitate gender-transformative outcomes.

- Through what strategies and actions do local peacebuilders and mediation actors, and national peacebuilders and mediation actors, use their agency to overcome barriers to influence peace processes and support gender-transformative outcomes?
- What strategies and actions could be taken by international peacebuilding and mediation actors to support inclusive and gender-transformative peace processes and outcomes?

i. The process of undoing colonial worldviews, institutions and power structures.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 APPROACH AND SCOPE

Participatory workshops were carried out in two contexts with different conflict and peace process typologies: the Bangsamoro region of the Philippines (February 2024), and the Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Ghana tri-border region in West Africa (October 2024) (see Box 1).

Each workshop took place over three days and brought together over 20 local peace practitioners, representatives of government departments, and independent experts and academics. Facilitation drew on elements of Conciliation Resources and Saferworld's Gender-sensitive conflict analysis toolkit. A gender and age balance was broadly achieved in each workshop, allowing for varied and intersectional perspectives.

Analysis from the two workshops was triangulated with a detailed literature review. As the research was conducted by an English-speaking team, a large proportion of literature produced by researchers in other languages was excluded. To reduce the impact of this limitation, the majority of analysis draws on the primary data collected in the two workshops, which were carried out in participants' own language (with simultaneous translation). Through this approach, the research has sought to avoid recreating systems of power by relying on knowledge produced by those in the Global Minority world. In line with a feminist approach,ⁱⁱ the research also aimed to ensure the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation was non-extractive and useful for participants (for example, by providing them with initial insights papers to inform their peacebuilding work).

During the analysis phase, emerging findings were sense-checked and strengthened through two further workshops for cross-contextual learning and sense-making in November and December 2024. Practitioners and policymakers from a range of contexts participated in these spaces. Through triangulation with their inputs, experience and suggestions, the research seeks to draw conclusions with relevance to different contexts and audiences.

A reference group of three Global Majority and Global Minority experts across practice, policy and academia helped to refine the research objectives, approach, conclusions and recommendations.

ii. Feminist research is grounded in a commitment to equality and justice. It strives to highlight the diversity of experience of women and minoritised and excluded groups.

3.2 KEY DEFINITIONS

Recognising the changing conditions of conflict outlined in Section 2, the research defines '**peace process**' loosely as not only formal decision-making processes at leadership level (Tracks 1 and 1.5), but also informal, grassroots peace initiatives, dialogues and conflict resolution mechanisms. In so doing, it intends to shed light on new or emerging forms of inclusion and exclusion as peace process dynamics shift. It understands a '**gender-transformative** peace process' as being one that addresses the underlying inequalities driving conflict and most heavily impacting women and other minoritised and excluded groups.¹⁸

'**Enabling environment**' is understood as the creation of conditions that are conducive to women's influence on and access to decision-making and -makers in peacebuilding, and to achieving gender-transformative change. It considers not just the role of women themselves, and the steps and actions they take to influence peacebuilding processes, but critically how those in positions of power can facilitate this.

'**Global Majority**': Sometimes referred to as the Global South, Global Majority affirms non-white people's inherent power as the majority of the world's population.

'**Minoritised and excluded groups**': This term is used to indicate that, while some groups may not form a demographic minority, they are explicitly targeted and excluded by powerful groups to minimise the types of political, social and economic power they have.

The term '**local**' refers to people, institutions, activities and decisions at the micro and sub-national level within a conflict-affected context.

'**Meaningful participation**' refers to the participation of women, minoritised groups and those systematically excluded in such a way that they are able to influence decision-making in all levels and phases of a peacebuilding process.

We use '**intersectional**' to refer to the ways in which multiple forms of identity and systems of inequality – for example, related to gender, age or ethnicity – interact to shape a person's experience and relative level of power.

A participant presents their findings during a gender-sensitive conflict analysis workshop in Accra, Ghana. © Nick Bennett/Conciliation Resources 2024



BOX 1: CASE STUDY CONTEXTS

Bangsamoro, Philippines: In March 2014, the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) signed the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, ending four decades of conflict and establishing a new self-governing region in Muslim-majority areas of Central and Southwestern Mindanao, called the Bangsamoro. The Comprehensive Agreement recognised and encouraged women’s meaningful participation in the region, triggering a process for communities to reflect on the fundamental roles that women play in society. Despite this success, implementation of the peace agreement is slow, local conflicts (or *rido*) persist, and women face ongoing challenges excluding them from decision-making. In this context, many local peacebuilding initiatives exist, separate from the formal process between the Government and the MILF.

The Bangsamoro was selected for this research because its formal Track 1 process was widely held to have been inclusive. Ten years have passed since the agreement, which enables analysis of the extent to which inclusive processes have gender-transformative potential. The range of local processes in the Bangsamoro offer further insight into the impact of fragmented conflict contexts on gender-transformative peace processes.

Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana and Burkina Faso tri-border region: Over the past five years, the Sahel has experienced a significant expansion of violence associated with proscribed armed groups. Since early 2020, violent activity has spread to southern Burkina Faso and subsequently northern Côte d’Ivoire. This is feared to be the start of a concerted effort by proscribed armed groups to expand their influence to Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana. This is occurring against a complex backdrop of pre-existing insecurity, including banditry, illegal mining, poaching and intercommunal violence between pastoralists and farmers. There are also substantial regional tensions, with Burkina Faso having broken away from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in January 2024, shortly after forming a new regional ‘bloc’ of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) with Niger and Mali in September 2023.

The tri-border region offers a counterpoint to the Bangsamoro region. It is one in which there are a range of peace processes and mechanisms in place, but few of which are working in a fully inclusive manner. Many of these are state-led security and defence initiatives around joint military operations and the sharing of intelligence, which are now being expected to facilitate wider peace (despite not being designed to do this). While local customary peace processes also exist organically, they face their own challenges with regard to inclusion and perceived legitimacy among communities.

4. KEY FINDINGS

4.1 THE EXTENT TO WHICH GENDERED DRIVERS AND EFFECTS OF CONFLICT ARE ADDRESSED IN PEACE PROCESSES

a) Mandating specific agencies helps in the analysis of gendered drivers and effects of conflict, but resourcing and capacity limits the extent to which these are addressed.

The formal peace process between the Government of the Philippines and the MILF is generally regarded by the participants and by peacebuilders globally as an inclusive process in which gendered drivers and effects of conflict were acknowledged.¹⁹ In 2018, the Bangsamoro Women's Commission (BWC) was established with a mandate to coordinate the needs and asks of women's organisations across the Bangsamoro government's ministries and agencies, including in relation to implementation of the peace agreement. Yet, although the BWC has played an important role in ensuring gendered poverty dynamics are understood, promoting women's representation in government as mandated in the Bangsamoro Electoral Code, and implementing the region's gender and development plans, research participants highlighted that its ability to fulfil this wide mandate is constrained by high workload and underfunding.

