

Across Conflict Lines: Women Mediating for Peace 12th Annual Colloquium Findings

Written by Theresa de Langis

This paper draws on discussions from The Institute for Inclusive Security's 12th Annual Colloquium "Across Conflict Lines: Women Mediating for Peace," held from January 9 to 21, 2011. Twenty-one female mediation experts from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East¹ exchanged views on advancing women's inclusion in mediation and ensuring gender-sensitive processes and agreements. Participants discussed how to increase the prevalence of female mediators, enhance communication and cooperation with women and civil society during negotiations, and how to augment attention to women's priorities and needs in talks. They developed and endorse the specific recommendations for creating more inclusive peace processes at the end of this document. The Institute for Inclusive Security put together the following synthesis of participants' perspectives; their collective expertise provides important insights into the need for improved mediation to create durable peace.

More than 50 percent of peace agreements fail within five years of signature.² In part, this is because negotiations and accords often do not address the underlying causes of conflict or seek to prevent its resurgence. It is also because talks suffer from the absence of women. Though governments and multilateral organizations acknowledge the critical role women play in peacebuilding, they remain largely absent from high-level international peace negotiations and from peace talks around the globe.³ In 2010, the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) found that women comprise less than 10 percent of negotiators and less than 3 percent of the signatories to peace agreements. The UN has never appointed a woman as chief mediator.

1 Annabelle Abaya (Philippines), Nadwa Al Dawsari (Yemen), Suaad Allami (Iraq), Francesca Bomboko (Democratic Republic of Congo), Ruth Caesar (Liberia), Roxana Cristescu (Romania), Shukrije Gashi (Kosovo), Florence Iheme (Nigeria), Raya Kadyrova (Kyrgyzstan), Nighat Khan (Pakistan), Luz Méndez (Guatemala), Merav Moshe Grodofsky (Israel), Alice Nderitu (Kenya), Danijela Nenadic (Serbia), Françoise Ngendahayo (Burundi), Stella Sabiiti (Uganda), Kumudini Samuel (Sri Lanka), Stella Tamang (Nepal), Preeti Thapa (Nepal), Claudia Torres (Colombia), and Lilian Vargas (Argentina).

2 http://www.internationalalert.org/pdf/Donor_Aid_Strategies_in_Post_Peace_settlement_environments.pdf p.6.

3 The obligation to promote the participation of women in all aspects of peace processes is codified in international human rights and humanitarian law, including as a central part of UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000), 1889 (2010), and 1960 (2010), as well as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Beijing Platform for Action.

Distinct from negotiators who advocate on a specific group's behalf, mediators do not represent parties to a conflict. Track One mediators convene, structure, and organize negotiations, intervening when necessary to move the process forward. Track Two mediators broker relationships and trust between parties, nurture dialogue, and build support for Track One negotiations. More informal Track Three processes connect civil society at the grassroots level. Mediators in all tracks can lead the way to comprehensive and sustainable peace.

Colloquium participants felt that mediation would become more successful if mediators brought a broader, longer-term perspective to talks; they believed that involving women would help ensure a focus on critical wider priorities and needs, resulting in peace agreements that are more easily implemented and more likely to endure.



Colloquium delegates, Institute for Inclusive Security Deputy Director for Training and Consultations Mirsad Jačević, and Antonia Potter Prentice from the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue collaborate to develop recommendations.

What Difference Does *Difference* Make?

Women mediators can change the focus, dynamic, and outcome of negotiations because they bring unique experience and expertise to the table. Ironically, this background has hindered women from engaging in Track One mediation and limited their ability to participate in formal mediation processes.

