WPS BRIEF SERIES

ADVANCING WOMEN'S MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION IN PEACE AND SECURITY: EVIDENCE AND IDEAS FOR PRACTICE IN MYANMAR

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Introduction

This paper outlines key elements of the global Women, Peace and Security (WPS) policy framework with an emphasis on women's meaningful participation – one of the four pillars of WPS – and a focus on Myanmar.[1]

Following many decades of work to form the Women and Armed Conflict Agenda outlined in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, the WPS policy framework was further advanced with the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000. This was the first time the Council recognized the specific and disproportionate effects of armed conflict on women and girls. There are now 10 resolutions which form the global WPS Agenda and outline policy directions on prevention, participation, protection and relief and recovery.[2]

Some of the ways UN Member States put UNSCR 1325 and the WPS agenda into action include developing government-led National Action Plans (NAP), as well as other national level strategies, policy statements, or programmes. These actions recognize that women experience specific challenges during and after violent conflict due to their gender, and that their equal and full participation is critical in the prevention of violent conflict, crafting of peace, and delivery of relief and recovery efforts.

The global WPS Agenda puts women's needs, interests, and rights at the centre of peace and security policymaking and practice. It draws attention to the overlooked differential impacts of insecurity and violence on women, men, and sexual and gender minorities, and intersectionality.[3] As well, it emphasizes women's needs and rights through gender-sensitive data and analysis and gender-responsive[4] policymaking and programming in conflict settings.

There are four pillars under the global WPS Agenda:

PREVENTION

Short- and medium-term measures that monitor and prepare for potential conflict, such as early warning and response, preventative diplomacy, and peacekeeping; and longer-term structural measures to address root causes such as tackling structural inequality, promoting human and civic rights and human security, good governance, demilitarization, disarmament, and reduction in military spending.

Example: In Myanmar, the leadership and participation of women in the pre-2021 civilian ceasefire and civilian protection monitoring networks provide powerful examples of preventing violent conflict through de-escalation, early warning and engagement.

PARTICIPATION

Women have equal representation and influence at all levels of decision-making, including conflict-prevention and resolution mechanisms and institutions (formal and informal).

Example: Efforts to include more women in negotiations for the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in Myanmar were unsuccessful. Women's participation comprised 4 per cent on the government side, and 6 per cent within ethnic armed organizations in the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team and 13 per cent in the Senior Delegation.[5]

1 The WPS brief series has been developed in response to feedback from women's rights organisations that UN Women Myanmar engages with.
2 See these resolutions in full, available at: https://www.peacewomen.org/why-WPS/solutions/resolutions.
3 Intersectionality is an approach to understanding how different aspects of our identities – ethnicity, social class, sexuality, religion, gender, abilities – can overlap and interact making discrimination or disadvantages more complex. For instance, a woman who belongs to a marginalized ethnic group or who lives with disability may experience three intertwined forms of oppression: sexism, racism and ableism.

4 'Gender-sensitive' refers to action that considers gender norms, roles and relations but does not address inequalities; and 'gender-responsive' refers to action that considers gender norms, roles and relations, and purposefully addresses needs to reduce inequalities.

PROTECTION

Women and girls have distinct protection rights and needs – in contexts of armed conflict this includes protection from conflict-related sexual violence, and as internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees and stateless persons. Those advocating for these rights – women human rights defenders (WHRDs) and women's rights organizations (WROs) – also experience life-threatening abuse, intimidation, and gender-based violence (GBV). Protection is linked closely with the participation pillar, as GBV (including that which is online and technology-facilitated) is used to silence women in public life.

Example: The web of safe houses for those experiencing GBV in refugee and IDP camps inside and outside of Myanmar.[6]

RELIEF & RECOVERY

Safe and equitable access to humanitarian and development assistance that is inclusive of women's and girls' distinct needs and rights. 'Recovery' focuses on longer-term initiatives that promote reconstruction and sometimes transformation of societies.

Example: Women's rights organizations across Myanmar providing humanitarian assistance following the 2021 military takeover.

