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# A Practical Guide to a Gender-Inclusive National Dialogue

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**Report**

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## Executive Summary

National dialogues are broadly inclusive, country-wide negotiation forums typically convened at moments of major political crisis and are meant to produce a consensus roadmap for navigating out of the crisis.<sup>1</sup> They are claimed to be inclusive forums that represent “the nation” through political parties, civil society, the private sector, unions, churches, and other social sectors and institutions, sometimes also including armed or previously armed parties. However, the legitimacy of this claim—that national dialogues are truly inclusive—requires women to have representation and a significant voice.

This guide is intended to be a practical resource for anyone preparing, advocating for, or participating in an upcoming or ongoing national dialogue, and it seeks to foster understanding of how to make a national dialogue truly inclusive of women and gender. It describes process design and context factors that can affect women’s opportunities in a dialogue, and explains sources of resistance to the inclusion and influence of women and gender, and strategies and sources of support and solidarity that can counteract such resistance. Meaningfully including women requires more than just adding women into a gender-blind or otherwise exclusive process. Women’s participation must be intersectional, which requires the participation of diverse women from different generations, geographical regions (including both urban and rural regions), backgrounds (both elite and non-elite), ethnicities, and religions to represent the national population.

This paper uses “gender inclusive” as an overarching term and differentiates between levels of gender-inclusiveness on a spectrum from gender discriminatory to gender blind, gender sensitive, gender responsive, and gender transformative. A “gender-blind” national dialogue ignores pre-existing gender inequalities that form barriers to women’s meaningful participation. A “gender-sensitive” national dialogue recognises gender inequalities without specifically addressing them, while a “gender-responsive” dialogue is designed to respond to specific gendered needs. This would include, for instance, recognising that due to barriers to women’s education, women participants in a national dialogue may need more technical support, especially in audio formats in local languages (rather than materials written in English only, for example). It would also recognise gendered vulnerabilities, such as specific security risks that women delegates and representatives may face when travelling to or from dialogue events, or the risk that they may experience sexual harassment during the process.

The ideal national dialogue would be “gender transformative,” be informed by an analysis of underlying gendered power dynamics, and aim to transform the root causes of gender inequalities and discriminations into equality to overcome the structural discriminations entrenched in forms of negative peace.

1 T. Paffenholz et al., “What Makes or Breaks National Dialogues?” Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative (2017), [www.inclusivepeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/report-national-dialogues-en.pdf](http://www.inclusivepeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/report-national-dialogues-en.pdf) [last accessed: 16 September 2022].

A gender-transformative national dialogue requires that women participate in the dialogue at or near parity, and with attention to intersectionalities; that women are represented in leadership positions; that women are involved in agenda-setting and participate in all working groups; and that discussions engage with gender, not only the needs and experiences of women. This can require women and their supporters to push for modifications to the procedures of the dialogue and the addition of new modalities and spaces as part of a long-term strategy that also encompasses mobilisation and advocacy from outside the formal process.



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 What Is a National Dialogue?

**National dialogues are broadly inclusive, country-wide negotiation forums typically convened at moments of major political crisis and are meant to produce a consensus roadmap for navigating out of the crisis.**<sup>2</sup> A major political crisis occurs when the fundamental rules of a political system are challenged and the crisis cannot be resolved using existing, regular institutions for dialogue and dispute resolution. Crises may take the form of large-scale popular protests, financial turmoil, tax strikes, general strikes, or a breakdown in security due to a major armed conflict or insurgency.

Drawing on the legacy of the great national dialogues—such as the United States (US) Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia (1787), the French National Constituent Assembly (1789–91), and the Conférence Nationale Souveraine in Benin (1990)—a national dialogue promises to manifest the popular will of the nation and resolve a crisis by constructing a more democratic, and legitimate, social contract. But how plausible is the claim that “we the people” have spoken if “the people” doing the speaking are all men? Despite mounting evidence that more inclusive processes lead to more sustainable outcomes<sup>3</sup> and despite widespread international legal obligations to equalise political participation across genders,<sup>4</sup> **women continue to be excluded from peace and transition processes of various kinds**, whether traditional elite negotiations or broader multi-stakeholder formats such as national dialogues.<sup>5</sup>

2 See, for example, “Briefing Note: What Makes or Breaks National Dialogues?” Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative (2017), <https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/IPTI-Briefing-Note-National-Dialogues.pdf> [last accessed: 16 September 2022].

3 See, for example, T. A. Eisenstadt et al., “When Talk Trumps Text: The Democratizing Effects of Deliberation during Constitution-Making, 1974–2011,” *American Political Science Review* 109:3 (2015), pp. 592–612; J. Krause et al., “Women’s Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace,” *International Interactions* 44:6 (2018), pp. 985–1016; J. True and Y. Riveros-Morales, “Towards Inclusive Peace: Analysing Gender-Sensitive Peace Agreements 2000–2016,” *International Political Science Review* 40:1 (2019), pp. 3–40.

4 The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women requires states parties not only to remove barriers to women’s full political engagement but also to take measures to guarantee or ensure women’s political power. Article 3 of the Convention commits parties to “all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men”; see “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,” United Nations General Assembly (1979), [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm) [last accessed: 16 September 2022]. The women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda, unlike the Convention and other inclusion norms, does not have a master treaty or convention, but is partly encoded in a series of UN Security Council resolutions, including Resolutions 1325 (2000) and 2242 (2015) but also Resolution 1820 (2008), Resolution 1888 (2009), Resolution 1889 (2009), Resolution 1960 (2010), Resolution 2106 (2013), Resolution 2122 (2013), Resolution 2467 (2019), and Resolution 2493 (2019). WPS encompasses women’s participation in peace and other political processes including at decision-making levels, as well as three other “pillars”: protection, conflict prevention, and relief and recovery.

5 K. Aggestam and I. Svensson, “Where Are the Women in Peace Mediation?” in K. Aggestam and A. Towns (eds), *Gendering Diplomacy and International Negotiations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), pp. 149–68; True and Riveros-Morales, “Towards Inclusive Peace.”

**The “national” part of the label makes the claim that dialogue participants represent the authentic voice of the nation** (whether the nation is imagined as unitary, multi-ethnic, multi-sectarian, etc.). However, any legitimate representation of a nation requires that women be present. **Women are members of all social sectors.** They own businesses, form civil society associations, practise faiths, engage in politics as part of movements or parties, and lead their communities (whether as part of traditional institutions or in non-traditional arrangements). **Therefore, women’s participation and influence are both crucial to the legitimacy and effectiveness of any national dialogue.** However, the inclusion of women does not always receive universal support from all parties. Indeed, women’s participation is often opposed (including by some women themselves) on the basis that it is of secondary importance to the “core” issues that have provoked the political crisis. Indeed, **the inclusion of women has frequently required dedicated lobbying by national and international women’s organisations.**

An inclusive national dialogue requires more than adding women into a gender-blind or otherwise exclusive process. Women’s participation must be intersectional, which requires the participation of diverse women from different generations, geographical regions (both urban and rural), backgrounds (both elite and non-elite), ethnicities, and religions to represent the national population.

