

Making Women Count in Peace Processes

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The Research Project

This Briefing Note is based on results from the “Broadening Participation in Political Negotiations and Implementation” research project conducted between 2011 and 2016 at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, Switzerland.

This project analyzes how and under what conditions various actors in addition to the main negotiating parties have participated in and influenced peace processes and political transitions, by comparing 40 in-depth qualitative case studies of peace and constitution-making multi-stakeholder negotiations, and the implementation of negotiated agreements, ranging from 1989 to 2014.

Background

Inclusive peace processes are gradually replacing the traditional exclusive peace deals negotiated solely between two or more armed groups. From Colombia to Libya and Myanmar, current peace processes seek to broaden participation at even the highest level of official peace negotiations. Although women often take part in these negotiations, mediators, negotiators and policy-makers overall still resist greater inclusion of women.

Key Findings about Women’s Inclusion

→ MAKING WOMEN COUNT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN COUNTING WOMEN

Fundamentally, the direct inclusion of women at the negotiation table does not *per se* lead to more peace agreements being signed, improving the quality of such agreements, or ensuring their long-term sustainability. What makes a difference for reaching and implementing sustainable peace agreements is the level of influence that women actually have on the process—not merely their numerical presence. When women’s groups have been able to strongly influence negotiations or push for a peace deal, an agreement has almost always been reached. Even where women’s groups have only moderate influence, an agreement has been reached in the majority of cases. When women’s groups are not involved at all, or have only minimal influence on the process, the chance of reaching an agreement is considerably lower. In short, making women’s participation count is more important than merely counting the number of women in peace negotiations.

→ **THE CHANCES OF AGREEMENTS BEING IMPLEMENTED ARE HIGHER WHEN WOMEN'S GROUPS INFLUENCE THE PROCESS**

The chances of agreements being implemented are also much higher when women's groups have stronger influence on the process. Comparative research indicates that in almost all cases where strong women's influence is exerted partial or full implementation follows after a peace agreement has been reached. Generally, the stronger women's influence is in reaching an agreement, the higher the likelihood of its subsequent implementation.

→ **TIMING IS KEY TO SUCCESSFUL WOMEN'S INCLUSION**

The research found that timing is key to achieving successful and effective inclusion of women in peace and transition negotiations. Early women's involvement—preferably in the pre-negotiation phase—has often paved the way for sustained women's inclusion throughout subsequent negotiations and agreement implementation processes. All case studies show that the international community tends to pay the most attention during the negotiation phase. However, many peace processes fail, or lose the substantial gains made during inclusive negotiations, during an agreement's implementation. This finding echoes UN Security Council Resolution 1889 (2009) and its emphasis on including women in decision-making at the earliest stages in peace and post-conflict processes.

→ **WOMEN'S INCLUSION TAKES PLACE THROUGH DIFFERENT MODALITIES, AT THE TABLE AND BEYOND**

Women's inclusion is not limited to the negotiation table. In any given peace or transition process, any of seven modalities of inclusion may be present; either separately or in parallel. The influence women may exert differs from one inclusion modality to another.

SEVEN MODALITIES

1 | Direct representation at the negotiation table

- A. Women's inclusion within delegations
- B. Women's own delegations

2 | Observer status for selected groups

3 | Consultations

- A. Official / unofficial
- B. Elite / broader / public

4 | Inclusive commissions

- A. Post-agreement commissions
- B. Commissions conducting peace process
- C. Permanent bodies

5 | High-level problem-solving workshops

6 | Public decision-making (i.e. referendum)

7 | Mass action

1 | Direct representation at the negotiation table: Women's quotas have proven effective in enlarging women's representation at the table. However, quotas alone do not automatically lead to more women's influence, as party loyalties are often stronger than women's interests. Women have higher chances of exercising influence at the negotiation table when they have their own independent women-only delegation and/or when they are able to strategically coordinate among themselves across delegations in order to advance common interests, such as by formulating joint positions on key issues and/or by forming unified women's coalitions across formal delegations.