Box 1
'Meaningful Participation': from passive to active participation

Since 2000, 'meaningful' has increasingly been used to qualify the participation of women beyond simply their numeric presence – the numbers of women in a meeting or in a project activity. Key elements include being present to seize opportunities; drawing on knowledge, networks and confidence; deploying political agency and being a part of setting agendas; and conveying gender perspectives and women's rights concerns as defined by broader social and political movements.

Barriers to the 'meaningful participation' of women in peace and security in Myanmar include:

1 Persistent patriarchal and exclusionary power structures that reproduce social and cultural norms and perpetuate gender inequality.

2 Lack of willingness or knowledge about women's inclusion in political participation and decision-making processes among (almost exclusively male) powerholders.

3 Inadequate legal and policy frameworks, and their weak application.

4 Minimal civic space to advocate for gender equality.

5 Lack of capacity due to lower confidence or self-perceptions of fewer skills among women leaders to participate in decision-making.

'Enabling measures' are critical to practically lowering barriers to meaningful participation. This may include boosting women's participation with 'use it or lose it' seats, affirmative measures, inclusive facilitation techniques (examples ahead), holding pre-meetings for women to prepare ahead of larger male-dominated meetings. Additional measures to lower logistical barriers could include childcare costs, interpretation/translation, data for online activities, public speaking and advocacy training and more.

Barriers and strategies

Women's participation in public life is often met with individual and collective resistance. This is most likely to come from individuals who benefit from the existing situation, predominantly men who hold forms of power. Different types of resistance span a spectrum from passive denial to actions preserving the status quo. As part of political and security risk management, it is essential to analyse resistance and backlash, and identify strategies to address its different forms.

Being prepared for, and responding to, resistance as a practitioner first requires understanding what form

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5 Buchanan, C. & Williscroft C. 2016. The Women are Ready: An Opportunity to Transform Peace in Myanmar. Yangon: Peace Support Fund.

6 For example, the work of the Karen Women's Organization (and many other WROs) to maintain safe houses, available at:
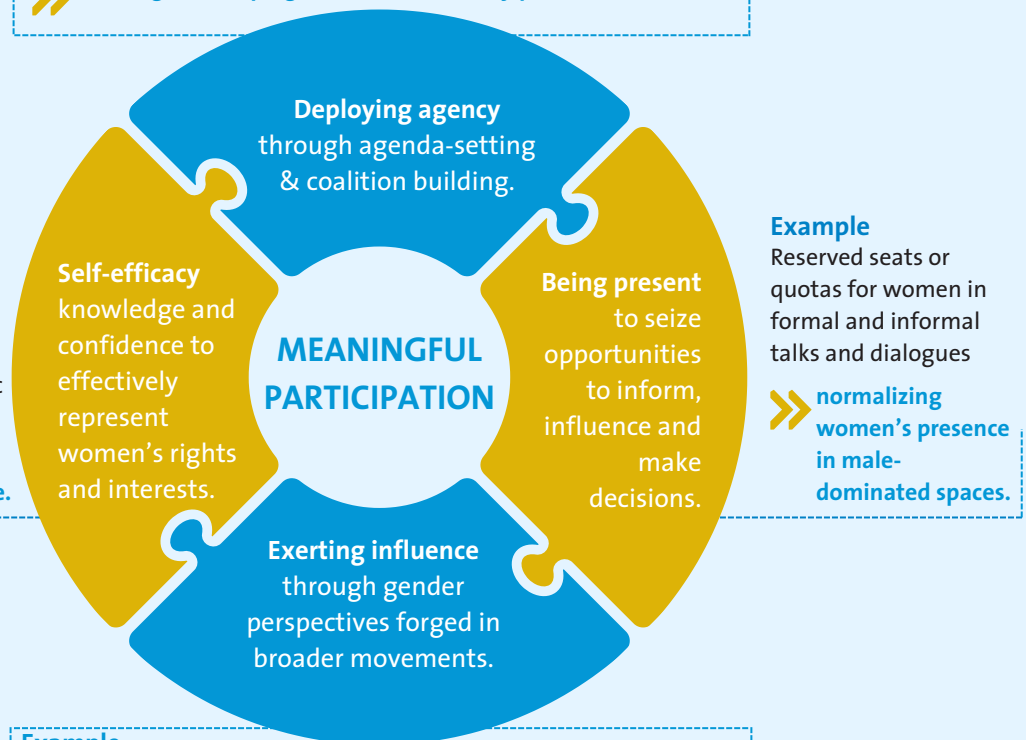https://karenwomen.org/social-welfare-program/safe-houses-and-womens-protection-project/

Example
Women's rights actors identify concerns – not necessarily "women's issues" – and mobilize diverse constituencies on policy change
» **shifting and shaping what is discussed by powerholders.**

Deploying agency through agenda-setting & coalition building.