The size and composition of a dialogue forum can vary considerably. Typically, national dialogues sit outside the existing institutions of government (parliament, the judiciary, etc.) and have a clear structure for establishing rules and procedures around dialogue and decision-making. They are usually convened through a peace agreement, law, presidential decree, or some other expression of consent among the parties to be involved and are typically supported by a secretariat that manages logistics and organisation. The process is often conducted via thematic working groups (involving subsets of the participants), with decisions usually made in plenary sessions. Ideally, national dialogues also have country-wide outreach by engaging with stakeholders outside capital cities and addressing issues that are relevant and responsive to the concerns of the population at a sub-national level. In some instances, this can also involve engagement with diaspora and/or refugee populations.

Depending on the specific type of national dialogue, discussions may last several days, weeks, months, or even years.<sup>6</sup> Participants in national dialogues normally include members of political parties (including those in government and opposition parties) as well as civil society, religious and traditional leaders, business actors, and youth representatives. Most importantly, women are part of all these sectors, and a dialogue that excludes them cannot claim to speak for the people of a nation.

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6 Some forums called (or commonly considered) national dialogues act as transitional national legislatures and sit in regular session for a period of years, as with the first and second Nepalese Constituent Assemblies, which sat between 2008 and 2012 and between 2014 and 2017.

This guide draws on comparative research on previous national dialogues and on peace and transition processes more broadly to explore how to achieve women's participation in national dialogues. The guide also situates national dialogues in the context of longer-term political transitions (or crisis resolution processes). **National dialogues are preceded and succeeded by other processes, mechanisms, and institutions that have often been marked by the exclusion of women; as such, women need to organise early and continue to cooperate over the long term in order to see their agenda consolidated.**

This guide is intended as a practical resource for people (those from governments, political parties, civil society, and business as well as their supporters) who are preparing for an upcoming or ongoing national dialogue in which they will participate, or are advocating for one in response to a political crisis. Therefore, it focuses on the strategies and formats that allow for women's influence (formats for inclusion, and modifications to procedures) and offers suggestions on how influence might be directed (including a discussion of the gendered dimensions of common issues raised in dialogue). It addresses questions relating to process design and strategic approach, potential sources of resistance to the inclusion and influence of women and gender, and sources of support and solidarity that can counteract such resistance.

## 1.2 National Dialogues and Gender

National dialogues are (or are meant to be) pivotal moments in a country's political life. The recognition that the old order has failed can open up transformative possibilities. Yemen provides an illustrative example. The country was ranked last in the Gender Inequality Index for the entire decade prior to the beginning of its national dialogue process.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, the National Dialogue Conference for a New Yemen (2011–14) featured a 30 percent women's quota across all delegations.<sup>8</sup> This does not minimise the resistance that Yemeni women faced in achieving this feat; rather, it illustrates the possibilities that may be created in moments of transition. Nevertheless, it is by no means guaranteed that broader political realignments will lead countries in the direction of greater gender equality.

National dialogues can range from gender discriminatory to gender transformative, according to the numbers of women who access the process, the manner in which they are able to do so, the degree to which intersectionality between gender and other dimensions of inclusion is taken into account, and the gender-responsiveness of the dialogue agenda and any resulting agreement.<sup>9</sup> This paper

7 See <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index>.

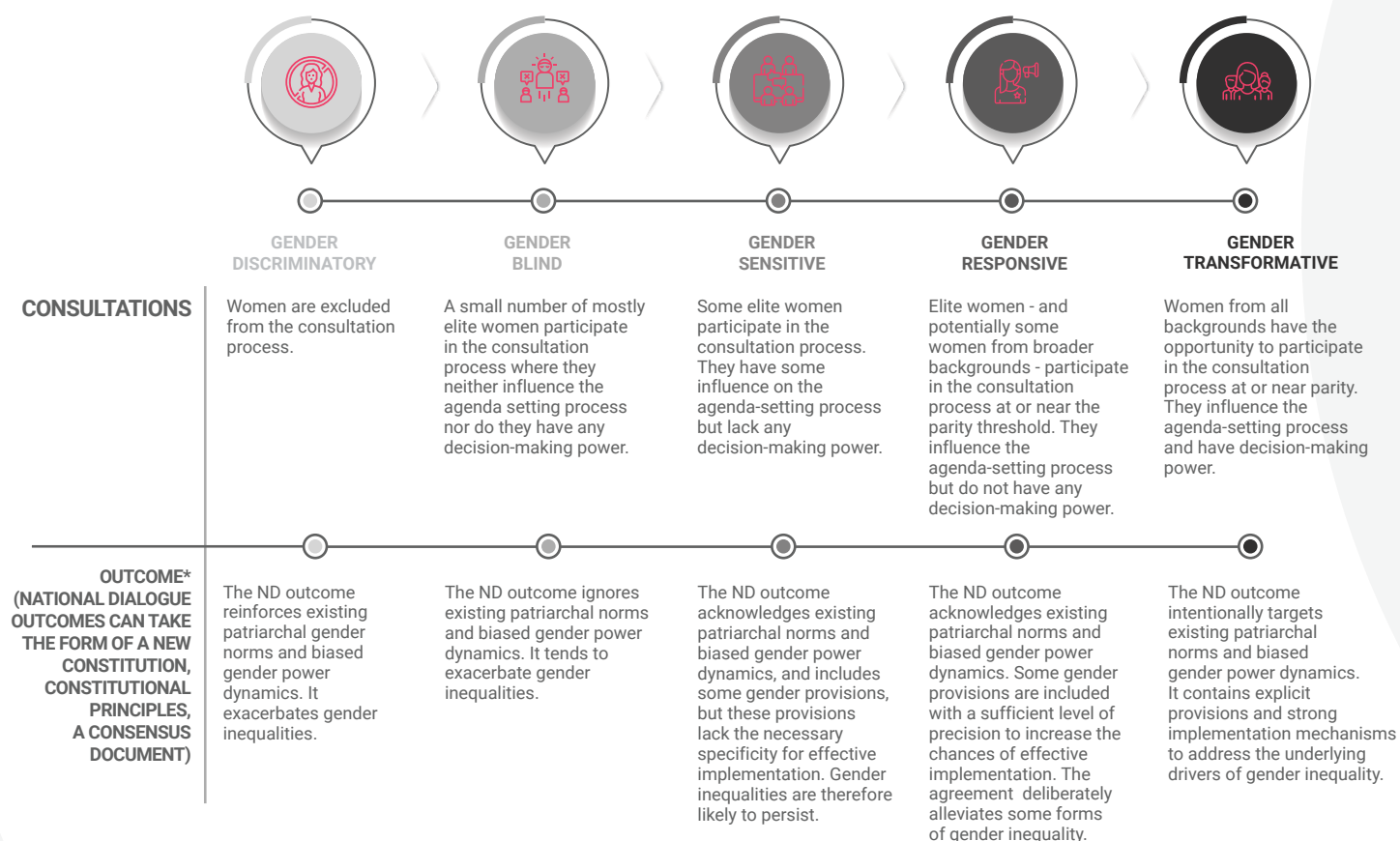
8 N. Ross, "Women in Peace and Transition Processes: Yemen (2011–2015)," Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative (2017), [www.inclusivepeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/case-study-women-yemen-2011-2015-en.pdf](http://www.inclusivepeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/case-study-women-yemen-2011-2015-en.pdf) [last accessed: 16 September 2022].