In contrast, government institutions in the tri-border region lack a clear mandate for analysing and addressing gendered conflict drivers, made further complex by their cross-border nature. Participants observed that the three countries' boundary commissions tend to adopt a narrow definition of peacebuilding focused on border demarcation and disputes, and have limited expertise and resources to advance cross-border peace and social cohesion work in a gender-sensitive way (by, for example, promoting cross-border trade in which women often play a key role). Meanwhile, government institutions that may have a more specific mandate for peacebuilding – such as ministries of the interior and national peace councils – tend to prioritise domestic conflict drivers, as cross-border conflict is considered more peripheral. This limits the extent to which cross-border conflict drivers, including gendered drivers, are addressed.

b) Space for understanding and addressing the gendered drivers and effects of conflict is constrained in heavily militarised and male-dominated peace mechanisms.

In West Africa, regional peace processes and mechanismsⁱⁱⁱ tend to prioritise highly securitised^{iv} and militarised responses to conflict. The predominantly male military and political elites leading these processes are typically expected to focus on 'hard' issues^v – such as defence and security – and are less likely to consider underlying gendered conflict drivers. This aligns with global analysis that suggests that dominant concepts of peace and security (which were historically formulated by men and continue to underpin predominantly male-led security efforts) are often at odds with women's experiences of conflict (which tend to focus on a continuum of violence extending from the household to wider society). The latter often leads to a focus on concepts such as positive peace and human security, which can be easily politicised and discredited in militarised spaces for being 'soft'.²⁰

The exception to this rule in the tri-border region is issue-specific cross-border meetings (for example, on matters such as water governance, refugees and traditional leadership), which tend to be less securitised and provide an entry point to discussing vulnerabilities and impacts among different groups of people.

c) Gender issues are often associated with the 'home', which reduces the legitimacy for gendered analysis and work in public peacebuilding spaces.

While the research uncovered some examples of government agencies, like the BWC, analysing and addressing gendered drivers of conflict, participants also highlighted instances where these issues are afforded less legitimacy due to association with the 'home' and family matters. The Ghanaian, Burkinabe and Ivorian ministries responsible for UNSCR 1325 implementation are also accountable for family and social protection issues. The breadth of their mandate – and how gender is typically associated with matters of the 'home' – sends a normative signal that reduces the potential for women to effect change in the public (including peacebuilding) sphere.

iii. Including bilateral frameworks, the work of ECOWAS, the AES and Accra Initiative. The Accra Initiative was formed in 2017 with five member states (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo) and two observer members (Mali and Niger). It aims to prevent spillover over terrorism from the Sahel and to address transnational organised crime and violent extremism in member countries' border areas.

iv. 'Securitised' in this report is a broad concept, referring to efforts to address serious threats to national security of which military action is one tool alongside others, like political process or intelligence.

v. 'Hard issues' in this report refers to securitised or militarised responses to conflict (e.g. use of force; efforts to contain the proliferation and use of small arms and light weapons).

Women are taking steps to challenge this. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, a group of women politicians and parliamentarians have formed the Caucus of Women for Peace (Caucus des Femmes de Côte d'Ivoire pour la Paix) and have signed a convention with the Ministry of Social Cohesion to work jointly on pushing gender considerations in peacebuilding.

d) 'Inclusion hierarchy' and a lack of consultation with diverse groups limits understanding of how conflict affects people differently.

Globally, gender-sensitive conflict analysis and intersectional approaches are increasingly used and valued by civil society, international NGOs (INGOs) and government actors to inform the design of peacebuilding interventions.²¹ However, participants in the tri-border workshop noted that gendered drivers of conflict and socio-cultural dynamics – particularly in terms of pastoralist needs and concerns – are rarely well-explored because civil society input into military-led cross-border fora and regional mechanisms such as the AES and Accra Initiative is often limited to that of observer status. This reduces or removes the opportunity for civil society to feed in gender-sensitive conflict analysis. At present, participants have not been able to directly engage with male military leaders to encourage their buy-in, allyship and leadership on understanding and addressing cross-border conflict drivers.

Similar dynamics can be seen in contexts where there is a so-called 'inclusion hierarchy': for example, in the Somali Regional State of Ethiopia, women's participation is often regarded by political actors as secondary to the participation of all different clans. Because men are typically nominated to represent their clan's interests, women's participation is reduced. There is also an intergenerational dimension. In Bougainville, for example, young people who do not have direct, lived experience of the 1989–99 conflict are struggling to gain credibility and influence over older generations working on the peace processes between the Autonomous Government of Bougainville and the Government of Papua New Guinea. Despite experiencing the ongoing effects of that conflict, they have little say in Bougainville's future.

e) Local dispute resolution mechanisms can help shift gendered drivers of conflict, but limited community buy-in can lead to the escalation of retaliatory and gendered violence.

Community Security Working Groups (CSWGs), established by Mindanao-based civil society organisations (CSOs) Teduray Lambangian Women's Organization and United Youth for Peace and Development, have provided inclusive platforms for communities to collaborate with local government units in resolving conflicts in the Bangsamoro. They have also helped to identify and shift gendered conflict drivers. For example, they have provided alternative, nonviolent means for men to gain

confidence and social standing in resolving land-related conflict, reducing their perceived need to participate in *rido* (local clan conflicts) to demonstrate manhood and fulfil the gendered expectations upon them to act as protectors and leaders.

In the tri-border region, on the other hand, many local peace processes are led by elites and exclude those with less power. Borderland communities increasingly see many forms of traditional leadership as self-interested, corrupt and biased in favour of customary leaders' ethnic groups. Where a customary leader or local government official rules one way in a dispute, this may be ignored or dismissed as illegitimate by one or other of the conflict parties. This is leading to increasing cycles of retaliatory violence with gendered effects, including sexual violence as a means of retribution between pastoralist and non-pastoralist communities.

4.2 ENABLING FACTORS FOR THE MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN, MINORITISED AND EXCLUDED GROUPS IN PEACE PROCESSES

a) Personal wealth and male patronage are 'status enhancing' factors but raise the risk of nepotistic or superficial participation.

In the tri-border region, participants noted that wealthy women can achieve a higher level of influence in decision-making spaces. This is true even for women from minoritised groups, such as pastoralist women who trade with farming communities. However, given property is overwhelmingly owned by men, it is challenging for many women to gain economic autonomy and so this enabling factor privileges a small minority who already have wealth and power. It is also illustrative of gendered power dynamics, namely that women are often only valued if they are seen to be on an 'equal footing' with men. International actors can perpetuate this by creating competition over funding, which privileges women in capital cities – who often have higher levels of education and wealth – over those in more remote areas.²²

Participants in both workshops also noted that it can be challenging – and in some cases unsafe – for women to participate in political or formalised peace spaces without the patronage of a male family member. While participation does not necessarily equate to impact, women from politically engaged and established families were generally able to have a greater impact, at least at the local level. In the Bangsamoro, local government unit chief executives are authorised to settle local disputes and chair their local peace and order council. This means that women in such positions, or who are related or married to male officials, can have real influence in local peacebuilding matters. It is, however, important to avoid nepotistic or superficial inclusion that can result from male patronage.