Example
Contextualized learning opportunities for women to hone insights on key policy issues (e.g., decentralization) alongside soft skills (e.g., public speaking)
» **boosting women's confidence and knowledge.**

Self-efficacy knowledge and confidence to effectively represent women's rights and interests.

MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

Being present to seize opportunities to inform, influence and make decisions.

Example
Reserved seats or quotas for women in formal and informal talks and dialogues
» **normalizing women's presence in male-dominated spaces.**

Exerting influence through gender perspectives forged in broader movements.

Example
Enable spaces for those in formal peace processes and mechanisms to regularly engage with diverse women's rights movements and groups » **strengthening connections to broader movements.**

Source: Adapted from Buchanan, C. 2021. Gender-inclusive peacemaking: strategies for mediation practitioners. Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue which builds on the original graphic developed by UN Women. 2018. Experts Group report on women's meaningful participation in peace processes and gender-inclusive peace agreements. New York: UN Women.

resistance takes and, secondly, having a set of strategies and effective responses to deal with it.

Strategies can be built from an understanding of:

- How leaders and individuals are involved, institutional interests and preferences.
- How policy and change initiatives are framed and communicated.
- The visible and invisible ways in which change occurs.
- How individuals and entities can be influential and allies.
- Learning from others and drawing on research in this area.[7]

Transcending resistance and designing inclusive processes involves using evidence to prove how women's participation benefits the peace and security agenda as a whole:

- **Making connections across issues:** identifying conflict triggers and factors across issues such as environment, public services, and education, beyond the more traditional security related concerns.
- **Duration of peace:** women's participation in peace agreements make them more likely to last longer.[8]
- **Broadening the agenda and agreement:** women are more likely to raise a wider range of issues and advocate for context-specific social justice, women's rights and gender equality provisions.
- **Access to critical information:** women often have access to information and community networks that men don't.
- **Act as honest brokers:** women are more likely to operate outside existing power structures and don't usually have political or military control, so are viewed as having fewer vested interests.

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7 Several resources exist which outline the types of resistance you could come up against and broad strategies for dealing with those. Most notably: VicHealth. 2022. (En)countering resistance: strategies to respond to resistance to gender equality initiatives. Melbourne: Department of Education, Skills and Employment; and Viswanathan, R. 2021. Learning from Practice: Resistance and Backlash to Preventing Violence against Women and Girls. New York: UN Women.

8 Some note that peace agreements could be 20% more likely to last at least two years and 35% more likely to last fifteen years when women are substantially involved. See: O'Reilly, M., et al. 2015. Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes. International Peace Institute.

- **Working across lines:** women are more likely to organize across ethnic and sectarian divides, increasing prospects of long-term stability.
- **Advancing peace:** women can have key roles as mediators and negotiators and are often at the forefront of pushing parties to commence or finalize negotiations, as well as working on the ground toward social cohesion.

Common barriers

Practitioners and policymakers supporting process and project design and implementation need to consider:

1. **Superficial inclusion:** 'Women counting' vs. 'counting women' or add 'women and stir' is prevalent in peace and security processes and spaces (and elsewhere). It refers to a token number of women who are added to male-dominated settings without being given the space to engage and influence outcomes.

2. **Challenges to women's mandates and legitimacy:** The power and influence of patriarchy is pervasive and suppressive, framing women as lacking knowledge, skills and competence and not questioning the capabilities of men. Women who do reach decision-making roles are also often framed as breaking acceptable social codes, being ambitious and aggressive. In this way, women are perceived as lacking legitimacy to be in male-dominated political decision-making spaces. This could mean that they also struggle to overcome the idea that people often see men as more legitimate and capable leaders.