- 2 | **Observer status:** When women are granted observer status, they can rarely influence the process. No patterns assessing the influence of women as observers have emerged; rather, the way in which women are able to use observer status during negotiations varies according to context-specific factors.
- 3 | **Consultations:** Setting up formal (i.e. officially endorsed by the mediation team and the negotiating parties) or informal consultative forums to identify key issues, demands, and proposals made by women—in parallel to ongoing peace negotiations—has been found to be the most common modality of women’s inclusion in peace and transition processes. However, for such consultations to be influential in practice, it is necessary to establish clear and effective transfer mechanisms that systematically communicate results of the consultations to negotiators and mediators. Overall, women are most influential within consultations when able to formulate joint positions on key issues. Joint positions are then presented, often in concise documents to the main negotiating parties, which are then either formally obliged or informally pressured to consider this input in the drafting of a final peace agreement.
- 4 | **Inclusive commissions:** There are generally three types of commissions: those established to prepare and conduct peace and transition processes, post-agreement commissions (e.g. transitional justice mechanisms, ceasefire monitoring, constitution-drafting), and permanent commissions that endure in the long-term. Particularly in post-agreement commissions, women’s inclusion is mostly the result of gender-sensitive provisions already written into the peace agreement. Securing women’s participation in all commissions across all phases of a peace process requires explicit gender equality provisions to be introduced as early as possible, in order to be present in the language of a final peace agreement.
- 5 | **Problem-solving workshops:** Women have been found to be highly underrepresented in this modality. Exceptions to this general finding have occurred when workshops have been specifically designed for women, as a means of overcoming any political tensions and grievances. Such cases often result in the formulation of joint positions, which then increase women’s overall influence.
- 6 | **Public decision-making:** In some cases, negotiated peace agreements or new constitutions are put to public vote. There are examples where women have been successful in launching a public campaign in favor of approving a peace deal. Reliable gender-disaggregated data on voting patterns are often lacking; however, when such data are available, it has been found that the voting patterns of women does not differ from those of men.
- 7 | **Mass action:** More than any other group, women have performed mass action campaigns in favor of peace deals. They have pressured conflict parties to start negotiations and sign peace deals. Women have also undertaken mass action to push their way into official processes that exclude them.

What Determines Women’s Influence

The research identified a number of key **process and context factors** that either enable or constrain the inclusion of women, and their ability to influence peace and transition processes in all seven inclusion modalities and across different phases.

Process design is crucial. Women’s inclusion is most beneficial to peace and transition processes when they are able to exercise meaningful influence; yet this has only been possible when gender-aware procedures were already in place for the **selection** of participants.

Quotas and transparent criteria and procedures have proven useful. However, if selected women have no substantive **decision-making power**, participation can become meaningless. For example, in almost all national dialogues, ultimate decision-making power rested with a small group of already-powerful male leaders despite high levels of women's participation in terms of numbers. For inclusion modalities further from the negotiation table, such as consultations, appropriate **transfer strategies** to bring results to the negotiating table were often neglected. Consultative forums were put in place, but the results of these debates were not necessarily taken into account. Women-only consultative forums may risk turning into debating clubs without real power.

Additionally, it was found that women's groups significantly increased their influence when they were able to **overcome divisions** and **build coalitions**. For example, in the 2008 Kenyan negotiations following post-election violence, Graça Machel, a member of the African Union mediation team, pushed women to overcome their differences to great effect. Conversely, in Yemen where women benefitted from a 30 percent quota in the national dialogue, they did not form a unified group and rarely voted as a block—thus failing to pass many of the issues of joint concern to them. The role of the **mediators** has also been found to be important. When mediators were inclusion-friendly and knew how to manage inclusion strategically, this helped women's groups assert influence. Finally, **preparedness and support structures** (provided by local, regional, or international actors) prior to, during, and after negotiations can substantially enhance the influence of women.

Context factors matter as well. The research found that the main context factors enabling or constraining women's inclusion and influence are elite support, public buy-in, and the influence of regional and international actors on peace processes. Inclusive processes challenge established **power structures**, and resistance by powerful elites is to be expected. However, the case studies show that women's groups (and the international community) have been ill-prepared to handle local **elite resistance**, and that this has often been a major obstacle to women's inclusion. **Public buy-in** for a peace agreement or new constitution is also important, and is influenced by a country's political climate and the attitudes of powerful actors. However, public buy-in can also be created. For example, in Northern Ireland ahead of the 1998 referendum to approve the Good Friday Peace Agreement, a massive civil society campaign initiated by the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition successfully pushed for a positive referendum outcome. Regional powers also matter. There are other elements that may enhance the influence exerted by women during a peace process, such as the pre-existence of **strong and active women's groups** or movements; the experience and expertise of these groups, along with the existence of prior commitments regarding the inclusion of women; and, networks providing logistical and other forms of support.

The Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative (IPTI) is dedicated to evidence-based research and its transfer to policy and practice. The objective of the initiative is to support sustainable peace by providing expertise and information on the inclusion of diverse actors in peace and transition processes. This expertise is drawn from a collection of research projects that have been conducted for nearly a decade at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva under the lead of Dr. Thania Paffenholz.

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