9 This continuum is an adaptation of several similar frameworks, such as the UN Development Programme's Gender Results Effectiveness Scale, UNICEF's Gender Equality Continuum, and the Inter-agency Gender Working Group's Gender Equality Continuum.



uses “gender inclusive” as an overarching term, with different degrees of inclusivity corresponding to the gender-sensitive, gender-responsive, and gender-transformative categories on the following spectrum.

## NATIONAL DIALOGUE GENDER EQUALITY CONTINUUM



Gender-discriminatory national dialogues are worse than the prevailing gender inequalities in a society. Conditions of crisis and social conflict can provoke a conservative reaction, which some find to be a compelling argument that the moment is not right for transformative change. Gender-blind national dialogues ignore pre-existing gender inequalities that form barriers to women’s meaningful participation, such as social norms that proscribe women’s public speech on political issues or socio-cultural traditions that limit their mobility.

Gender-sensitive approaches recognise gender inequalities without specifically addressing them, while gender-responsive dialogues are informed by an understanding of gender, using this to both respond to specific gendered needs and bring participants together. This would include recognising that due to barriers to women’s education, women participants in a national dialogue may need more technical support, especially in audio formats and in local languages (rather than materials written in—for example—English only, which are likely to be useful only to elite audiences). It would also recognise gendered vulnerabilities, such as specific security risks that women delegates and representatives may

face when travelling to or from dialogue events, or the risk that they may experience sexual harassment during the process. Box 1 considers women's influence on national dialogues.

#### Box 1. Women's Influence and Gendered Issues

**Women's influence on national dialogues can be understood as the extent to which the discussions and decisions reflect the contributions, perspectives, and gendered needs of women and girls. There is a tension here: of course, women's politics is not limited to gendered issues, and nor are women only politically relevant when they act together with other women.** This means that there is no description of the gendered implications of political reforms that does not involve some flattening of women's interests and experiences. However, without an account of what a gender-responsive agreement would look like, advocates are limited to pushing for women's participation, which is itself not sufficient for a gender-responsive or gender-transformative dialogue (see Section 2.1.5 for a more detailed discussion of this topic).

National dialogues often incorporate women with the expectation that they will limit themselves specifically to gendered contributions. This is clearly unsatisfactory, even if it represents an improvement over processes that actively exclude or simply ignore women. Another possibility is that a process may include influential women leaders who nevertheless feel they cannot speak to gendered issues or needs without undermining their credibility to speak to other issues. They may also not identify as feminists or see any particular need to make politics more gender responsive. This was the case with Raquel Zelaya, negotiator for the government in the peace talks between the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity and the Government of Guatemala. Zelaya reputedly saw herself as a businessperson and expert, rejected the label of "feminist," and saw her interest in women's economic issues as part of a general mandate to ensure that a post-peace agreement for Guatemala would be economically stable.<sup>10</sup>

The ideal national dialogue would be gender transformative, be informed by an analysis of underlying gendered power dynamics, and aim to transform the root causes of gender inequalities and discrimination into equality to overcome the structural discrimination entrenched in forms of negative peace.

### 1.3 The Three Phases of a National Dialogue

National dialogues can be divided into three phases: preparation, dialogue, and implementation. These phases present women with different opportunities and

10 S. Taylor, "A Better Peace? Including Women in Conflict Negotiations" (PhD diss., The New School for Social Research, 2015), pp. 166 and 186–90.

challenges around achieving political influence. This sub-section gives an overview of the structures and procedures of national dialogues in these different phases, providing necessary background for the subsequent sections.

### 1.3.1 The Preparation Phase

The preparation phase begins with the work required to build towards the announcement of the dialogue and ends on the day of the first session. During this phase, the basic structure and procedures of the dialogue are designed, usually by one or more special bodies. These bodies are often labelled “technical” (a typical example would be something like a “technical preparatory committee”), but their work is deeply political and can have a decisive influence on how the dialogue is conducted and decisions are reached.

Planning a national dialogue involves many complex decisions that must be negotiated before any substantive issues are discussed: Where will the dialogue be held? Who will formally convene the dialogue? Who will participate? How many people will participate? How long will it last? How much will it cost? Where will the budget come from? What topics will be discussed, and in what order? How will decisions be made? Many of these questions will combine mundane administrative (or technical) elements with important political implications. **The fact that “technical” roles are often perceived as less important than “political” ones may mean that efforts to secure women’s participation meet with less resistance early on (i.e. when recruitment is underway for technical roles) than they would at later stages in the process.** Hence, the preparation phase is a key window of opportunity for women to influence national dialogues.

The preparation phase may also see the establishment of bodies that are mandated to convene and steer the national dialogue process (often called “national dialogue commissions”). The appointment of commissioners and the process of establishing both political and technical functions are often highly competitive and politicised. The same is true of the potential involvement of women in such commissions—including as commissioners.