3. **Women's resistance to raising gender considerations:** Questions around women's legitimacy make it harder for them to bring gender considerations into their role. Women must navigate the gendered expectations and assumptions here – they are held to different standards. The view of gender considerations as 'soft' and unimportant can also jeopardize the perceived legitimacy of women who raise these issues.

4. **Women sidelined in decision-making:** Even when women participate, ultimate decision-making power usually rests with a small group of already-powerful, mostly male actors. Women's participation in institutions and structures often decreases as the level or hierarchy increases. For example, there are few women in leadership levels in many peace and security entities versus in junior and mid-level roles.

5. **Women's access limited to 'around the table':** Women's participation is often limited to consultative processes, official or unofficial advisory roles, or pressure from outside decision-making fora. This already excludes women from the beginning from setting the agenda and shaping or re-thinking the table. Women are then forced to establish other (often, creative) ways to ensure their inputs find their way to the negotiation table and into peace agreements, leaving the inclusion of their inputs at the will of male decision-makers.

6. **Women's overrepresentation in civil society:** Women are overrepresented in civil society and at local level peacemaking. At this level they have few links to or opportunities to influence formal processes. Although such work at the local level is often inherently political, it is seen as a 'social or community project' despite including negotiations around issues like aid distribution, search for missing persons, and local ceasefires. Although this can have advantages in carrying out sensitive work under the radar, it also often leaves women in civil society devalued and viewed as not having relevant political skills or experience, and thus often results in their exclusion from political processes. Here, the openness of civic space and degree of co-operation between CSO and state institutions is a key limiting factor.

Addressing barriers

In addressing barriers to women's meaningful participation, it is important to think about a range of actions across three dimensions: (1) getting women to the negotiating table; (2) unlocking women's influence at the negotiating table; and (3) bringing in women's concerns that remain outside the process.

Getting women into decision-making spaces

1. **Strategic arguments for women's meaningful participation:** Evidence shows that normative arguments are relied upon to push for women's participation, while political and strategic arguments are used to include other actors – political parties and other CSOs. This can be shifted by relying on established data that shows peace agreements with women signatories are associated with more durable peace[9] and more and better implemented provisions on political reform,[10] and are less likely to fail when civil society are signatories.[11]

2. **Enabling measures:** Deployed to address impediments to participation. This includes childcare; access to travel funds; additional security provisions and digital security tools and helplines. Meeting these needs goes hand in hand with women's ability to participate meaningfully. Previously in Myanmar, USAID funds managed by DAI Inc. were available to women, at very short notice (e.g., within the hour) to buy plane tickets, book hotels and other logistical support, translate materials or put interpretation in place during meetings. It was recognized by the UN Secretary General as international good practice in 2018.[12]

9 Krause, J. Krause, W & Bränfors, P. 2018. "Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace." International Interactions, 44:6, 985-1016.
10 Ibid.
11 Nilsson, D. 2012. "Anchoring the Peace: Civil Society Actors in Peace Accords and Durable Peace." International Interactions 38:2, 258; Pfaffenholz, T., Kew, D. & and Wanis-St. John, A. 2006. Civil Society and Peace Negotiations: Why, Whether and How They Could Be Involved. Geneva: HD Centre.
12 UN. 2018. Report of the Secretary-General on women peace and security. S/2018/900, para.33.

3. Capacity bridging and confidence building: When women shift from working in community groups to getting involved in political processes, negotiation training and building content expertise can play a key role in preparing women. Qualifications and skills often already exist among women, but they have simply been culturally devalued. Entrenched patriarchal beliefs can be challenged by pointing out that culture is dynamic and changes over time and that gender equality as a human right is also a goal of inclusive peacemaking.

4. Countering de-valuing of women's civil society work: Community-based initiatives are often viewed as 'social work' (as opposed to more respected 'political work') and thus not seen as equipping women with relevant skills for political processes. While there are important security reasons in many contexts to strategically 'de-politicize' work, this can also exclude women's civil society from political spaces. As risks allow, consideration should be given to framing it as the political work it often is, and in this way linked inextricably to peace and security.