An Altered Approach to Dialogue. Women have a vested interest in equalizing power. Participants felt that, because women themselves face discrimination, they are more apt to identify with the concerns of disempowered and marginalized groups—including other women—and to better understand the complex dynamics at play in groups with differing identities based on gender, ethnicity, race, class, and other markers. In many cultures, women are perceived as less threatening; because of this, they are well placed to facilitate difficult conversations among negotiators. Participants provided examples of how women succeeded with consensus building when male counterparts may have felt pressure to save face in power struggles. Additionally, because women are often excluded from backroom dealmaking among “old boy” networks of power brokers, participants felt that women may be better able to focus on big-picture outcomes while remaining neutral and impartial.

Unique Skills and Perspectives. Women come to peace tables with socially constructed roles; drawing on cultural mores and traditions that position women as peacebuilders in their families and communities, participants felt women may be more practiced than men at accommodating the needs of others, establishing relationships of trust, using a more collaborative and

Sri Lanka

For years, women in communities worked to bring warring factions to the peace table. Yet once formal talks began, these same individuals were shut out. Armed with a unified platform on women's needs and perspectives, Sri Lankan women convinced official mediators and donors to establish a gender subcommittee made up of women from all sides of the conflict. As talks progressed, the women built broad consensus, at times putting aside difficult topics to build momentum by finding common ground. Eventually, the peace talks failed when the warring parties in the main negotiations reached an impasse, notwithstanding continued cooperation within the gender subcommittee to keep the talks alive. Women demonstrated an ability to negotiate successfully.

cooperative approach generally, and dealing with disputing groups, in particular. As one participant stated, “Women are dependent upon collaboration for our survival, and so we build bridges to create alliances.” In the words of another participant, “Women are both inclusive and conclusive,” pointing to the patience and persistence they bring to negotiating disputes as well as the long-term view they use to measure agreements’ viability. Additionally, women may be more open than men to addressing the emotional and psychological trauma of conflict, which, if left unattended, can prove to be one of the most destructive spoilers of an accord.

Barriers to Inclusion. Too often, participants stated, formal mediation processes include *no women*—not at the table representing national interests, not in mediation support teams, not within observer delegations. Additionally, women's perspectives and priorities are rarely solicited. The results are imbalanced and incomplete accords.

Colloquium participants expressed frustration that women do a great deal of conflict resolution in communities; they are instrumental in “ripening the ground” for peace talks to begin and accords to hold. Yet, when talks enter the Track One stage, they are shut out; their Track Two and Track Three efforts are often viewed as “naive” and disconnected from the policy setting agenda. Again and again, colloquium participants—representing conflicts at different stages around the globe—noted how unfortunate it is that women need to expend their energy aggressively lobbying to break into peace processes. Instead, they could be focusing their time and attention on service as equal participants in efforts to set a comprehensive, and inclusive, agenda for peace.



Institute Chair Swanee Hunt and participants from the Philippines, Uganda, Sri Lanka, Serbia, and Nigeria meet with Michelle Bachelet, UN Under-Secretary-General for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

What Women Deliver

Women have much to bring to the table to ensure that accords can be sustained. Indeed, colloquium participants believe that women's participation would help ensure that all components of a peace process are designed bearing in mind the long-term implications for implementation and are more fully vetted and validated by a representative cross-section of the population.



UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs B. Lynn Pascoe (left) meets with colloquium participants.

A Fuller Security Picture. Women bring a perspective no mediator can afford to ignore. When exclusively focused on questions of territory, sovereignty, and power, negotiations are marred by a blind spot as to the full security picture—how conflict specifically impacts women, children, and other civil society members. Education, health, livelihoods, community coherence—virtually no aspect of life is left unscarred by armed conflict, participants stressed. Sexual and gender-based violence is too common a tactic in today's wars; it is also an indicator of societal instability pre- and post-conflict. (Participants pointed out that sexual and gender-based violence often increases immediately after a conflict, especially when warring parties are demobilized without considering how their reentry into communities will affect women.) For mediators, such intelligence should not be viewed as “women's issues” or “social issues,” but as hard security issues that have a direct impact on accords' sustainability. One participant shared her experience working with other activists in the Mano River region of West Africa, calling attention to the distinct experiences of women during a conflict marked by widespread sexual violence. Locked out of the formal processes, they focused their advocacy on pressing mediators to hear and formally consider the women's views. “The mediators were treating the warring parties with deference and respect, calling

them ‘gentlemen.’ We, on the other hand, called them ‘bandits.’ By the end of our presentation to the mediation team, they said, ‘We did not know. We did not understand the full gravity of the crisis.’”