Moreover, women’s early involvement has been seen to increase their ability to make substantive contributions. One study found that women included during the preparation phase, often through quotas, found that their participation was sustained during the dialogue and implementation phases.<sup>11</sup> Given the importance of the technical preparatory activities that precede a national dialogue, it is essential that women be included in these bodies (see Box 2). Overall, research

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11 T. Paffenholz et al., “Making Women Count—Not Just Counting Women: Assessing Women’s Inclusion and Influence on Peace Negotiations,” Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative and UN Women (2016), [www.inclusivepeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/report-making-women-count-en.pdf](http://www.inclusivepeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/report-making-women-count-en.pdf) [last accessed: 16 September 2022], p. 33.

has found that when women are involved early on in the process, they are much more likely to have a greater role throughout the entire process, including in the dialogue and implementation stages.<sup>12</sup>

## **Box 2. Technical Preparatory Committees**

The Yemeni National Dialogue Conference featured a Technical Preparatory Committee, which was in charge of organising the dialogue and deciding on the structure, organisation, rules of procedure, and management of the process. After a preparatory workshop and consultations with United Nations (UN) Special Envoy Jamal Benomar, Yemeni women from civil society and political parties were successful in securing a 30 percent quota for women in the committee. Ultimately, this was not fully honoured and there were only 6 women out of 31 total members (i.e. 19 percent), but these women acted as leaders later in the process. Moreover, the early benchmark of 30 percent set an important precedent for subsequent dialogue bodies (including the overall dialogue forum), supported by women included in the Technical Preparatory Committee under the quota.<sup>13</sup>

The preparation phase for a gender-responsive or gender-transformative national dialogue would feature women's involvement in the preparatory committee(s) and broad-based preparatory consultations with a diverse range of women's organisations and networks, including consultations focused specifically on women's inclusion and on the gendered implications of the dialogue agenda. It might also secure a quota for women, or intersectional quotas with gender among their criteria,<sup>14</sup> and coalition-building among potential women participants in the national dialogue.

### **1.3.2 The Dialogue Phase**

The dialogue phase is where different perspectives are voiced, compromises are made, and the details of the national dialogue outcome(s) are worked out.<sup>15</sup> Dialogues usually begin with a plenary session of all delegates, where the chair (or chairs) of the dialogue welcomes the participants and outlines the significance of the negotiations to follow (see Box 3).

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12 Ibid., p. 33.

13 Ross, "Women in Peace and Transition Processes."

14 For example, see Box 4 for a description of how an intersectional quota was applied in Nepal.

15 National dialogue outcomes can take the form of constitutions, packages of legislation, consensus documents, peace agreements, or any combination of these.

### Box 3. The Dialogue Chair

The dialogue chair (or chairs) acts as the figurehead and guarantor of the process. They also typically fill a role equivalent to a speaker in parliament, ensuring procedures are followed, apportioning speaking time, and deciding the order of speakers. In some cases, chairs set the discussion agenda and are given important decision-making power (see Section 2.1.4). Working groups may also have chairs. Given the power and importance of the position, chairs are usually chosen either because they have a reputation for impartiality or because they are seen as a reliable proxy for one faction.

Dialogue and working group chairs can have an important influence. For example, there are symbolic and practical advantages to speaking first or responding first, but women representatives are often pushed to the back of the speaking order—just before lunch or at the end of the day when people are tired and impatient. **By ensuring women are higher in the speaking order, chairs can create a much more conducive environment for their participation.**

**A gender-responsive or gender-transformative dialogue phase would feature active and effective engagement by women in all aspects of the dialogue, and with constituencies outside the dialogue.** The ideal dialogue process leads to gender-responsive outcomes, including specific gender equality provisions as part of broader inclusion provisions, in the products or follow-up mechanisms of the national dialogue (implementation commission, a new constitution, legislation, etc.) with the aim of working to transform gender inequalities. A gender-transformative dialogue requires the support for inclusive outcomes of powerful (often men) incumbents—it is not just a “women’s job.”

With or without the support of incumbents, a gender-transformative dialogue is made more likely through strategic action by women at multiple levels inside and outside the dialogue process. These strategies include coalition-building among women within the dialogue; efforts to ensure the perspectives, priorities, and experiences of women across the country (and particularly in more marginalised communities) reach and inform the dialogue; and effective lobbying by women groups and networks and their supporters to boost the points raised by women representatives inside the dialogue.

### 1.3.3 The Implementation Phase

**The implementation phase begins when the national dialogue concludes and hands its mandate on to a successor institution.** Depending on the mandate of the dialogue, this handing-over process might include an implementation commission or a new constitution, with a newly constituted electoral governance body holding new elections. It might also take the form of a package of

constitutional principles or recommendations (handed to a constitution-drafting commission) or a peace agreement with provisions that must be implemented by the state (as well as any demobilising armed parties).

**Securing gender-responsive provisions in a national dialogue outcome document is an important achievement; seeing those provisions implemented in the real world is quite another challenge.**<sup>16</sup> According to the Peace Accords Matrix, only 65 percent of provisions in peace agreements are ever implemented.<sup>17</sup> Gendered provisions fare even worse. The Peace Accords Matrix reveals that only around 22 percent of gendered provisions in comprehensive peace agreements are implemented.<sup>18</sup> In the Colombia peace process (2012–16), gender-specific provisions were about one-third as likely to be fully implemented after three years than provisions addressing other issues.<sup>19</sup>

The implementation phase is particularly important for gender equality and inclusion provisions. The intersectional nature of gender equality provisions means that they are unlikely to be adopted as core commitments of any of the political factions after the dialogue. **Gender equality provisions, therefore, are more likely to lead to concrete changes in processes that have strong, institutional implementation pathways (through parliaments, commissions, or the bureaucracy), in contrast to those that depend on sustained mobilisation.**<sup>20</sup> In addition to gender equality provisions, there may also be opportunities to advocate for women's meaningful involvement and representation in the bodies charged with overseeing, conducting, and monitoring implementation. This could be the case particularly in instances where implementation bodies are established outside existing governance structures.

16 See Inclusive Peace's PeaceFem app ([www.inclusivepeace.org/resources/fem\\_app](http://www.inclusivepeace.org/resources/fem_app)) for a list of potential gender equality provisions. See also the Language of Peace project's searchable database of peace agreements, which has codes covering gender issues ([www.languageofpeace.org/#/search](http://www.languageofpeace.org/#/search)), and the PA-X Women, Girls, and Gender Database: C. Bell et al., "PA-X Codebook: Women, Girls, and Gender (PA-X Gender), Version 4," Political Settlements Research Programme, University of Edinburgh (2020), [www.peaceagreements.org/wsearch](http://www.peaceagreements.org/wsearch) [last accessed: 16 September 2022].

17 This figure applies to a sample that includes some peace-making national dialogues and the percentages of recommendations implemented are likely to be similar for all national dialogues.

18 Figures taken from M. Joshi et al., "Annualized Implementation Data on Comprehensive Intrastate Peace Accords, 1989–2012," *Journal of Peace Research* 52:4 (2015), pp. 551–62. There are no summary statistics for aggregate implementation across all agreements and all provision types, so this was calculated by the research team at Inclusive Peace following the methodology described in the Peace Accords Matrix codebook: "taking the annual sum of implementation points across all provisions in an accord (total\_implem\_points) and dividing that sum by the highest possible implementation score that could have been received (number of provisions \* three points)." See M. Joshi and J. Quinn, "Peace Accords Matrix Implementation Dataset (PAM\_ID) Codebook: Version 1.5," [https://peaceaccords.nd.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/PAM\\_ID-CODEBOOK-V1.5-29July2015.pdf](https://peaceaccords.nd.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/PAM_ID-CODEBOOK-V1.5-29July2015.pdf) [last accessed: 16 September 2022].