Women's influence in decision-making spaces

1. Consensus models for decision-making: When women are present in small numbers in deliberative bodies, they are less likely to be able to influence processes that are based on majority rule.[13] A consensus model for decision-making, however, is shown to establish group behaviour that allows them to exert influence. Consensus models aim for acceptance (or at least no objections) of the decision by all group members, encouraging collaboration and inclusion.

2. Women's mandates come from both leadership and constituencies: Leveraging connections to CSOs can bolster support and power at the negotiating table, broadening participation in peace processes and building momentum for future outcomes. Age hierarchies can act to limit possibilities for young women to be bestowed with mandates, as more established peacebuilders can act as gatekeepers to decision-making power. When there are only a few spots for women, some may feel that if one woman gains a position, another loses out (zero-sum).

3. Thematic expertise: Informally developing a specialization in a specific area (for example, security sector reform) has been a strategy used by women to demonstrate their value and become indispensable to negotiating parties.[14]

4. Mapping connections to power: Influencing a process requires navigating power dynamics (and egos), determining how to access power, identifying allies, and leveraging relationships. This includes through conducting gender-sensitive conflict analysis to recognize potential peace drivers and opportunities and identifying alternative pathways for gender inclusion.

5. Legitimacy through gender expertise: In the Philippines, women delegates were selected based on qualifications such as their past peace work, local-level mediation, or leadership in civil society. They were more likely to bring women's priorities into the negotiations and to push for a sustainable agreement.[15]

6. Inclusive facilitation techniques: Make the contributions and roles of women more visible and shift the order or norm of men 'naturally' speaking to influence women's voice and potential influence and quality of participation. This includes co-facilitation by women and men, bringing women together to prepare prior to meetings, and 'calling on women first' [see Box 2].

Supporting women from outside the decision-making table

1. 'Transfer' mechanisms: Strategies that have proven most successful combine the insider tactics of submitting position papers directly to negotiators and meeting with mediators, negotiators, or technical advisers with outsider tactics like issuing public reports, lobbying international actors, and conducting media outreach.[16]

2. Reinforcing women at the table: Women with existing positions at the negotiating table can leverage their position to bring in more women and gender perspectives into talks. Women's groups can exert pressure from the outside to demonstrate the legitimacy of their participation and amplify messaging by women at the table on gender perspectives. Women's participation is mostly initiated and achieved via concerted pressure and lobbying by coalitions of women's organizations.[17]

13 O'Reilly, M., et al. Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes.
14 See the section titled 'Practitioner perspectives' ahead.
15 O'Reilly, M., et al. Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes.
16 Ibid.
17 In the Northern Ireland peace process, for example, women united across sectarian divides to form the Women's Coalition and earned a seat at the negotiating table. In Somalia's 2002 Peace and Reconciliation Conference, women organized themselves as the "Sixth Clan" so that they could participate in the formal peace negotiations. See, UN Women. 2012. Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations: Connections between Presence and Influence. New York: UN Women.
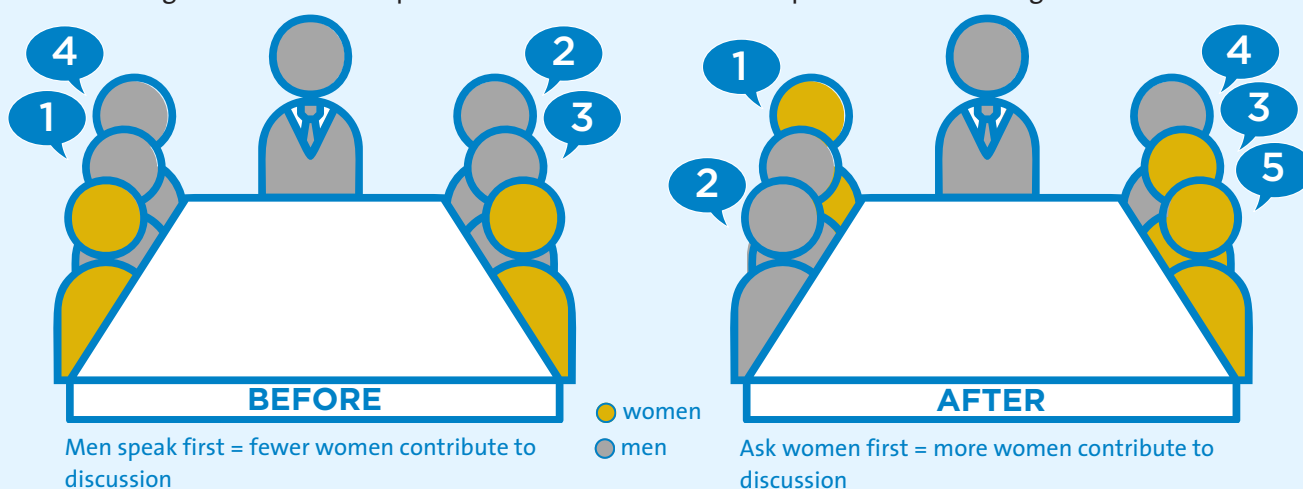
Box 2

