

## CASE STUDY

# Mums for Mums: Enhancing the role and participation of women in the Tigray Region Peace Process

October 2025

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Mums for Mums aims to empower women and girls in Tigray, providing economic and social support programs across a range of areas, including health and nutrition, social accountability, and peace building and conflict mitigation. Through a Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) Rapid Response Window (RRW) grant, and with support from Conciliation Resources, Mums for Mums aimed to enhance the representation of women in the implementation of the peace agreement between the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

The conflict in Tigray, which broke out in early November 2020, resulted in widespread human rights abuses, including systemic sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) with reports estimating that between 40-50% of women experienced GBV. After two years of intensive fighting, in November 2022, the Government of Ethiopia and the TPLF signed a "Permanent Cessation of Hostilities" under the auspices of the African Union, also known as the Pretoria Agreement. While the Pretoria Agreement paved the way for inclusive political dialogue, it does not adequately represent the interests of women; for instance, neither negotiating team included a woman representative. This reflects systemic challenges of discrimination and exclusion of women in political and peace processes in the region. It underscores the need for ensuring women's participation in the continuing peace process, including in political dialogue with the newly-established Interim Regional Administration of Tigray, and in national-level initiatives like the National Dialogue Commission and preparation of the Transitional Justice Policy. Without inclusive participation, women and conflict-related sexual violence victims in Tigray are excluded from processes aiming to provide spaces for the amplification of their voices which is crucial to inform the path to reconciliation.

Accordingly, through the RRW grant, Mums for Mums sought to strengthen the capacity of women and increase the democratic participation of women in the ongoing peace process. The project took place from May to October 2023. The project provided the groundwork for new initiatives, and Mums for Mums have since continued their work on women's participation in peacebuilding.

## Achievements

Through the RRW project, Mums for Mums strengthened the role and representation of women in the ongoing peace process, through the following:

- **Creation of a new political space to influence decision-making, with critical early successes in improving women's representation in the implementation of the Pretoria Agreement.**

Through consultative workshops and dialogue, Mums for Mums established a government-Civil Society Organisations (CSO) forum, led by the Tigray Bureau of Women Affairs, and the Alliance of Civil Society Organisations respectively. The forum was created to facilitate discussions between women-led CSOs and the interim regional government, and through the project, had already achieved early successes. In particular, in part due to dialogue through the forum, key stakeholders agreed that two Tigrayan women should formally participate in the next phase of the Pretoria Agreement talks, whenever talks resumed. This marked a significant step forward, as no women had been involved in the first phase of the talks. Dialogue through the forum also contributed to the establishment of the Tigray Bureau of Women's Affairs as a separate government institution. It had previously been part of the Bureau of Social and Youth Affairs, and its formal establishment as a separate institution solidified a clear mandate to monitor and ensure greater accountability on women's participation in political processes.

- **Secured buy-in from political officials and women's groups on the urgency and need for women's participation to ensure the success of the peace process.** Mums for Mums conducted in-depth research on the barriers, resources and capability gaps affecting women's participation. These results were validated through engagement with women's groups and officials from the Interim Administration, with officials acknowledging the importance of the research. This report contributed to a wider advocacy effort led by CSOs, encouraging the government to develop a position paper on a Transitional Justice Policy. In addition, the report and advocacy around it raised the interest of other women's groups on the importance of women's participation in the peace process. In particular, the project laid the groundwork for collaboration on strengthening women's participation in peace processes between Mums for Mums, and the Network of Ethiopian Women Association (NEWA), which leads civil society consultations with the government at the national level.
- **Strengthened women's ability to advocate for transitional justice mechanisms in the peace process.** Mums for Mums conducted workshops on the role of women in peacebuilding, justice and accountability for 70 women's CSOs, working to directly address some of the capability gaps identified in the capacity assessment research that was conducted. Women who attended the workshops have gone on to participate in forums and meetings in Tigray and Addis Ababa calling for more accountability on the peace processes.
- **Working with existing religious and cultural norms can help in navigating challenges from male-dominated spaces and masculine norms and standards.** Mums for Mums worked with allies within religious and cultural spaces to make the case to gatekeepers on the importance of women's participation. This included working with religious leaders and existing traditional conflict resolution structures like the Abo Gereb. These structures in turn helped to raise community awareness of the importance of women's representation in the peace process.
- **Advocating for women's involvement to shape agendas early in the peace process is critical.** Research shows that if women are involved in the early stages of peace processes, a precedent is set for more substantive contributions throughout. If their priorities do not shape the agenda from the beginning, it becomes harder to contextualise them later on in the peace process. While women were excluded in the 2022 negotiations of the Pretoria, the signing of the Agreement provided an opportunity for Mums for Mums to convince the newly-established Interim Regional Administration in Tigray to work with civil society to increase the participation of women in the implementation of the agreement. Creating an entry point for women's participation early on in the implementation of the peace agreement could contribute to future successes down the line.
- **Shifting deeply held cultural norms and power dynamics requires patience and flexibility.** While short-term funding provided by the RRW helped to move the needle on women's engagement in the ongoing peace process, the operational realities of working in the region, such as food insecurity, posed additional logistical challenges that short-term funding was not necessarily equipped to meet. Meanwhile, working alongside traditional Abo Gereb conflict resolution mechanisms and building trust with communities can take time. Awareness-raising activities are needed in a greater number of areas and communities, particularly in rural areas.

## Lessons learned supporting women to influence peace processes

- **Identifying and working with female role models and male champions can help challenge gender stereotypes in more formal spaces.** Mums for Mums worked with a prominent male scholar to conduct research on the barriers women face in engaging in peace talks, and the value women can bring. This created an entry point for presenting findings to the Vice President of the Interim Regional Administration who, along with seven Cabinet Secretaries, made a public commitment to create a more enabling environment for women's participation once the formal peace talks resumed. Mums for Mums also worked with women leaders in federal positions, organising a workshop on the importance of women's participation in the peace processes.

# Recommendations

## How can policymakers, donors, and INGOs better support women peacebuilders to influence peace processes?

- 1. Support civil society efforts to sustain their engagement in the ongoing peace processes.**  
A lack of knowledge amongst communities and civil society on the ongoing developments of the peace process and a risk of backsliding on inclusion underscore the importance of continuing this work.
- 2. Provide diplomatic and financial backing to establish Women Peace Commission advocacy groups** at both national and sub-national levels, with the full involvement of civil society. These Commissions can play a vital role in upholding accountability for inclusion and sustained peace efforts.
- 3. Connect national, regional and local peacebuilding efforts and amplify voices of civil society within these.**  
Support to peace efforts at all levels is critical, as is encouraging connections between them to enable inclusion in national and regional processes.
- 4. Advocate for substantive and inclusive transitional justice processes.** Learning from best practices elsewhere, it is critical that CSOs connected to and embedded within communities shape these processes. This provides an approach that integrates localised experiences and alternate trusted forms of learning into the process thus enhancing grassroots support for such processes.

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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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