A New Framework for Dispute Resolution. Bringing a comprehensive view to peace and security, women have the potential to reframe issues over power sharing into broad-based communal social issues. “Too much of the male legacy is tied to the warrior model, where power is derived from the conflict itself,” shared one participant. As such, so long as peace negotiations are exclusively dominated by warring parties—who may have a vested interest in holding onto power by continuing the conflict—accords will be fragile at best. Participants repeatedly stressed the need to see peace as a process, rather than as a deal or an event whereby power is redistributed to a small circle of “men with guns.” (Interestingly, some participants noted that women combatants do not find it any easier getting a place in formal talks.) Rather than “winning the war,” participants stressed, peace processes need to focus more extensively on how to “keep the peace” by building institutions, creating legal frameworks, and by introducing early warning and prevention measures. As one participant said, “We know that military solutions don't succeed and political solutions only include power brokers who have the weapons. Real solutions are at the social level.” As most of today's conflicts are intra- rather than interstate, it becomes even more important to emphasize building the peace by fostering social cohesion rather than simply ending the war by halting violence.

Darfur

To engage women in the peace process, the Canadian government, African Union, and civil society activists organized a 20-member, all-women Gender Expert Support Team that included a neutral, diverse cross-section of experts from across Darfur. The GEST women participated in the seventh round of peace negotiations in Abuja, Nigeria, in 2005; they advised mediators and negotiators, reviewing and providing input on draft language. Though they were involved for just three short weeks, the women convinced negotiators to include many elements of the GEST charter in the Darfur Peace Agreement, making it one of the most gender-sensitive peace accords in the world.

Legitimacy. Participants shared numerous examples of how peace processes gain legitimacy when women are involved. Less likely to be combatants and rarely in command of armed forces, women are perceived more neutrally by negotiators, and they are less likely to resort

to violence when resolving disputes. In the Philippines, for example, public perception of the peace negotiations' legitimacy greatly improved when women were appointed as four of the five official mediators seeking to resolve deeply entrenched intrastate conflicts. At the same time, women's participation is vital to the perceived acceptability of raising issues specific to women and of providing a gendered perspective on all aspects of a peace deal. Participants shared multiple examples of women activists organized as a "third side," serving as intermediaries between disputing parties, as well as between the government and communities.

Including women in high-level peace deliberations may itself build confidence among warring factions and the public. One participant shared a story of being challenged during a meeting with displaced people in a refugee camp she visited while serving as minister. Demanding proof that things had changed and that inhabitants would not be subject to the same violence again, she stated, "I am the proof of the change. When have you ever seen a woman with this much power [in government]?"

National Ownership. Often more closely linked and identified with civil society, women can deliver a national constituency supportive of a peace process, critical to any accord's durability. Participants frequently expressed a pragmatic view of peace, measuring the viability of any agreement by its potential for concrete implementation at the local level. This led them to feel that education, health, economic opportunity, and justice were critical to sustaining stability and social cohesion. Additionally, participants felt that women, often victims of gross violations, would be more apt to adopt a human-rights-based approach and to press for an end to impunity using transparent and inclusive accountability mechanisms directly involving civil society in building peace.

Burundi

For peace talks in Burundi, UNIFEM organized a team of international gender experts to support the peace process. The team was made up of individuals who had negotiated conflicts in their own countries; three of the four members were women. Unconstrained by a restrictive mandate, the gender expert group leveraged its informal status to consult with all actors in the negotiations; because of the experts' experience resolving conflict while bringing forward gender concerns, they were accepted as peers to the official participants in the official deliberations. Serving as a bridge between women civil society activists and formal negotiators, the team built support for the adoption of a comprehensive women's agenda in the formal peace process.