19 M. Joshi et al., "Women, Peace and Security: Understanding the Implementation of Gender Stipulations in Peace Agreements," Folke Bernadotte Academy, PRIO, and UN Women (2020), [www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/New-insights-on-WPS-Understanding-the-implementation-of-gender-stipulations-en.pdf](http://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/New-insights-on-WPS-Understanding-the-implementation-of-gender-stipulations-en.pdf) [last accessed: 16 September 2022], p. 2.

20 "Sustained mobilisation," in this context, refers to organised political action that tries to influence institutions (such as a parliament) from outside or to grab a greater share of power within them.



# SHAPING GENDER-INCLUSIVE NATIONAL DIALOGUES

National Dialogues are inclusive, country-wide negotiation forums convened at moments of major political crisis to produce a consensus roadmap for navigating out of the crisis.



## REGULAR POLITICS

"Regular" politics is conducted through institutions like parliament, courts, the presidency, etc.

## CRISIS

A crisis may be caused by: a financial crisis, a general strike, armed conflict or security breakdown or large-scale popular protests

Regular politics continues but is usually eclipsed by the dialogue\*

\*if regular politics overshadows an ongoing Dialogue, this is usually a sign of a weak or coopted process

Preparing a National Dialogue involves decisions about who will participate (selection), in what numbers, and how they will be chosen, as well as topics to be discussed and how decisions will be taken.

## 1 NATIONAL DIALOGUE ANNOUNCED

- A Dialogue is convened with a mandate, which spells out how the dialogue will resolve the crisis (e.g. to create a new constitution).
- A Dialogue may be convened by a national government, parliament, a supreme court, civil society, by agreement among political elites or by an international third party.
- Language of text announcing the National Dialogue must be gender-inclusive.



## 2 PREPARATION

Gender-inclusive preparation features:

- Women's involvement in preparatory institutions
- Gender as a selection criteria (e.g. quotas)
- Women in decision making bodies
- A gender-responsive agenda

The fact that preparation is often perceived as "technical" or "administrative" means women's participation meets with less resistance early on than later in the process.



## 3 DIALOGUE

A gender-inclusive dialogue features:

- Women as delegates, observers, advisors and witnesses
- Consultations with a range of women's organisations and networks
- Gender mainstreaming bodies
- Active and effective engagement by women in all aspects of the dialogue, and with constituencies outside of the dialogue

Different perspectives are voiced, compromises are made and the details of the dialogue outcome(s) are worked out



## 4 AGREEMENT

Gender-inclusive outcome documents (draft constitution, peace agreement, package of legislative measures) feature:

- Provisions addressing women's rights and needs such as health and reproduction, the rights to own property, to operate a business, to pass on a citizenship, and the right to vote
- Points raised by women related to protection of civilians, humanitarian access, access to health and education
- These are universal social issues, but can be thought of as gendered insofar as women can be particularly disadvantaged under the status quo

Once an agreement is reached, the new consensus is brought into the realm of "regular politics"



## 5 IMPLEMENTATION

Gender-inclusive implementation features:

- Women fulfilling a range of decision-making roles across implementation sectors and mechanisms
- Broader inclusion plays a critical role in ensuring credibility, transparency and acceptance of implementation mechanisms
- Sustained mobilisation by women (and allies) in political parties, civil society, and elsewhere in support of gains won in the dialogue

Implementation may involve a new or amended constitution, a package of legislation, a period of power-sharing, etc.

## NEW REGULAR POLITICS

The National Dialogue result is a milestone on a pathway to a more peaceful and inclusive society



**Inclusive Peace**  
setting change in motion

## 2 Constructing a (Gender-)Inclusive National Dialogue

A gender-inclusive national dialogue is an inclusive national dialogue and vice versa: an elite-dominated national dialogue that carves up political power among the already-advantaged is not inclusive of women any more than it is inclusive of men. This means that gender inclusion must be part of an overall focus on marginalisation and political identity.

Women and their supporters can push for two major categories of modification to national dialogues: modifications to the procedures of the national dialogue to make them gender inclusive, and creation of new national dialogue modalities that are inclusive of women and gender (see Table 1). This section describes these two categories of modification to the structure and procedures of a national dialogue. The suggestions are additionally summarised in Appendices 3 and 4.

**Table 1. Gender-Supportive Features of a Dialogue**

Category of Features	List of Features
Modifications to the procedures of the national dialogue (see Section 2.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Women's quotas: gender as a selection criterion</li><li>• Women's delegations</li><li>• Special recognition of women's role and needs in national dialogues</li><li>• Women and decision-making</li><li>• A gender-responsive agenda</li></ul>
Creation of new national dialogue modalities (see Section 2.2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Women observers, witnesses, and advisers</li><li>• Consultations to understand women's needs</li><li>• Gender and broader mainstreaming bodies</li><li>• Support mechanisms for women</li></ul>

## 2.1 Modifications to the Procedures of a National Dialogue

### 2.1.1 Women's Quotas: Gender as a Selection Criterion

Selection criteria define who is eligible to be included in a national dialogue (the general categories of organisations and individuals, e.g. political parties, armed groups, and civil society but also youth, women, faith or language groups, etc.), while selection procedures refer to how eligible actors are chosen (i.e. from among the sectors qualified to participate on the basis of certain selection criteria). As outlined in Section 1.1, **women are members of all social sectors and can participate in national dialogues as part of any of these constituencies.** Gender-discriminatory and gender-blind approaches to selecting representatives for a national dialogue actively exclude women or simply ignore the role of gender. A minimally gender-inclusive **selection criterion is to ensure there is some deliberate effort made to guarantee women's participation** (rather than expecting this to just happen naturally).

Two general categories of approach can be seen in national dialogues: dialogues have seen women participate (1) through the creation of a women's delegation or the inclusion of women's civil society organisations or (2) as members of other delegations or factions. The latter has been most effective with a women's quota. A quota reserves some share of seats (e.g. among a political party's representatives in a dialogue or among the total seats in a dialogue) and specifies the terms of eligibility for those seats (who can be selected) and the procedures for selecting people. Quota eligibility is usually expressed along demographic or identity characteristics. Alternative approaches to supporting women's selection for a dialogue can include "soft quotas" (non-binding benchmarks) or other guidelines (e.g. non-binding recommendations to especially consider women for selection).<sup>21</sup>

**A gender-responsive or gender-transformative approach to selection would involve some attention to the intersection of gender with other political identities.** The quota system for Nepal's two Constituent Assemblies is perhaps the gold standard for this type of intersectional approach (see Box 4).