A participant speaks about the effects of gender inequality on conflict during a gender-sensitive conflict analysis workshop in Accra, Ghana.
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b) While some men enable women’s participation in peace processes through their allyship, others see women’s inclusion as a ‘zero-sum game’.

Participants in both workshops shared personal experiences of male family members ‘switching’ gender roles at home by taking on more responsibility for cooking, cleaning and childcare. In doing so, they free up their female partners to undertake peacebuilding work while challenging traditional gender roles in front of their children. They also agreed with learning from other contexts that, in the public sphere, male leaders are instrumental in demonstrating allyship. For example, in Ethiopia and Kenya, women peacebuilders have worked with male Christian and Muslim faith-based organisations, pastors and sheiks to advocate for their participation in conflict resolution.²³ However, some men in positions of power believe that in order for women’s power to increase, men’s (relative) power will decrease, resulting in resistance to women’s active participation.²⁴ In Liberia, for example, some male traditional leaders have argued that women’s involvement in peace talks has been imposed by international actors like the UN, fearing this could lead to ‘no men’ being left in power.²⁵

c) Affirmative action by state institutions, civil society and international actors enhances women’s participation.

The Ghana Boundary Commission often sends women-led teams to borderland communities to conduct field work, therefore ‘leading by example’. The Ghanaian National Peace Council is mandated

to ensure a proportion of women leaders sit on its boards, including those which hold responsibility for addressing issues such as the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW), thereby helping to challenge misconceptions that women cannot add value to hard security issues (which is often used to justify their exclusion from these spaces). In the Bangsamoro, participants indicated that CSOs’ support to women’s roles in CSWGs was critical in building the evidence base to demonstrate to local (male) powerholders that women can make a meaningful contribution in peace processes. International actors can also support this affirmative action. The African Union, for example, has committed to developing a gender equality policy for all mediation processes that it leads or co-leads.²⁶

d) The religious and spiritual identity of women peacebuilders sometimes enables their peacebuilding role, but this is highly context specific.

In the Bangsamoro workshop, participants reflected that Islamic tradition contains concepts that allow for women’s role in leadership and governance in peace processes.²⁷ Qur’anic peacemaking concepts such as *karama* (human dignity) and *islahu thatil-bayn* (bond mending) can resonate with, and be more inclusive of, those of Muslim faith than concepts such as human rights and conflict transformation, and are used by women peacebuilders to guide and inform their peacebuilding practice.²⁸ In Bougainville, where society is primarily matrilineal and where local Christian church groups are hugely influential at the community level, women church leaders make strong contributions to peacebuilding.²⁹

Qur'anic peacemaking concepts can resonate with those of Muslim faith more than concepts such as human rights and conflict transformation, and are used by women peacebuilders to guide and inform their peacebuilding practice.

However, participants stressed that while religion and interpretation of religious texts can be, and is, supportive of women's public role in some contexts, this is generally not the case in the tri-border region. Here, participants reflected that passages in the Bible, for example 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:12 which indicate that women should remain silent, are taken literally. This has been corroborated in other contexts such as Cameroon, where women mediators report that churches and faith communities see female members' purpose as dedicating their life to God and serving with humility, in contrast to public mediation roles.³⁰ Women in Kenya noted that because men are at the forefront of Muslim communities and decision-making spaces it is harder to make the case for women's greater involvement.³¹ In the Somali Regional State, women are seeking to navigate these types of exclusion by working closely with selected religious leaders to establish a religious basis for women's political participation in the region and culture.³²

4.3 BARRIERS TO THE MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN, MINORITISED AND EXCLUDED GROUPS IN PEACE PROCESSES

A range of analysis from the two workshops focused on gender norms and power dynamics that act as powerful barriers to the meaningful participation of women. Due to the substantial evidence on this already available, the following findings focus primarily on less-explored and emerging barriers highlighted by participants.

a) Militarisation and securitised responses to instability and increasingly fragmented conflicts are structural barriers to participation for women and minoritised groups.

The often-heavy presence of men in uniforms across the Bangsamoro and tri-border regions can leave minoritised groups feeling threatened and insecure, which diminishes their appetite for engagement in peace processes. Conflict fragmentation is a key issue here, particularly in West Africa where there are many parties to the varied transnational conflicts and the response to this is typically heavy securitisation. In Niger, for example, governance structures working for women's rights, such as the Ministry of Women, have been suspended since the coup in July 2023.³³ Participants in the tri-border workshop noted that

peacebuilders can also contribute to this challenge for personal security reasons. For example, because pastoralists are often well-armed – to protect their valuable livestock – peacebuilding organisations tend to approach them only if they are accompanied by police or local military. This sends the wrong signal and is not conducive to peace- and trust-building.

b) Ongoing prioritisation of formal, high-level peace processes results in less attention to locally-led peacebuilding and local women.

Participants noted that in the Bangsamoro the formal peace process remains a priority and, as a result, the networks of women and insider mediators that have been established through informal processes are often less valued. While there are some women participants in the formal process – for example, women members of the MILF Peace Implementing Panel and an influential woman Chair of the Government of the Philippines' Peace Implementing Panel until 2016 – more could be done to showcase the legitimacy of women's peacebuilding achievements at Tracks 2 and 3, to facilitate better connection across the levels in this process. There are some examples of this being done effectively. The work of the Myanmar Joint Peace Fund, established as a multi-donor fund in 2016, has provided support to women's groups and linked their work to the Track 1 Panglong Conference talks, including by promoting outreach and communication between the conflict parties and civil society.³⁴

More generally, evidence shows that the 'behind the scenes' approaches deployed by grassroots women peacebuilders, such as tackling misinformation, using cultural events to bring different groups together and facilitating community-level negotiations, are divorced from and undervalued in formal process. Claims that women lack appropriate qualifications for participation contribute to a lack of institutional and self-recognition, which makes it difficult for them to enter more formalised spaces.³⁵

c) The risk of retraumatisation acts as a disincentive to meaningful participation.

The risk of retraumatisation and the emotional burden for participants in a peace process is high. Indigenous peoples in the Bangsamoro experience identity-based trauma as a result of forcible displacement from traditional lands due to conflict, and Fulbe pastoralists in the tri-border region face a deeply hostile environment in West Africa.³⁶ This can cause them to withdraw from or self-censor their engagement in peacebuilding processes. Limited trust in the likely success of a peace process, and fear of disappointment, weighs heavily on prospective participants, and the possibility of success is not always sufficient to justify the expected emotional burden of participation.

This can affect men more deeply than women because, in both the Bangsamoro and tri-border region, men are expected to be 'brave' and solve problems without seeking mental health and psychosocial support for the trauma they have experienced. More widely, women faith-based mediators have reflected that a lack of debriefing mechanisms makes it difficult to cope with secondary trauma during peace mediation, which can disincentivise their participation.³⁷

d) Digital peacemaking risks creating new forms of exclusion for many women and minority groups, but has the potential to circumvent some gendered barriers.