'Calling on women first': Evidence to back establishing women's voice and confidence in male-dominated spaces

A study examining women's confidence in male-dominated settings concluded that calling on women first in meetings helps establish women's voice and presence, creating an environment which encourages more women to speak up during the rest of the meeting.[18]

The study found that if the first person to speak up in a meeting with a 50:50 gender balance was a man, then men were more than 2.5 times more likely than women to make an intervention for the rest of the meeting. But, if the first person to speak up was a woman, then women and men made an equal number of interventions for the rest of the meeting.

Chairs or facilitators of meetings can action this by calling on a woman for the first comment or question and using other inclusive facilitation techniques to amplify the voices and ideas of women such as affirming the ideas or statements posed by women, placing women closer to the chair or front of the room or head of table, and knowing about women's expertise to be able to name their experience when calling on them.

BEFORE

Men speak first = fewer women contribute to discussion

○ women
○ men

AFTER

Ask women first = more women contribute to discussion

Women's influence and participation in practice

Included below are some examples of strategies that women have undertaken to exert influence and get into decision-making roles and spaces:

Public mobilization and engagement

Women's civil society and community-based organizations can address local-level peace and security issues. This can provide them with technical expertise, increase acknowledgement of the political nature of their work, and make them valued contributors to peacebuilding and conflict prevention and implementation of agreements.

Examples include:

- During Cameroon's tense elections, the Cameroon Women for Peaceful Elections platform established a Women Situation Room call centre and election observation to witness and receive first-hand information confirming widespread fraud and corruption.[19]

- In Somaliland, women's groups continually organized demonstrations at negotiation venues to demand inclusion. These actions led to them becoming official observers in the eventual Baroma conference in 1993.[20]

- In the Philippines, Bangsamoro women were active in rehabilitation and reconstruction in their communities, starting as community organizers and eventually becoming officials or members of their local government units.[21] They then created the Bangsamoro Women's Solidarity Forum to provide capacity and advocacy support to assist women to ensure they continued making gains in decision-making and were not relegated to subordinate roles in 'peace time'.

18 Carter, A.J., Croft, A., Lukas, D., Sandstrom, G.M. 2018. "Women's visibility in academic seminars: Women ask fewer questions than men." PLoS ONE 13(9). Described in The Economist. 2017. Women ask fewer questions than men at seminars: There is an easy fix.

19 WILPF. 2020. "Cameroon: Call Center Eases Electoral Process and Monitors Violence During Elections". Accessed 25 October 2023.

20 Inclusive Peace. 2018. Women in Peace and Transition Processes: Somaliland (1993). Case Study Series. Geneva: Inclusive Peace

21 Santiago, I. 2011. "Mindanao." In Buchanan, C (eds). 2011. Peacemaking in Asia and the Pacific: Women's participation, perspectives and priorities. Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.

- In El Salvador, women's activists' search for missing family members expanded into work on reunification and disappearances. Over time, they built political and institutional links with government.[22]

- In Liberia and Colombia, women have created safe spaces free of armed conflict where they can mediate and resolve community disputes, including incidents of gender-based violence, essentially establishing conflict prevention and early warning systems.[23]

Direct participation in political decision-making fora and observation

Women 'at the table' and 'around the table' can directly influence political processes – in peace talks, shaping the structure of processes and political settlements, and women's future participation in public life. Reserved seats and quotas are a key strategy for actioning women's direct participation – as one criterion for group-specific participation.