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21 M. L. Krook, "Gender and Elections: Temporary Special Measures beyond Quotas," Social Science Research Council (Social Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum Working Papers on Women in Politics: No. 4) (2015), [https://mlkrook.org/pdf/ssrc\\_2015.pdf](https://mlkrook.org/pdf/ssrc_2015.pdf) [last accessed: 16 September 2022].

#### Box 4. Selection for Nepal's Constituent Assemblies

The elections to Nepal's first and second Constituent Assemblies, following the 2006 comprehensive peace agreement, were organised around a mix of single-member districts and multi-member districts with closed-list proportional representation (where voters elect a party, which then appoints candidates in order from a pre-written list to each seat that it has won). The electoral law applied a quota to the party lists that divided the population into caste and national groups (Madhesi, Dalits, etc.) and then applied a parity women's quota to each group. So, for example, for every Dalit man on a party's list, there should have been one Dalit woman.

One limitation of this approach was that other axes of disadvantage were not subject to an intersectional quota, allowing the persistent exclusion of Madhesi Dalits (including Madhesi Dalit women) from political power.<sup>22</sup> The party list quotas helped to ensure that nearly 48 percent of the 335 proportional representation seats were filled by women. Putting these together with the women elected in single-member districts and appointed to special seats, women made up around 33 percent of all representatives in the first Constituent Assembly. This quota system was carried forward permanently as a constitutional mandate that "at least one third of the total number of members elected from each political party representing in the Federal Parliament shall be women."<sup>23</sup>

Advocacy by women and their supporters also often focuses on supporting women's participation in national dialogues without being specific about the structure of representation or other goals. It is important to understand that means of ensuring representation (such as quotas) do not guarantee stronger activism and progress on issues such as gender mainstreaming.<sup>24</sup> They do not even guarantee that women's inclusion will reach the quota-mandated threshold: quotas must be supported by a comprehensive strategy to have their intended effect. Quotas can be subverted by adopting a tokenistic approach, such as by filling seats with the wives and daughters of men elites. Moreover, if quotas are

22 The meanings of these terms are complicated and contested. Madhesi are conventionally defined as speakers of non-Nepali languages, implying a closer relationship with the Indian empires on Nepal's borders, or comparatively recent arrivals in the territory of Nepal. They have historically been less favoured in Nepali politics. Dalits are the least advantaged members of the Indian caste system, which applies to a significant extent in Nepal. Madhesi Dalits are perhaps the most disadvantaged people in Nepal. See D. Gellner, "Caste, Ethnicity and Inequality in Nepal," *Economic and Political Weekly* 42:20 (2007), pp. 1823–8; M. Subedi, "Caste/Ethnic Dimensions of Change and Inequality: Implications for Inclusive and Affirmative Agendas in Nepal," *Nepali Journal of Contemporary Studies* 16:1–2 (2016), pp. 1–16.

23 "The Constitution of Nepal," Nepal Law Commission (2015), <https://lawcommission.gov.np/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Constitution-of-Nepal.pdf> [last accessed: 16 September 2022], art. 84(8).

24 Gender mainstreaming involves integrating a gender perspective into all aspects and stages of an institution's work (e.g. policy development, legislation, and consultation).

not supported—whether by leaders within the national dialogue, by backers in administrative committees, or by a mobilised women’s movement—they can be (and often are) ignored.

### 2.1.2 Women’s Delegations

**Women can participate in national dialogues (1) through women’s civil society organisations or bipartisan women’s delegations or (2) as members of other factions** (through a women’s quota or other measures to promote women’s inclusion; see Section 2.1.1). A national dialogue process can also feature more than one of these types of intervention to ensure women’s participation.

Where women access a process through non-partisan delegations of women, this is typically premised on them forming a non-partisan or bipartisan coalition as a precondition of entry (e.g. a non-partisan women’s network that is included to bring a gender perspective)—although the case of the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition (see Box 5) is one in which non-partisanship was self-consciously adopted by the women involved. Each approach has strengths and weaknesses.

An example of weaknesses is that asking women to form a non-partisan delegation as a precondition of entry implicitly holds women to a much higher standard than other constituencies in a dialogue (who are allowed to express their disagreements openly in the national dialogue itself). It also implies that these delegates should or will limit themselves to specifically gendered issues—an expectation that the included women must therefore work to overcome. On the other hand, women who participate as part of other factions generally must first struggle to raise the salience of gender among their colleagues, which may see them sidelined on other issues.<sup>25</sup>

An example of strengths is that a non-partisan delegation (see Box 5) can model compromise and consensus for other parties. On the other hand, women participating as part of other factions (e.g. political parties, civil society, or armed groups) is a more mainstreamed approach, and the necessary work of building support within these other factions may help to ensure provisions won by women are actually implemented.

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<sup>25</sup> See the discussion in Section 2.1.5.



## Box 5. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition

The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) garnered the necessary votes to form a political party and secured a seat at the negotiating table for the peace process leading up to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. The NIWC refrained from taking controversial political positions (that engaged directly with the conflict issues) and instead focused on building a foundation for inclusion within official decision-making bodies. This group was transformative in shaping the outcome of the peace agreement as it successfully proposed the establishment of the Civic Forum, an inclusive consultative body set up to address economic, cultural, and social issues as part of the Northern Ireland Assembly. It was also able to effectively communicate the details of the agreement to the public and launch a successful campaign to vote "yes" on the referendum that ended more than two decades of violence.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, combining the two is the best arrangement: that is, having a women's quota across all delegations and a separate women's delegation that brings women and gender activists together. During the Yemeni National Dialogue Conference, for example, women secured a 30 percent quota across all delegations and a separate women-only delegation. Direct representation at the table helped Yemeni women to achieve notable successes in securing important provisions in the 2015 draft constitution, including a quota for women in all state authorities, an increase in the legal age of marriage, equal legal status, and non-discrimination provisions for women in public service employment.<sup>27</sup> Even though the constitution was never ratified, these achievements set a precedent for future peacebuilding processes.

**The approach to women's selection has important implications for the national dialogue implementation phase.** In particular, the often-noted tendency for women's coalitions formed during the dialogue phase to dissolve or become inactive following the signing of an agreement seems to apply mostly to the purpose-built coalitions created around women's delegations, which are formed in response to the opportunity structure<sup>28</sup> of the national dialogue or chosen by a

26 "Women in Peace and Transition Processes: Northern Ireland (1996–1998)," Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative (2018), [www.inclusivepeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/case-study-women-northern-ireland-1996-1998-en.pdf](http://www.inclusivepeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/case-study-women-northern-ireland-1996-1998-en.pdf) [last accessed: 16 September 2022]; K. Cowell-Meyers, "The Social Movement as Political Party: The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and the Campaign for Inclusion," *Perspectives on Politics* 12:1 (2014), pp. 61–80.