As spaces for peacebuilding open up online, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise in artificial intelligence, those with limited digital literacy or lack of connectivity face a new type of exclusion. Participants reflected that, for those in the Bangsamoro's geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas and in remote border areas in West Africa where internet coverage is poor, even fairly minor steps towards digitalisation, such as moving public announcements for peacebuilding activities online, can create new exclusions. There are also under-researched gendered risks to digital inclusion, such as monitoring, defamation, online blackmail, and potential backlash if women and minoritised groups are perceived to be becoming more digitally skilled than traditional powerholders. In West Africa, disinformation was noted to be a key emerging challenge, with some already minoritised groups like pastoralists being accused of extremist activities online to stoke social division, with no – or false – substantiation or evidence.³⁸

Even fairly minor steps towards digitalisation, such as moving public announcements for peacebuilding activities online, can create new exclusions.

There are, of course, many possible benefits of digital methods to make peacebuilding spaces more inclusive. These include the ability to meet different language requirements, consult with wide numbers of people on specific issues,³⁹ and reduce gendered performances of power (such as positions in a room) and private 'backchannel' discussions which often take place in locations or times that are physically unsafe or inconvenient for women.

4.4 HOW EMERGING TRENDS, AND THE DESIGN, MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP OF PEACE PROCESSES, INFLUENCE GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE OUTCOMES

a) Securitised responses to conflict are not conducive to gender-transformative approaches, so expectations on inclusion in these processes are difficult to realise.

Participants in the tri-border workshop observed that international mediators and civil society often consider security mechanisms, such as joint military operations to counter violent extremism, to be peace processes. Unsurprisingly, such mechanisms, including the AES and Accra Initiative, are not set up to address gendered conflict drivers and rarely produce gender-sensitive – let alone transformative – results. Those in charge rarely have a peacebuilding or mediation background and their mandates are to establish security rather than to build a broader peace. This reflects a wider challenge: as fewer UN special envoys are leading processes, many of the different multilateral organisations and international governments playing an increasingly influential role are appointing regional advisors who do not have peacebuilding backgrounds.

b) Highly centralised governance can limit the space for peacebuilding and gender-transformative outcomes.

Participants noted that governance and peacebuilding in Côte d'Ivoire is highly centralised, and very little community-based conflict resolution takes place. While traditional chiefs are sometimes called upon to mediate conflict at the village or canton level, they are so often intimately involved in conflict themselves that they are not always able to fulfil this role. Village committees are sometimes established to identify solutions for conflict drivers including land disputes and farmer/herder conflict, but these are typically male dominated, as men are seen to hold wisdom around practices and cultural values regarding land management.

The limited nature of community-level conflict resolution in Côte d'Ivoire puts the onus on formal initiatives to resolve conflict. One participant reflected, "This takes the life out of local peacebuilding initiatives and makes communities dependent on the state to solve problems." While the Ministry for Solidarity, Social Cohesion and the Fight against Poverty and the Ministry for Interior and Security hold the primary mandates for conflict resolution, they are based in Abidjan. Officials do not travel often to distant border communities and

will therefore offer delayed arbitration or conflict resolution guidance that is not well contextualised or does not address gender specific needs. While both ministries have regional offices, these are generally not sufficiently resourced (either financially or technically) to effectively mediate local conflict.

c) Cultural, religious, political and social traditions can create elitism in local peace processes and serve as a barrier to gender-transformative outcomes.

Participants in both workshops were clear that locally-led peace processes and mechanisms can be just as elite as high-level processes. In Burkina Faso, the ‘resolution under the tree’ approach – whereby local leaders speak together to determine the response to local conflict drivers such as cases of rape – is dominated by male voices who already hold community power. Likewise, in Côte d’Ivoire farmer/herder conflicts tend to be managed by a narrow circle of people – mainly local prefects – so are typically exclusive of women and of herders who do not hold prefecture representation. It is notably harder or less likely that gender-transformative outcomes will be reached where local peace mechanisms are exclusive, because predominant and unequal gender norms are replicated and reinforced.

It is less likely that gender-transformative outcomes will be reached where local peace mechanisms are exclusive, because predominant and unequal gender norms are replicated and reinforced.

d) As the number of formal processes and comprehensive agreements decline, more creative means to facilitate women’s participation are emerging.

Participants in both workshops spoke in detail about local and sub-national peace mechanisms and informal processes they are engaged in. Indeed, in the tri-border region, there are few formal peacebuilding processes at national and regional level with which to engage. This indicates that platforms designed to support women’s participation in formal processes may be becoming less relevant in increasingly fragmented conflict contexts. Therefore, peacebuilding and mediation actors are increasingly considering how to support women’s meaningful engagement across multiple levels of peacebuilding both during and post-conflict. Intentional multimediation – in which multiple, diverse peacebuilding actors pursue peace through different means but with interconnected outcomes – may be a suitable strategy.

There are some promising examples of this: in Kenya, the Garissa County Women’s Peace Movement has established peace clubs in schools, designed to provide girls with core peacebuilding skills to support their meaningful participation. In the Somali Regional State of Ethiopia, women politicians from multiple parties have formed a Women’s Dialogue Space, *Ugaaso*, as an innovative means of navigating resistance to women’s political representation from male political and religious leaders.⁴⁰

e) Women’s roles and experience in conflict is complex – this nuance can be lacking in the design of peace processes.

Research participants noted that women’s role in conflict is highly complex, and that they can be both victims and active participants. In the Philippines, many women participated in a MILF supplementary force and purchased ammunition, delivered arms and provided medical support to combatants. In West Africa, women cross-border traders sometimes trade weapons if they see it to be in their interests, and can play the role of informant between conflict parties and non-proscribed armed groups. While participants noted that some women are instrumentalised in these roles – that is, given no choice by powerful male family or community members – many do have agency in their involvement.

Equally, women peacebuilders and leaders can also be victims; in the Philippines and West Africa they are at high risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) during conflict. Because discussing or recognising SGBV is taboo, and women survivors are often stigmatised, this can act as a barrier to women’s role in peacebuilding. At the same time, positioning women as vulnerable and requiring enhanced duty of care can also encourage paternalistic protection and be used to restrict women’s agency in peacebuilding.

This nuance indicates there is a tension in the normative framing of the WPS agenda as it has developed which, at present, is not effectively considered enough in the design of many peacebuilding processes. Many who support peace processes focus too much on women’s participation (representation) or women’s protection (as victims), without adequately accounting for the duality of women’s experience. Decolonial approaches that recognise women’s power – both as facilitators, and sometimes detractors, of peace – could be powerful in rethinking this framing.

5. STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Local peacebuilders and mediation actors the world over are deeply committed and creative in the strategies and actions they take to overcome barriers to their participation and advance gender-transformative peace processes. This section outlines a number of these strategies.