Setting rules (quotas) in peace agreements to include more women in future elections is a proven way to boost the number of women in public roles.[24] But within peace talks and negotiations, quotas remain poorly used. Women can also be included as observers – around the table – where they can also exert considerable influence.

Examples include:

- The Yemen National Dialogue Conference had a 30 per cent quota for women across all constituencies and women had their own delegation of 40 seats (out of 565).[25] Working group and conference decisions required 90 per cent approval for adoption which also helped ensure women were not marginalized.

- Commissions following the 2007/2008 violence in Kenya had gender, ethnic, religious, and geographic quotas and publicly advertised posts, leading to recruitment of women lawyers and activists.[26]

- Liberian peace talks in 2003 included a women's network as observers who coordinated with outside groups to hold negotiating parties accountable and maintain momentum for agreement.[27]

- In late 2018 the UN Special Envoy's Office on Yemen posed reserved, non-transferable seats for women and youth in delegations. To date, the parties have refused to use these.

- In 2000 the five main clans in Somalia convened for the National Peace Conference. These were all dominated by men. Women formed the 'Sixth Clan' to ensure they were represented and included as a delegation and agreement signatories. They continued in further negotiations and were pivotal in securing a parliamentary gender quota, establishing a Ministry for Gender and Family Affairs and other achievements.[28]

Amplifying women's voices and perspectives

Ensuring gender-sensitive political analysis is available to a range of decision makers (e.g. mediation support teams) and shapers (e.g. media) is another pathway. Commision studies and research so that analysis is readily available in future moments that could shape decisions.

Another approach is mass action as well as through public consultations and decision-making. Online forums, surveys, social media platforms, and artificial intelligence software can be used to get unofficial feedback and input on discussions at the table among excluded groups like women. The media is critical to amplifying these results, ideally alongside an official mechanism or key individual like a mediator to transfer the results to the table.

The Beyond Consultations Tool can be helpful to improve the quality of consultations.[29] Mass mobilization can be used strategically to amplify and legitimize the role of women (in negotiations or civil society) and the inclusion of gender perspectives. Without pressure from constituents, key decision-makers often lack the political will to listen to activists.

Examples include:

- The Myanmar Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process (AGIPP) critically reviewed the 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.[30] This represents the world's first published feminist critique of an agreement in a peace process. Some were surprised AGIPP did this and that it reflected the views of so many organizations. Male conflict party representatives at the centre of the ceasefire implementation process were unaccustomed to women's opinions being put forward in this way.

22 Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy. 2021. Women, Peace and Security: Pillars for Peace. The Hague: NIMD.
23 Coomaraswamy, R. 2015. The Global Study on the Implementation of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325. New York: UN Women.
24 Anderson, M.J., Swiss, L. 2014. "Peace Accords and the Adoption of Electoral Quotas for Women in the Developing World, 1990–2006." Politics and Gender. 10(1), pp.33–61. Also, see: Shair-Rosenfield, S., Wood, R. 2017). "Governing well after War: How Improving Female Representation Prolongs Post-Conflict Peace." Journal of Politics. 79(3), pp.995-1009.
25 Ibid.
26 Inclusive Peace. 2018. Women in Peace and Transition Processes: Kenya (2008-2013). Case Study Series. Geneva: Inclusive Peace
27 Inclusive Peace. 2018. Women in Peace and Transition Processes: Liberia (2003-2011). Case Study Series. Geneva: Inclusive Peace

28 Asha Hagi Elmi reflects on this effort here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K4Nku0HUedE&feature=youtu.be
29 Available at: https://beyondconsultations.org/.
30 Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process. 2018. If half the population mattered: A Critique of the Myanmar Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and Joint Monitoring Committee Framework from a Gender Perspective. Policy brief 4. Yangon: AGIPP.

- The UN Special Envoy's Office in Yemen commissioned gendered perspectives from Yemeni women analysts on themes including security reform and power-sharing in 2020/21 to give staff ready access to gender-sensitive data and perspectives.

- Prior to August 2021, in Afghanistan, women's systematic exclusion in peace talks led to their creation of the Bishnaw survey which, in parallel to the talks, surveyed and publicized the views of Afghan women on issues being addressed in talks.[31]

- In Colombia, negotiating parties established a consulting mechanism with the public, including a website for citizen input. Civil society organizations were also consulted on methods of their involvement so negotiators could prepare sessions with them more meaningfully.