27 Ross, "Women in Peace and Transition Processes."

28 Where a dialogue chair or committee announces that there will be a non-partisan women's delegation, this creates an opportunity for politically ambitious or motivated women (i.e. "Will you be in the delegation?"). This is not meant to imply judgement of women mobilised in this way (it is how politics works, after all), merely to raise the question of whether women's coalitions formed from this type of mobilisation are as durable as other types of women's coalition and to suggest from anecdotal experience that the answer is probably "no."



national dialogue selection committee. (As opposed to coalitions that predate the dialogue, which have thereby proven their ability to endure beyond a period of heightened political opportunity.)

In addition, the issues relating to both quotas and women's delegations can be mediated using influence strategies. For example, **where women participate as members of other delegations, it can be helpful to introduce support and advocacy strategies that help them to express their own political programme (e.g. through coaching or training by specialist organisations), to feel less alone (through confidential advocacy strategies by civil society), or to be seen to be supported (e.g. through public advocacy and political campaigns at important moments in the process).** Alternatively, where women participate as part of their own delegation, high-level support from international diplomatic actors—for example, foreign ministries or the UN—may help them to influence the process. Entrenched social norms create barriers to how men participants listen to women's concerns and perceive them. Therefore, any training provided to women needs to be matched by awareness-raising among men participants on why women's participation is crucial.

### **2.1.3 Special Recognition of Women's Role and Needs in National Dialogues**

Entering patriarchal institutions can be enormously burdensome for women. The symbolic and physical infrastructure may be unwelcoming. This dynamic is often heightened by the fact that national dialogues typically take place during periods of crisis, including armed conflict, when both real and perceived risks towards women are elevated. Women who seek to actively contribute to national dialogues have experienced resistance from various actors, including state authorities, religious leaders, non-state armed groups, and conservative communities.

Resistance to women's engagement in national dialogues and peacebuilding has taken various forms. Personal attacks against women peacebuilders and women human rights defenders have encompassed torture, assassination, rape, abduction, acid attacks, surveillance, and travel bans.<sup>29</sup> Threats of sexual violence and defamatory campaigns that depict women peacebuilders and women human rights defenders as "prostitutes," "terrorists," "witches," "garbage," or "foreign agents" have aimed to destroy these women's reputation and delegitimise their

29 M. Forst, "Situation of Women Human Rights Defenders: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders," UN General Assembly (2019), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1663970?ln=en> [last accessed: 16 September 2022]; M. Holmes, "Protecting Women Peacebuilders: The Front Lines of Sustainable Peace," International Civil Society Action Network (2020), [https://icanpeacework.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ICAN\\_ProtectingWomenPeacebuilders.pdf](https://icanpeacework.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ICAN_ProtectingWomenPeacebuilders.pdf) [last accessed: 16 September 2022].

work.<sup>30</sup> During the Yemeni National Dialogue Conference, women delegates were in many cases publicly threatened for participating and even physically attacked. Smear campaigns against women have also been extended to the online space. Here, Yemeni women delegates were singled out by name and in pictures calling them “dishonourable” for going to dialogue meetings unaccompanied and at night (one potential implication of such attacks is that arranging meetings in the evening may exclude participants from the process). Similarly, women leaders in Libya’s national dialogues have been targets of violence.<sup>31</sup>

State and non-state actors have used information and communication technologies to launch defamation and slander campaigns against and monitor women peacebuilders, as well as exert pressure on them to halt their activities.<sup>32</sup> The reluctance of the media in many conflict-affected settings to counter gender stereotypes and raise the voice of women peacebuilders has exacerbated the situation for many women peacebuilders and politically active women.

Ensuring the safety of women representatives in national dialogues requires the specific involvement and support of men leaders and participants (who often require targeted awareness-raising efforts). Men supporters need to speak out in support of women’s participation and to condemn any violence or threats against women participants, and men leaders need to speak out on gender equality issues. Gatekeepers, including agenda-setters, should take this into account.

International organisations such as the UN have recently come to acknowledge the need to protect women peacebuilders and women participating in national dialogues. More specifically, UN Security Council Resolution 2493 (2019) and the UN Secretary-General’s 2021 report on women, peace, and security urge member states to recommit to the protection of women peacebuilders and women political actors in order to ensure that they can meaningfully contribute

30 S. N. Anderlini, “Recognising Women Peacebuilders: Critical Actors in Effective Peacemaking,” International Civil Society Action Network (2020), [https://icanpeacework.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ICAN\\_RecognizingWomenPeacebuilders.pdf](https://icanpeacework.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ICAN_RecognizingWomenPeacebuilders.pdf) [last accessed: 16 September 2022], p. 7; I. Barcia, “Our Right to Safety: Women Human Rights Defenders’ Holistic Approach to Protection,” Association for Women’s Rights in Development (2014), [www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Our%20Right%20To%20Safety\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Our%20Right%20To%20Safety_FINAL.pdf) [last accessed: 16 September 2022], pp. 8–10; Forst, “Situation of Human Rights Defenders.”

31 For example, around the national dialogue process for Libya, at least ten women activists have been assassinated, including Hanan al-Barassi, who was killed in Benghazi in 2020 while the national dialogue was meeting in Tunis. Of the 17 women who participated in the national dialogue, many were attacked on Facebook, and one woman from eastern Libya dropped out of the dialogue. In 2019 lawmaker Seham Sergiwa was taken from her home in Benghazi shortly after the airing of a television broadcast in which she had criticised Khalifa Haftar’s offensive on Tripoli. See “Libyan Women Reach High Office but Activists Say Long Road Ahead,” Arab News (20 March 2021), <https://arab.news/53g6n> [last accessed: 16 September 2022]. For details about women in the Yemeni National Dialogue Conference, see Ross, “Women in Peace and Transition Processes.”