1. How are local peacebuilders and mediation actors using their agency to overcome barriers to their participation and influence over peace processes?

<p>Women peacebuilders contextualise global frameworks such as UNSCR 1325 to support the implementation of gendered peace commitments in ways that resonate with local communities.</p>	<p>Established women leaders provide support to excluded groups to enhance their participation, which also ensures networks of influential women can represent less powerful groups.</p>
<p>Young men in some cases work as effective allies to champion inclusion, including challenging patriarchal behaviours through their own actions.</p>	<p>Local peacebuilders use cultural spaces to foster greater social cohesion and understanding across different groups.</p>

2. How are national peacebuilders and mediation actors supporting the meaningful participation and influence of women and minoritised groups in peace processes?

<p>Delivering strategies to hold institutions to account on national frameworks for gender-transformative peace, including lobbying for greater transparency on progress.</p>	<p>Platforming women's specialist knowledge on aspects of wider conflict prevention, which enhance their authority and creates entry points to wider conversations that can advance inclusion.</p>
<p>Providing specialist training to support women and other minoritised groups to be taken seriously in peace processes.</p>	<p>Working with the military to build understanding of community security needs, reduce the negative impact of military operations on communities, and reduce practical barriers to women's participation in peace processes.</p>

5.1 HOW DO LOCAL PEACEBUILDERS AND MEDIATION ACTORS OVERCOME BARRIERS AND ADVANCE GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE PEACE?

a) 'Translating' and contextualising global frameworks to national and sub-national levels supports the implementation of gendered peace agreement commitments.

Participants in the tri-border workshop noted that frameworks for the inclusion of women and minoritised groups in peace processes, such as UNSCR 1325 and National Action Plans (NAPs) for WPS, are poorly understood in border communities. They reflected that in other contexts, such as Colombia, civil society has played an important role in promoting learning about these standards to make them relevant at the local level. Indeed, Colombian feminists have continued contextualising global frameworks to advance their agenda for peace by incorporating tailored goals into local development plans and the development of municipal public policy for women in Puerto Tejada.⁴¹ In Cameroon and Zimbabwe, women-led CSOs have advocated for strengthened language in NAPs on how men are responsible for supporting women's leadership in peace processes,⁴² indicating that NAPs can be a useful mechanism through which male dominance of peacebuilding spaces can be tackled on a structural level.

These examples show how local feminists have contextualised global norms and frameworks to support the implementation of gendered peace agreement commitments in their own countries. Such efforts challenge the misconception that WPS is an externally imposed, rather than a universal, agenda. Global frameworks can also support allyship: for example, women peacebuilders and other minoritised groups draw on different frameworks to support one another's inclusion. In the Bangsamoro, groups have used Article 5 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to promote indigenous peoples' participation, and women peacebuilders are advocating for politicians to strengthen the implementation of laws pertaining to the societal inclusion of persons with disabilities, such as Republic Act 7277.⁴³

b) Peer support from established women leaders to wider women and excluded groups enhances their participation while ensuring networks of influential women are grounded in equity and inclusion.

Participants in both workshops highlighted the critical importance of peer support for women and excluded groups who may lack confidence or have a perceived lack of relevant skills in peacebuilding spaces. They felt the advice and guidance of existing networks of powerful women, such as women members of the Bangsamoro Parliament and the Queen Mothers in Ghana, can help grow women's confidence, while also ensuring that networks of influential women remain grounded in principles of equity and inclusion through engagement with those less powerful than themselves.

Participants also reflected that experienced women mediators and peacebuilders, such as members of the Women Mediators across the Commonwealth network, are able to model authoritative and well-informed interventions in high-level meetings, which is valuable for less experienced women mediators to observe and learn from. This is particularly important in reducing over-reliance on a few experienced women mediators in high-level spaces, and diversifying and developing the skills of younger women.

c) Young men can serve as effective allies in championing inclusion and challenging patriarchal behaviours and structures.

Targeted work with men is critical in addressing underlying patriarchal structures that can lead to the exclusion of women. In the Bangsamoro, participants had held men-only dialogue sessions in communities to provide men with the space to discuss expectations on them and how they might resolve conflict peacefully. There is also an important intergenerational dynamic: participants reflected that young men are particularly engaged in these discussions as a way of demonstrating local leadership, which offers them the opportunity to gain social standing where other opportunities may be limited due to high unemployment and disenfranchisement. In deeply patriarchal societies in which men are dominant materially, socially and politically, young men may in time have substantial influence to change the mindsets of older men.⁴⁴

It is important to recognise, however, that truly gender-transformative outcomes require systemic behaviour change and commitment from those in the most powerful positions of society. While men in local conflict-affected communities can and do play important roles in championing more inclusive behaviour, interventions must be careful not to place the onus for change solely on them, or to reproduce harmful assumptions that socio-economically deprived men are more likely to engage in violence.



Participants take part in a group exercise during a gender-sensitive conflict analysis workshop in the Philippines.
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d) Sociocultural spaces and events foster greater social cohesion and understanding.

There are many important events and festivals in the tri-border region that present opportunities for cultural exchange through storytelling, food and dancing. These include the Goliba Festival, Akwasidae Festival, Fête du Dipi, DJEMBE Festival and Kizaba Music Festival. Each festival typically has a major theme, such as the farmer/herder conflict and rural/urban divide. Participants reflected that a potential avenue is to work with festival organisers to introduce peacebuilding as a major theme or organise specific activities on this. Cultural methods such as these have been used to develop unified positions and hold decision-makers to account effectively in wider contexts, including South Sudan⁴⁵ and Kenya, where the Garissa County Women's Peace Movement organise regular *Abaay-Abaay* (sister-sister) meetings to bring women from conflicting counties together in a neutral space to share stories and food, the significance of which is particularly important within local Somali and Cushitic culture.

5.2 HOW DO NATIONAL PEACEBUILDERS AND MEDIATION ACTORS OVERCOME BARRIERS AND ADVANCE GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE PEACE?

a) Holding institutions to account for implementation of national frameworks for gender-transformative peace and inclusion is important.

The Philippines' Regional Action Plan (RAP)-WPS – which will be integrated into the Barangay Development Plan by the Ministry of Interior and Local Government – is the key policy vehicle to overcome barriers to women's participation. It has 68 action points, each of which has an assigned lead and support agency, and is funded by the Bangsamoro's Gender and Development budget, which makes up 5% of the Bangsamoro government's total budget. The RAP-WPS is particularly important because it provides a rare opportunity

to coordinate different actors' efforts within an overarching framework, and because – if properly implemented – it could lead to gender-transformative outcomes. For example, the overarching impact goals of the RAP-WPS is “the full realization of [the human rights of women and girls] in conflict situations and post-conflict transformation towards inclusive and sustainable peace and development in the region.”⁴⁶

Participants noted that a number of women-led civil society organisations are holding agencies accountable for the delivery of the RAP-WPS, and that NGOs should identify and seek to support these organisations as a way to contribute to this strategy. They also highlighted the role of the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity, which is mandated to direct and supervise implementation of the Bangsamoro peace process and could support increased transparency around progress on gendered provisions within the 2014 agreement.

b) Platforming women's specialist knowledge of aspects of wider conflict prevention can offer them authority and entry points to strategic conversations that can advance inclusion.