A View to Implementation. Above all, participants stressed, women understand the dynamism of conflict—its cyclical escalation and de-escalation—and that implementation is a long-term venture involving reconciliation and reconstruction within communities. Participants provided examples of how even model peace processes will unravel over time if implementation and negotiation are not attended to with equal vigilance. In Guatemala, for instance, a woman was part of the formal negotiations and the accord took into account a full range of human security and human rights issues. Yet, years later, lack of implementation has led to widespread poverty, criminal gang activity, and an alarming increase in femicide and other violence against women. While official mediators may come for a short time and leave once a deal is struck on paper, women felt the process was better served by viewing peace as a collection of agreements achieved over time—with women often serving as the only thread before, during, and after conflict as they work in communities to make peace "stick." In using their potential to serve as third side intermediaries, women can be central in advocating for a democratic transformation to move from thinking about "power over" to thinking about "power with"—and, as a result to have citizens invested in and incentivized to take part.



Women experts from Uganda, Romania, and Nepal deliberate with Institute Director Carla Koppell.

The Way Forward:

Conclusions and Recommendations

Colloquium participants felt that a three-pronged approach would most effectively improve mediation: Such an approach would involve bringing women to talks, enhancing cooperation and consultation by mediators and negotiators with civil society and women throughout talks, and ensuring attention to women's priorities and needs when crafting accords. They felt strongly that such an approach to implementation would strengthen mediation per se as much as it would ensure attention to women's priorities and needs. Participants offered a



Delegates from Africa and Meredith Preston McGhie of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue hone their advocacy message.

comprehensive set of concrete recommendations (see box on pages 6-7) for elevating the role of women in mediation.

Participants also reached several critical conclusions during deliberations.

Making peace accords more durable. Of greatest importance to participants was the need to generally improve negotiations and mediation processes. To do so, they felt:

1. Mediators must include a wider range of players in talks to increase the perspectives brought to bear in resolving conflict and to increase local ownership of accords;
2. Peace talks must be viewed as one step in a process rather than ends unto themselves; doing so would change the frame of negotiations, fostering a broader, longer-term perspective in talks; and
3. Accords must explicitly facilitate conflict prevention by addressing underlying causes of conflict and by introducing structures and means for monitoring the situation and addressing threats into the future.

Finding women. While policymakers sometimes claim they cannot find women to involve in talks, women have done—and are doing—considerable work at the formal and informal levels as mediators. Yet because they have not often been elevated to the international level and are

generally not well known to those making appointments, aggressive and diversified recruitment strategies are needed to identify women. Outreach should involve women engaged in sub-national and local peacebuilding processes as well as women who have played decision-making roles in negotiating conflicts within other countries.

Creating space for women at talks. Bringing women into negotiations may require incentives. To make it attractive, extra seats can be offered at the peace table for teams that bring women. To make it feasible, donors should underwrite assistance with childcare, transportation, and women’s unique security concerns. Complementing seats at formal talks can be parallel efforts that enable women’s perspectives to filter directly and indirectly into talks. Various approaches in such diverse settings as Guatemala, Sri Lanka, and Nepal have successfully ensured women’s influence on negotiations. (Some are briefly highlighted in this publication.)

Guarantee that gender is on the agenda. Addressing gender issues in a negotiation requires considering the different social roles women and men play as defined by cultural codes and mores as well as how men and women may access and deploy power differently. Attentiveness to gender is not women’s work. To ensure peace processes are gender sensitive, all actors must be held responsible. Participants spoke again and again of the important role played by male allies as messengers for gender equality and its link to sustainable peace. To ensure accountability, participants recommended that mediation team mandates set performance objectives requiring attention to gender and receive technical support to mainstream gender in all aspects of the process. A range of tested models ensure attention to gender in talks; in places like Darfur, gender expertise was provided by local women experts.⁴ In Burundi, female and male experts from abroad were employed.

