



# Beyond the Normative: Can Women's Inclusion Really Make for Better Peace Processes?

Policy Brief

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Thania Paffenholz

This policy brief is based on results from the multi-year research (2011-2015) on “Broadening Participation in Political Negotiations and Implementation” conducted at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies’ Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding. The results of this research form part of the knowledge base of the new Inclusive Peace and Transitions Initiative at the Graduate Institute, where they are used to inform policy and practice.

## Background

Inclusive peace processes are slowly replacing the traditional exclusive peace deals negotiated solely between two or more armed groups. From Colombia to Libya or Myanmar, current peace processes seek to broaden participation even at the highest level of official peace negotiations. Though women often take part in these negotiations, overall mediators and policy-makers are still resistant to greater inclusion of women. This problem derives from the lack of research-based knowledge able to extend the debate beyond normative claims of the importance of women's inclusion.

With a team of more than 30 researchers, the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva has just concluded a multi-year research on "Broadening Participation in Political Negotiations and Implementation" (2011-2015) analysing how inclusion works in practice by comparing 40 in-depth case studies of peace and constitution-making negotiations and their implementation from the period 1990 to 2013. The project assessed the role of all actors included additionally alongside the main conflict parties such as civil society, religious actors, business and also women's groups.

Key findings and recommendations for mediators, donors, civil society organisations and their partners are presented here:

## Findings

**1. Making women count is more important than just counting women:** Fundamentally, the inclusion of women does not *per se* lead to better quality and more sustainable peace agreements. However, when women's groups have the opportunity and capacity to exercise effective influence on the peace process the likelihood of peace agreements being reached and implemented is much higher. Thus, what matters is not counting women, but making women's influence count.

**2. Women's inclusion does not weaken peace negotiations:** On the contrary, the presence of women significantly improves the influence on negotiation outcomes exercised by all additionally included actors aside from the main parties. Of all cases examined, there was only one case where an agreement was not reached in which women exercised strong influence. Moreover, organised women's groups, networks and movements never mobilised against a peace process.

**3. So far women's inclusion takes only place due to normative pressure:** Whereas the broader inclusion of civil society was generally initiated by the main conflict parties, this was not the case for women. Exclusionary barriers for women were overcome following a massive push by the women themselves and/or by international supporters and mediators.



Indigenous women line up to search delegates at the Zapatista Encuentro, 1996. Photographer: Julian Stallabrass <https://www.flickr.com/photos/slowkodachrome/11450087616>

## 7 Modalities of Inclusion

### 1. Direct representation at the negotiation table

- A. Women 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

#### 4. Inclusion takes place in different modalities, at the table and beyond:

There has been an excessive focus on, and simplification of, the negotiation table. The research found that women's inclusion takes place in different modalities at the table and beyond. At the table, women take part in official delegations, but also occasionally have their own delegations (such as in Northern Ireland or in Yemen). In parallel to the table, women took part in various consultative forums, problem-solving workshops and were often successful in organising mass action to push men into signing peace agreements. While seven inclusion modalities have been identified (see box), success cases always featured a combination of different inclusion modalities in parallel and at different times of the process.

**5. Implementation is key but often neglected:** All case studies show that most attention of the international community goes into the negotiation phase. However, many processes fail, or lose the substantial gains of inclusive negotiations, during implementation. The research found that inclusive post-agreement commissions for example, such as monitoring bodies and constitution review commissions, shape the implementation of an agreement. Women can play key roles in these implementation phase modalities. Thus, the inclusive composition and proper functioning of these inclusion modality mechanisms requires proper preparation and monitoring, and is most effective when already specified in the peace agreement.

**6. Process design is crucial:** Women's inclusion is most beneficial to peace processes when they can exercise influence, yet this has only been possible when gender-aware procedures were in place for **selection**. Quotas and transparent criteria and procedures have proven useful. However, if selected women have no **decision-making power**, participation can become meaningless. For example, in almost all national dialogues, despite often good women participation by numbers, ultimate decision-making power rested with a small group of already-powerful male leaders.

For inclusion modalities further from the negotiation table such as consultations, appropriate **transfer** strategies to bring results to the table are often neglected. Consultative forums are put in place and the results of these debates are not necessarily taken into account. Hence, women-only consultative forums can become a debating club without power. However, the case of the 1996-2003 Burundi peace process shows that consultations can help to enhance women's influence. The All-Party Women's Conference was convened to address issues relating to the peace process and negotiations relevant to women and, although it had no formal decision-making power in the process, it was successful in bringing a number of recommendations into the final agreement. This success was heavily facilitated by the fact that the Conference resulted in a coherent, unified declaration with proposals, which could then be used by the mediator, Nelson Mandela, as a concrete agenda point for the formal negotiations.

Additionally, it was found that women's groups significantly increased their influence when they were able to **overcome divisions** and **build coalitions** for joint women positioning. For example, in Kenya, Graça Machel, a member of the AU mediation team, pushed women to overcome their differences to great effect. Conversely, in Yemen, although women benefitted from a 30 per cent 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 concern to them. The role of the mediators has also been important. When **mediators** were inclusion-friendly and knew how to manage inclusion strategically, this has helped groups to 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.

**7. Power matters:** 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 elite resistance, and this has often been a major obstacle to women's inclusion. Public buy-in for an agreement or constitution is also important and is influenced by the political climate in the country and the attitude of powerful actors. However, public buy-in can also be created. In Northern Ireland, in the run up to the referendum over the Good Friday Peace Agreement, a massive civil society campaign initiated by the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition successfully pushed for a positive outcome of the referendum. Regional powers also matter. The latest developments in Yemen are a disheartening example of how the lack of buy-in by major elites and regional actors can destroy a very inclusive process.

## Recommendations

The findings presented above lead to the following recommendations for women groups and their partners but also for mediators and donors:

- 1) Continue all efforts to enhance the participation of women in peace and transition processes; in particular, strengthen early involvement of women in the pre-negotiation phase to ensure their participation during official negotiations as well as during implementation.
- 2) Ensure that women representing diverse female constituencies take part in different inclusion

modalities both inside and outside the formal negotiations during peace processes.

- 3) Strengthen policies and strategies to ensure women have greater opportunity to exercise influence prior to, during, and after peace negotiations instead of merely increasing the number of women involved in these processes.
- 4) Apply coherent policies and strategies that combine the aforementioned support and empowerment strategies for ensuring women's influence with broader support for the peace process.
- 5) Strengthen the gender-awareness of mediators, facilitators, mediation teams and conflict parties.
- 6) Improve monitoring and accountability mechanisms for enhancing women's participation in peace processes, implementation and post-conflict governance.

A substantial report on these results on women and gender from the "Broadening Participation Project" has been commissioned by and sent to UN Women to inform the Global Study in preparation for the High-level Review on the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

More Information: [thania.paffenholz@graduateinstitute.ch](mailto:thania.paffenholz@graduateinstitute.ch)

<http://graduateinstitute.ch/home/research/centresandprogrammes/ccdp/publications/publications-issuebriefs.html>

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