Participants in the tri-border workshop noted that when newer government institutions such as boundary commissions and national peace councils coordinate their work well with NGOs, it can create more enabling conditions for inclusive peace processes. For example, by offering women opportunities to speak and provide advice on issues such as countering the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW), institutions can help challenge perceptions about the areas in which women have skills, knowledge and bring value to conflict reduction, and open up other opportunities for influence on peacebuilding. In this case too, gender-sensitive conflict analysis was used by NGOs to challenge common gender misconceptions which exclude women from peacebuilding and security spaces by revealing that men are not the only purveyors and procurers of SALW; women can and do trade weapons, particularly when underlying economic inequalities mean this is one of the only income options available to them.

c) Specialist training supports women and other minoritised groups to be taken seriously in peace processes, but they are still often held to a much higher standard.

Women peacebuilders, particularly young women and other minoritised groups, face high technical expectations when it comes to justifying their inclusion in peace processes. They are often held to a higher standard than men, needing to not only navigate gendered power structures but also demonstrate consistent high-level skills and expertise.⁴⁷ Strategies by national actors focus on hard and soft skills development to help women and other minoritised groups to navigate this challenge. For example, members of the Bangsamoro government are partnering with Mindanao State University to establish a youth leadership camp. This will teach young people about Islamic leadership and governance, as well as negotiation and conflict resolution skills. The camp is being trialled on the island province of Sulu, which means it also has the potential to address practical barriers to participation in peace processes related to the isolation of some communities.

d) Military engagement in community consultation sessions can build understanding of community security needs, reduce the negative impact of military operations on communities, and reduce barriers to women's participation in peace processes.

Participants in the Bangsamoro workshop felt that the military should consider any ways in which forces can reduce their overt presence to avoid making community members feel threatened, and undertake community consultation to understand the impact of their operations on local people. They reflected that these steps would help women feel safer to travel, reducing barriers to their participation in peacebuilding activities and in turn supporting women's contributions to lasting and gender-transformative outcomes. While it was unclear whether any such meetings are currently taking place, this approach has been adopted in other contexts with positive effects. For example, a project funded by the UK's Integrated Security Fund held community listening sessions to understand how the Somali security sector can better consider communities' needs.⁴⁸ This is important to achieving militaries' goals around promoting human security and minimising harm to civilians, and important to peacebuilding goals in terms of supporting social cohesion in highly insecure contexts.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions and recommendations draw on two participatory workshops, which took place in November and December 2024. These provided an opportunity for policymakers and practitioners from target contexts and the wider international peacebuilding community to validate key findings and ensure recommendations are actionable.

WHAT: how the type of peace process or mechanism affects gender-transformative potential

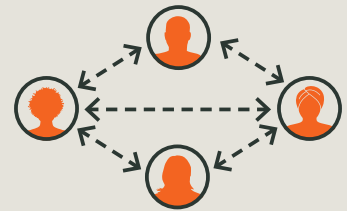
Security mechanisms are rarely conducive to gender-transformative outcomes and cannot be considered 'substitutes' for peacebuilding processes.



Local and sub-national peace mechanisms can be highly effective at addressing gendered conflict drivers, but this must not be assumed, for they can be just as exclusive and elitist as high-level processes.



Insufficient two-way communication between peacebuilding processes at different levels limits understanding of gendered drivers and impacts of conflict.



WHO: how those with a role, or power, in a peace process affect gender-transformative potential

Women mediators, and those from minoritised groups, continue to use their agency to play a critical role in advancing gender-transformative peace.



Men who hold power can also play a critical role as positive allies for gender-transformative peace – but are often not yet engaging enough in this regard.



Despite the limited potential of security mechanisms to effect gender-transformative change, it is critical to engage their leaders due to their prevalence and power.



State institutions accountable for peace process implementation and delivery of National Action Plans on WPS often lack direction, skills and expertise.



HOW: how the peace process or mechanism is conducted affects gender-transformative potential

Detailed, intersectional, gender-sensitive conflict analysis is critical to understanding the gendered drivers and effects of conflict – yet often it is not done well, if at all.



Affirmative action by state institutions, civil society and international actors – such as setting up women-led teams and building the evidence base for their meaningful contribution – is effective.



Imagination and creativity in the design and format of processes and mechanisms – such as working through online spaces – is critical to support inclusion and meaningful participation.



Peace processes that fail to take trauma into account risk retraumatizing participants, deterring both men and women from participation.



6.1 CONCLUSIONS

WHAT: how the type of peace process or mechanism affects gender-transformative potential

Security mechanisms are not substitutes for peacebuilding processes that deliver gender-transformative outcomes. These mechanisms, such as those found at the regional and bilateral level in West Africa, are not well-placed to understand and address gendered conflict drivers. They are often led by male political and military elites who lack experience of addressing the gendered drivers of conflict and promoting inclusive peace processes, and are established to maintain security – not build sustainable, gender-transformative peace.

Local and sub-national peace mechanisms can be highly effective at addressing gendered conflict drivers. This is especially the case when they are established with a specific mandate to be inclusive and to facilitate dialogue and mediation between societal groups who may not otherwise have a say (for example, in the case of the CSWGs in the Philippines). Local peacebuilders often remain involved and invested in resolving local conflict dynamics, even where national and international mediators' work stalls.

...but it must not be assumed that both the process and outcomes of local peace processes will be gender-transformative. This is, not least, because local processes can be just as exclusive and elitist as high-level political processes. This is especially true of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in which local powerholders, such as typically male traditional and religious leaders, show multiple types of resistance to including women and other minoritised groups in decision-making.

Insufficient two-way communication between peacebuilding processes at different levels limits understanding of gendered drivers and impacts of conflict. Communication is insufficient in both directions: many local peacebuilders do not have sufficient opportunities to share their knowledge with those involved in formal and political processes, and the latter often do not communicate effectively with affected populations on progress made and challenges faced in their efforts. This means formal processes often have insufficient data on the gendered drivers and impacts of conflict at the local level. This challenge is particularly acute in contexts, like Côte d'Ivoire, where governance is centralised and where the role of civil society – which often acts as an interlocutor between different levels of peacebuilding – is limited.

WHO: how those with a role, or power, in a peace process affect gender-transformative potential

Despite the limited potential of security mechanisms to effect gender-transformative change, it is critical to engage their leaders due to the prevalence and power of these mechanisms. While security mechanisms are not conducive to gender-transformative outcomes, it is possible to build consensus with military and political leaders through meaningful engagement with women and minoritised groups on the role they – and the security mechanisms they lead – should play to address gendered conflict drivers and effects. At present, interaction with civil society is limited.