Guatemala

In Guatemala, women’s participation came as part of a broader effort to ensure civil society a significant voice in talks between the government and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG). A Civil Society Assembly enabled deliberation by eleven different stakeholder groups, one of which convened women’s organizations. Members of the women’s organization sector dialogue collaborated with female participants in other groups as well as with the woman member of the URNG negotiating team. Direct and indirect input into the talks enabled the ACS generally, and the women specifically, to have a meaningful impact on the resulting accord.

⁴ Page, M., Whitman, T., and Anderson, C. (2009) “Strategies for Policymakers: Bringing Women into Peace Negotiations,” The Institute for Inclusive Security, Washington, DC.

Colloquium 2011 Recommendations

To elevate the role of women in mediation conveners and observers of mediation (such as multilateral organizations, foreign countries, and non-governmental organizations) should:

1. Include at least 40 percent men and 40 percent women in mediation teams, including in decision-making positions.
2. Ensure that every formal mediator and mediation team has appropriate technical support to engage women and address their needs by:
 - a. Clearly defining the mediators' mandate and performance objectives to require attention to gender and consultation with women and civil society;
 - b. Providing orientation and sensitization of the need for women's inclusion and cooperation with civil society at the national, sub-national, and community levels;
 - c. Formulating and disseminating guidelines regarding cooperation with women and civil society;
 - d. Including a gender adviser at a senior level who has knowledge of peace processes;
 - e. Convening high-level gender expert support teams of women from conflict-affected areas to advise all actors in the process, including observers; and
 - f. Consistently commissioning analyses of community level conflicts that look at the differential needs, roles, and interests of women and men to feed into local, national, and international mediation efforts.
3. Strengthen international contact groups/groups of friends⁵ efforts to ensure women's role in mediation by including at least 40 percent men and 40 percent women within them and by explicitly:
 - a. Calling for formal consultations with women and men in civil society;
 - b. Mandating gender analysis; and
 - c. Advocating to mediators and negotiating parties to include women in peace processes and to produce more gender sensitive agreements.
4. Credit and identify women as members of mediation teams and publicly acknowledge their contributions to mediation, including with the media.

To elevate the role of women in mediation, funders and providers of technical assistance should:

1. Fund global mapping exercises of women with national and sub-national mediation experience; use those maps to enrich rosters of mediators that exist.
2. Enhance research into the role and success of female mediators and women's priorities in mediation, especially by:
 - a. Conducting evidence-based analyses of the different roles women play in mediation, including everything from direct mediation support to creating the conditions for mediation to occur; obstacles to women's participation; women's differential impact on mediation; strategies and structures to promote women's inclusion; and case examples of successful and unsuccessful mediation efforts that explore the quantitative and qualitative difference more inclusive processes make on the community, national, and international levels;
 - b. Conducting gender-sensitive analyses of conflicts at the local level; and
 - c. Consistently using a gender lens when tracking and evaluating implementation of peace processes, including agreements.

⁵ "Group of friends" refers to the different formal and informal international coalitions that come together in support of mediation processes. Examples include Friends of the Guatemalan Peace Process, the International Contact Group on Somalia, or the International Contact Group supporting the Mindanao peace process. These may be established directly by the mediator, by observers and supporters of the mediation, or at the request of the parties.