- In 1994, the Assembly of Civil Society of Guatemala (including 33 women's groups) established a platform for interest groups among a vibrant and effectively organized civil society to give non-binding recommendations to negotiating parties.[32]

Practitioner Perspectives

Many women are involved in peacemaking in the Philippines. Irene Santiago, a former member of the government peace negotiating panel, identified three key types of barriers to transform so that women can meaningfully participate in peace processes: political, technical, and structural.[33]

This framework shows the importance of taking a multi-pronged approach to dismantling the logic and practices that exclude women from political processes. Santiago emphasizes the need to take various practical actions. These actions should not only help women be part of decision-making but also empower them. The goal is not just to include women at the table but to change how we see the idea of the table and increase women's involvement in politics.

Conceptual barriers
These include firstly, the way peace talks are understood as being about ending conflict not building peace, which reinforces the narrative that armed groups alone must be at the table and leads to the exclusion of over half of the population (women and other marginalized groups).

In the Philippines, this barrier was only overcome because the talks were reframed to be about building peace and addressing injustice through political, economic, and social transformation. Women's role was championed by key actors – including individuals in negotiating parties – by using religious and cultural arguments for participation. Peace was pursued across multiple tracks at various levels – civil society, grassroots groups, media – where women were significant actors.

Political barriers
These include women's exclusion from decision-making, and the depoliticization and coding of women's work as 'social work'. Women have significant relevant political experience and expertise working in civil society organizations which goes unacknowledged. In contrast, men's lived experiences, especially as armed actors, are commonly recognized as a source of valuable transferable knowledge and expertise in the political arena. This is not so for women's lived experiences. Women and civil society organizations, given their roles and positions in society, are more inclined to view peace processes as needing both social transformation and a political reform agenda for sustainable peace. Lobbying for women's inclusion should use both normative and strategic arguments.

Technical barriers
These come from women having less access to the political and security sphere in many contexts and not having the opportunity to develop related technical expertise. Santiago noted this and warned against being seen solely as a gender expert, as the biggest obstacle to her having influence within her own negotiating team. To address this, she became a self-taught ceasefire and security expert, and was seen as adding value to the discussions when compared with her male counterparts. Pools of women experts can be made and readied to address this issue, so that lists of women experts across different fields can easily be drawn on for specific topics during drafting and implementation of the peace agreement.[34]

31 For more see: https://www.bishnaw.com/home/en.
32 Inclusive Peace. 2018. Women in Peace and Transition Processes: Guatemala (1994-1999). Case Study Series. Geneva: Inclusive Peace
33 This is drawn from an interview with Irene Santiago by Anna Hess (CSS ETH Zurich) on 7 March 2014 on Women in Peace Processes, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TSWIGHmjBnA&list=PLXMa7vto-_OVolYMjtFm8D_s_XOkxWrLI&index=1; and Santiago, I. 2015. The Participation of Women in the Mindanao Peace Process. New York: UN Women.

34 For example, these can be seen in women mediator networks like the Southeast Asian Network of Women Peace Negotiators and Mediators (https://twitter.com/SEAWomenPeaceNM).

Resources

- GAPS UK et al. 2019. _Beyond consultations: A tool for meaningfully engaging with women in fragile and conflict-affected states_.

- Haines, R and Buchanan, C. 2023. _Practice Note: Making inclusive analysis a reality – strengthening political analysis in Myanmar post-2021._ Singapore: Reimagining Conflict Sensitivity. Available in Burmese.

- Viswanathan, R. 2021. _Learning from Practice: Resistance and Backlash to Preventing Violence against Women and Girls_. New York: UN Women.

- UN Women. 2018. _Experts Group report on women's meaningful participation in peace processes and gender-inclusive peace agreements._ New York: UN Women.

- Domingo, P et al. 2014. _Women's participation in peace and security: Normative ends, political means._ Briefing paper. May. UK: Overseas Development Institute

- Buchanan, C (eds). 2011. _Peacemaking in Asia and the Pacific: Women's participation, perspectives and priorities._ Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.

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