State institutions accountable for peace process implementation and delivery of National Action Plans on WPS (NAPs-WPS) often lack direction, skills and expertise. As the number of comprehensive peace agreements declines, NAPs-WPS may play an ever more important role in seeking to address gendered drivers and effects of conflict as one of the main remaining means of advancing gendered peace and security goals. Yet, state institutions accountable for their implementation are often stretched, with large and complex mandates, limited funding, and at times insufficient direction from political leadership. Some government institutions accountable for elements of NAPs are not involved in their development, which means they may not have the appropriate interest or motivation to deliver their mandate.

Women mediators, and those from minoritised groups, continue to play a critical role in the advancement of gender-transformative peace. Women contribute to and lead this work in a myriad of ways: from the 'translation' and contextualisation of global frameworks to highlight their relevance to local contexts and counter resistance; to the allyship, sisterhood and peer support shown through mentorship that enables meaningful participation; to their efforts to hold institutions to account for the implementation of gendered objectives in peace agreements and NAPs-WPS.

While they can often be blockers to women's meaningful participation, men also play a critical role as positive allies and supportive powerholders. The meaningful engagement of men, with men, on WPS goals is key at all levels. Further, the powerful allyship some men are playing in support of inclusive peace processes and gender-transformative outcomes indicates it is important to engage with men through a consensus-building approach, rather than making assumptions around their attitudes and positions.



HOW: how the peace process or mechanism is conducted affects gender-transformative potential

Detailed, intersectional, gender-sensitive conflict analysis is critical to understanding the gendered drivers and effects of conflict – yet often it is not done well, if at all. This is particularly the case in contexts where the role of civil society actors in peace processes is limited (and they are therefore not able to feed in the analysis on which they often lead), and in cross-border conflict contexts where there is no clear actor with a mandate to lead on understanding, and resolving, the conflict. In such cases, mechanisms and processes aiming to resolve conflict often miss key parts of the picture, which can reduce the extent to which peace processes successfully address and resolve gendered drivers of conflict.

‘Status enhancing’ factors – including personal wealth and male patronage – support participation of some women, but may reinforce other types of exclusion. These factors give women who already hold power advantages and influence in peace processes, and may further exclude more marginalised groups who do not benefit from this type of status enhancement (and can be actively ostracised as a result). The research found these factors to be fairly common in the Philippines and the tri-border region, and they risk nepotistic and superficial inclusion.

Affirmative action by state institutions, civil society organisations and international actors to enhance women’s participation can be effective and equitable enabling factors. This is particularly the case when such action challenges perceived wisdom and typical practice in the roles women play in peace processes and increases opportunities for them to broaden their roles and remits. Examples of this include the work of women in West Africa and the Philippines on ‘hard’ – and male-dominated – issues such as arms control. It is also critical that women receive training in technical areas as well as in soft skills, to ensure they can take full advantage of these opportunities.

Imagination and creativity in the design and format of processes and mechanisms can support inclusion and meaningful participation. There is extensive evidence that numerical representation is not in itself effective in ensuring meaningful participation of women and minoritised groups in peace processes. This research has highlighted other creative ways in which peace processes and mechanisms can be inclusive, including through online spaces and community consultation with and by military actors.

Trauma-blind peace processes create barriers to inclusion. Peace processes that fail to take trauma into account risk retraumatising participants, deterring both men and women from participation. The multiple and gendered trauma peacebuilders may experience – including identity-based trauma, retraumatisation based on experience of conflict, and intergenerational trauma – are critical issues to be considered in the design and management of peace processes.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

As part of this research process, participants were asked: “What strategies and actions could be taken by international peacebuilding and mediation actors to support inclusive and gender-transformative peace processes and outcomes?” Responses to this question focused almost exclusively on international donors’ funding support and modalities, and on the value international governments and INGOs add through ‘capacity building’.

The recommendations therefore consider how international actors can continue to play this role, and play it better. However, international institutional funding is declining. The recommendations take this into account and consider how governments and multilateral institutions can seek to create enabling environments for gender-transformative peace in this context.

Recommendations for governments and multilateral institutions

1. Integrate WPS objectives into security mechanisms.

Steps could include: conduct or commission gender-sensitive conflict analysis to understand the gendered drivers and effects of insecurity and develop objectives for responses based on the analysis; ensure security actors consult civil society and civilian populations – for example through civil-military dialogues – to reduce the risk of harm to civilian populations; and ensure that military and political commanders of these mechanisms receive training on WPS and have professional objectives on WPS.

2. Provide consistent funding and tailor funding modalities. This could include:

- **Lower eligibility barriers:** Review funding requirements for women-led organisations (WLOs) and women’s rights organisations (WROs) to ensure they are guided by a risk-based and proportionate approach to due diligence, and that the barriers to funding are not so high that it precludes WLOs and WROs from applying.
- **Extend funding cycles:** Avoid short-term or projectised funding cycles, as gender-transformative peace outcomes take time to achieve. Donors should prioritise long-term (minimum three year, ideally minimum five year) funding which enables peacebuilders to focus on peacebuilding rather than fundraising.
- **Set realistic operational costs:** Ringfence a sufficient percentage of funding for peacebuilders’ operational costs (including staff salaries) and ensure gender-sensitive budgeting (for example, by ringfencing funds for safe transport for women and childcare costs).

- **Invest in grantee sustainability:** Provide regular training on financial literacy and fundraising to WRO, WLO and CSO partners, including how to write expressions of interest that will meet different donors’ specific requirements, and how to prepare and track a budget that meets donors’ standards. It should be noted that, at present, INGOs retain an important role as intermediaries in the relationship between grassroots peacebuilders and donors – particularly with regards to fielding, responding to or pushing back on resource-intensive donor requirements and administrative requests, which can be challenging for local practitioners.
- **Take a broad interpretation of ‘participation’ in funding calls:** Rather than reinforcing numerical targets for women in peace processes, which are not indicators of influence, consider participation in (for example) online spaces and community consultations, and set qualitative indicators to assess the impact of women’s participation.

3. ‘Impact multiply’ existing funding and direct funding to grassroots peacebuilders.

Sufficient, direct funding to grassroots peacebuilding is economical, efficient and effective. Donor governments and institutions should ‘impact multiply’ funding by identifying and investing in existing funding mechanisms and feminist funding models. Examples include the Women’s Voice and Leadership Programme (Canada), the ‘SDG5 Fund’ and linked financing mechanisms such as the Leading from the South programme (Netherlands), and the Support Fund for Feminist Organizations (France). It is especially important to fund feminist models in the context of the chronic underfunding they face, despite having the capacities to absorb and mobilise the funds they receive.⁴⁹ The UN-coordinated Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund is also playing an important role in helping women-led and grassroots peacebuilding organisations take advantage of specific, time-bound opportunities like elections to advance their goals (although donors to this fund must be conscious of the lessons that are emerging on its application, and of how to navigate and mitigate the possible challenges it presents).⁵⁰

4. Co-create rather than pre-determine project ambitions.

Projects that achieve gender-transformative change are adaptive and have objectives that can be owned by practitioners. In short, they treat practitioners as partners. To achieve this, the following can be done: bring local partners into decision-making spaces from the outset; avoid pre-designed projects, or projects on which the overarching goals are agreed between an INGO and a donor without meaningful consultation of local partners (or in which the priorities of the INGO or donor override those of the local partner); ringfence

resources for donors to travel to contexts (including outside capital cities) or to bring local partners to donors' offices to build personal relationships, trust and joint accountability for project success; allocate funding for local partners to attend global conferences and events to share their expertise and experience; and integrate context-specific, gender-sensitive and participatory risk planning for peacebuilding work.