3. Use financial incentives to:
 - a. Facilitate women's participation in peace talks by underwriting women mediators' and negotiators' participation in peace processes (that is, additional to the funding provided for the standard number of mediators and negotiators); and
 - b. Encourage the creation of gender sensitive agendas for negotiation by facilitating consultations with women and civil society.
4. Support efforts to increase the number of female mediators and gender awareness in mediation through:
 - a. Gender-sensitization sessions to increase awareness of all mediators;
 - b. Efforts to recruit, increase capacity, and provide opportunities for women in mediation;
 - c. Ensuring peer exchanges of peace mediators and exchanges among conflict areas to give local women experience mediating outside of their own context;
 - d. Funding formal networks of female mediators and supporting women's entry into broader networks of mediators; and
 - e. Supporting medium- to long-term programming to develop cadres of female mediators to ensure professionalism and sustained peace.
5. Underwrite national government and civil society efforts to increase the visibility of women mediators and to highlight their achievements in public broadcasting, commercial mass media, and social media as well as through the creative arts.

To elevate the role of women in mediation, domestic actors facing conflict (such as national and sub-national governments and negotiating parties) should:

1. Ensure women's input is solicited and formally considered:
 - a. At the peace table, by including women equally at all levels within mediation teams, negotiating parties, and technical assistance teams; and
 - b. In constructing the agenda for talks and determining the content of agreements through consultations with women and civil society organizations.
2. Diversify recruitment of female mediators for international and national mediation teams by including women with conflict mediation experience in different contexts at the national and local levels.
3. Institutionalize mediation by:
 - a. Creating a legal framework for the use of gender-sensitive, non-adversarial dispute resolution processes (thereby ensuring enhanced participation of women as mediators, recognition of women mediators in these areas, and women's access to justice);
 - b. Where applicable, creating a national structure for peacebuilding and conflict resolution in which there are at least 40 percent men and 40 percent women in positions at all levels; and
 - c. Developing school curricula at all levels to create a culture of peace.
4. Ensure peace negotiation agendas include women's priorities and needs.
5. Support women's political participation at the local and national level to ensure that a sufficient number of women feed into the pool of mediators drawn upon to resolve future conflict.



“Some scholars and international practitioners of mediation are often confident that they know exactly how to run a process. But context is very important. Women who comprise a large number of community-level mediators in the Philippines, are attuned to culturally-appropriate processes. Many of them have found that a needs-based approach is more effective than a rights-based method which is prone to argumentation and competition. If an external mediator comes without a sensitivity to the context and consequently the approach, the process will most likely suffer.”

Annabelle Abaya (Philippines)

“Parties start with demands, but a mediator has to find the needs. During one mediation, a rebel leader passed me a note with a long list of demands — the ones they were going to slap on the table at the last minute: a new constitution, high ministries, paved roads, electricity, and so on. After each, they said, ‘*We won’t lay down arms unless this is honored.*’ Their last demand was, ‘*We are tired, we want to come home.*’ Immediately I saw a problem. How were they going to get home if all the other demands had to be met first? I asked them to draw a triangle around their demands, and it came out upside-down. The tip — the easiest demand — was at the bottom. I asked them to think about this triangle, and they recognized that it was top-heavy. So they flipped the triangle and found out that their desire to come home came first. They didn’t need to set conditions anymore. So they moved from demanding that someone else do something for them to doing something themselves.”

Stella Sabiti (Uganda)

“Women often see themselves as educators, so they understand the importance of the long term. In a peace process, ‘*long term*’ can be translated into how we work through with great patience the many aspects of the negotiation and how we look at not just what is here and now but at what will be in the future. We’re attentive to how leaders need a way to gain the support of their people. Women can look at these different aspects because a lot of them are aspects of relationships — among those at the table; between a leader and his people; and between peoples and the future.”

Merav Moshe Gorodovsky (Israel)

“Many male mediators tend to use ‘*confrontative language.*’ Even if the language is not intended to be violent, it can make people feel unsafe and defensive because it creates an atmosphere of argumentation. If you want to encourage openness and collaboration, people need to see that you respect their feelings and perspectives. They need to have you listen in order to understand, not persuade or debate. You don’t even have to agree. When they sense that you acknowledge them, the whole dynamic changes.”

Annabelle Abaya (Philippines)