5. Exchange knowledge and experience on inclusion and peacebuilding. Governments and multilateral institutions could create opportunities and fora, such as high-level dialogues, bilateral exchanges and knowledge-sharing hubs, to learn from and align respective approaches to inclusion and gender-transformative peacebuilding, and identify good practice. This research has shown that 'traditional' mediators like the UN, regional mediation powers such as Kenya and Qatar, and multilaterals engaged in peace and security work such as ECOWAS, AES and the EU, have different approaches and attach different levels of prioritisation to this agenda. Exchanging knowledge is very valuable to developing comprehensive understandings of the different approaches advanced, and therefore to trying to build consensus among international powerholders on what works. Sharing of expertise across different contexts could also offer technical support on priority areas, such as normalisation^{vi} in the Bangsamoro, to ensure this work can be undertaken in a gender-transformative way.

6. Consolidate and expand good practice in creating enabling environments for gender-transformative peace. Three key areas where international mediation actors can show continued leadership, and which are highlighted in this report, are:

- **Mentorship:** Establish specific mentorship programmes for men in government institutions, departments and ministries, to build and develop their knowledge of WPS and why it is critical for men to engage in this work. Encourage participation by including it in performance objectives. Support intergenerational mentorship, and where it is sought, ensure there is funding for experienced women mediators to travel to workshops and global convenings with younger, less experienced women mediators so the latter can observe and learn from their approach.
- **Gender-sensitive conflict analysis:** Provide training and guidance to mediation teams and programme leads on how to conduct gender-sensitive conflict

analysis and turn findings into action. Conduct gender-sensitive conflict analysis alongside political economy analysis to understand the factors influencing conflict so that the conflict is not considered in isolation from the wider political, economic and social conditions that affect it. Where this cannot be achieved, ask questions to understand *why* – for example, resource constraints, limited project timelines, lack of expertise among staff – so that ways of addressing these challenges can be devised.

- **Visas and travel:** Difficulties obtaining visas and travel permits make it incredibly challenging for Global Majority participants to attend research events and discussions hosted in Global Minority countries, thus minimising the opportunities for good policy development, informed research and effective programming. Expedited visa processes for peacebuilders attending global events are one option Global Minority countries should consider to ameliorate this issue.

7. Increase transparency and interaction between formal and informal peace processes. Where governments and multilaterals are providing support to ongoing peace processes, they could work to determine if establishing government-civil society engagement fora could lead to more effective outcomes. In this, they could learn from the approach of the International Contact Group and Third Party Monitoring team in the Philippines as a hybrid mediation mechanism that aims to ensure implementation of the 2014 agreement remains open, transparent and inclusive. They could also work with existing regional women mediators networks to achieve this.

8. Engage in 'minilateralism' on aspects of WPS where multilateral messaging is too challenging. Engaging in minilateralism with a smaller group of willing states, to develop common messaging on WPS, offers a way to advance effective WPS practice. This is especially the case at a time where pushback on gender and geopolitical polarisation impede progress in multilateral institutions, such as the EU, OSCE, NATO, ECOWAS, ASEAN and AU. Working groups within institutions could combine a focus on WPS with institutional priorities (for example, WPS and hard security; WPS and transnational threats). To support this work, more gender and/or WPS focal points could be recruited into key government departments and multilateral institutions.

vi. In the Bangsamoro context, 'normalisation' refers to the process that aims to disarm and demobilise former combatants, reintegrate them into society, and deliver wider peace dividends such as the provision of socio-economic development programmes. See: International Crisis Group (2021) *Southern Philippines: Keeping Normalisation on Track in the Bangsamoro*. Crisis Group Asia Report No 313.

9. Build ownership of National Action Plans with civil society and across government. Work closely with civil society, including WLOs and WROs, in the development of NAPs to ensure they are aligned with and supportive of civil society's existing work and WPS framings. Wider public consultation could also encourage public sensitisation and buy-in. Adopt a whole-of-government approach to NAP development: avoid siloed thinking; ensure different government departments, institutions and ministries with accountability under the NAPs are consulted throughout; ensure there is clear understanding of the responsibilities and budgets each department has with regard to the NAP; and, where possible, ensure NAP goals can be effectively integrated and 'mainstreamed' through other national policies and strategies (such as national security policy). Delivery of capacity assessments and training on NAP-WPS goals and objectives for accountable ministries, institutions and departments could ensure they have the knowledge and skills to implement their responsibilities effectively. Donors should consider funding stretched state institutions with responsibility for implementing gendered provisions of NAPs and peace agreements in conflict-affected contexts.

Recommendations for INGOs and international civil society

10. Consider the political influence that governments and multilateral institutions can deploy to create enabling environments for gender-transformative peace. In the context of declining global funding for WPS and peacebuilding, INGOs and international civil society could develop advocacy strategies that consider the political influence international governments and multilaterals can deploy, as well as the resourcing they can provide. This might mean: engagement with governments in the run-up to bilateral meetings on transnational and cross-border security issues to press for integration of WPS goals; engagement with regional mediation powers to advocate for gender-responsive and -transformative goals in the mediation processes in which they are involved; and advocating for the integration of WPS goals into development and humanitarian programming.

11. Seize opportunities for normative change when governments take leadership. When governments take up positions of special normative power – for example, non-permanent membership of the UNSC, presidency of the EU, and chairpersonships of the AU, ASEAN and OSCE – they have powerful platforms through which to advance global WPS advocacy. INGOs and civil society could map into the short, medium and long term the different positions their governments may hold, then develop long-term, targeted advocacy to ensure WPS is integrated into their priorities.

12. Enhance the practice of trauma-informed peacebuilding through training and peer learning. This could include provision of mental health and psychosocial support for peacebuilders, including men and young people; undertaking careful and consultative design of the peace process or mechanism to understand and mitigate the risk of retraumatisation for participants; and developing communities of practice in areas like trauma-sensitive peacebuilding with other INGOs, civil society, governments and peacebuilders.

13. Partner with digital experts to understand how digital technology and artificial intelligence can support gender-transformative peacebuilding. Explore partnerships with digital experts and/or the private sector to explore how digital technology can be used to support gender-transformative work, while understanding and avoiding potential pitfalls through digital exclusion. Establish learning fora to help civil society understand the potential harms and risks of digital technology, as well as the opportunities for diverse inclusion it presents.

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