32 Barcia, “Our Right to Safety,” p. 20; A.-M. Buzatu et al., “Security and Human Rights in the Digital Age: Opportunities and Risks to Advance Women’s Meaningful Participation and Protect Their Rights,” Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (2021), [https://gnwp.org/wp-content/uploads/DIL-GNWP-Research-Report\\_WPS-and-Human-Rights-in-Digital-Age\\_2021.pdf](https://gnwp.org/wp-content/uploads/DIL-GNWP-Research-Report_WPS-and-Human-Rights-in-Digital-Age_2021.pdf) [last accessed: 16 September 2022].

to and participate in peace processes.<sup>33</sup> However, in spite of this recent acknowledgement of the need to protect them, there have been few efforts to systematically develop effective protection strategies for women peacebuilders and women political actors.<sup>34</sup>

#### 2.1.4 Women and Decision-Making

Decision-making procedures determine how the contents of national dialogue outcomes will be reached (e.g. how a constitutional provision will be adopted). Decisions can be taken by majority vote, as a matter of consensus, unilaterally by a chair or similar, or through variations on and combinations of these processes. Most large national dialogues rely on voting-based procedures. **Voting-based procedures are almost a precondition for women to form cross-party caucuses:** if women have individual discretion over their vote, they can agree to use it in concert with other women. However, high party discipline can be an obstacle to this.<sup>35</sup> Here, “party discipline” refers to the extent to which parties are allowed to pressure their members to vote unanimously (rather than with members following their own preferences or judgement). **In environments of high party discipline, cross-party women’s caucuses are difficult to achieve.** Political parties exercise discipline in part through the use of whips—members whose job it is to anticipate members’ votes and offer incentives or threaten punishments if they deviate from the party line (see Box 6).<sup>36</sup>

33 “Resolution 2493,” UN Security Council (2019), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3833931> [last accessed: 16 September 2022]; “Women and Peace and Security: Report of the Secretary General,” UN Security Council (2021), [www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_2021\\_827.pdf](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2021_827.pdf) [last accessed: 16 September 2022].

34 Anderlini, “Recognising Women Peacebuilders,” pp. 4–7.

35 For an example of this relationship in the context of legislatures, see M. Yung Yoon, “More Women in the Tanzanian Legislature: Do Numbers Matter?” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 29:1 (2011), pp. 83–98.

36 Whips weaken constituency-to-representative relationships at the expense of making political parties better able to implement their agendas. For example, the US party system is characterised by low party discipline, which has historically allowed the two major parties (Democratic and Republican) to encompass the diversity of the country’s politics (e.g. the 20th-century coalition of explicitly racist southern Democrats and progressive northern Democrats, which drew significant support from African Americans). For information about the effect of party discipline in Nepal, see S. Tamang, “Exclusionary Processes and Constitution Building in Nepal,” *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 18:3 (2011), p. 306.

## Box 6. Party Whips in Nepal's Constituent Assembly

The procedures for the first Constituent Assembly of Nepal anticipated the stifling effect of high party discipline and initially prohibited the use of party whips. Parties eventually overturned this rule and employed whips in the first Constituent Assembly. This inhibited consensus on issues such as a 50 percent quota for women in the Parliament of Nepal after the Constituent Assembly: parties impelled their members to disagree in order to strengthen the party's bargaining position on other issues. The lack of consensus was, in turn, used by party leaders to justify a sort of horse-trading in closed-door meetings between party leaders in which they negotiated compromises to support each other's legislative programmes. Minority representation suffered as decisions were made by party elites, who were overwhelmingly men and higher-caste members of the majority Nepali population. However, the fact that cross-party caucuses of women and of lower-caste members of the Constituent Assembly were formed at all suggests that party discipline was less than complete.<sup>37</sup>

**Coalition-building is an important strategy that can be used to mitigate the usually marginal position of women within their own factions.** However, the expectation that women will inevitably build coalitions, or that this is their primary role, minimises their contribution to other political issues. It is also important to mention that forming coalitions puts women at particular risk. In highly polarised contexts, cooperating with the other side is often seen as a betrayal and, within party political structures, could lead to denial of future opportunities.

### 2.1.5 A Gender-Responsive Agenda

The agenda for the dialogue, which sets out the topics to be discussed, is determined during the preparation phase. Topics on the agenda can be addressed in sequence or concurrently by different working groups. The agenda is not the same as the mandate of the dialogue. The mandate may delegate certain topics to the dialogue and reserve other topics for a different body; the agenda sets out the finer details of how these issues will be worked through. In general, there are two main approaches to including gender issues in a negotiation agenda: they may be included as a separate issue area or mainstreamed under any or all agenda points. As an example of how gender may be treated separately, the peace talks between the Government of Mexico and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation reserved one table (about one-sixth of all issues to be discussed) for the rights of women in Chiapas.<sup>38</sup>

37 "Update on the Constituent Assembly," Martin Chautari (2009), <http://martinchautari.org.np/storage/files/policypaper2-eng.pdf> [last accessed: 16 September 2022], p. 6.

38 Chiapas is the state of Mexico in which the conflict took place. See N. Ross, "Authority, Legitimacy, and Support for Armed Groups: A Case Study of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional," *Civil Wars* 21:3 (2019), pp. 1–26.

**As explained in Box 1, discussing the gendered implications of political issues inevitably involves some flattening of women's interests and experiences but is a necessary precondition for going beyond minimal, gender-blind dialogues.**

Some areas of law are specifically gendered: for example, laws addressing health and reproduction, and laws governing rights to own property, operate a business, pass on citizenship to one's children, and vote. The gendered implications of other laws are implicit, with women usually being more disadvantaged under the status quo. For example, women are in many countries less likely to hold the legal title to land they own de facto, either under a customary land ownership regime or as an unrecognised member of a household. This can disadvantage women during armed conflicts where customary regimes are disrupted and restitution requires victims of dispossession to seek remedy under the law.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, a gender-responsive national dialogue agenda should seek to clarify women's land rights. In national dialogues, women also often raise issues related to the protection of civilians, humanitarian access, and access to health and education. These are universal social issues, but they can be thought of as gendered insofar as women may be particularly disadvantaged under the status quo.<sup>40</sup>

As noted above, **the agenda is usually defined during the preparation phase. Influence strategies that aim to increase women's position during this phase, especially within the "technical" bodies charged with setting out the details of the negotiation agenda, are likely to be most effective (compared to the use of such strategies at later stages).** "Agenda-setting" refers to both the formal process of defining the topics of the negotiations (e.g. "first we will discuss the terms of a possible ceasefire") and the more abstract process of raising issues in the minds of participants and in discussions as the dialogue progresses—in other words, deciding what is salient, relevant, and important. Agenda topics are usually specified in minimal detail, leaving considerable scope to add substance through agenda-setting discussions and advocacy as a national dialogue approaches or once it is underway (see Table 2). For example, the agenda for the 2010 Madagascar National Conference listed the discussion topics as the constitution of the Fourth Republic, amnesty, national reconciliation, the status of the opposition, secularism and the state, impunity, the High Court of Justice, territorial division, inclusivity, the resolution of insecurity, cultural identity, and the review of a number of important laws (the original agenda agreement is almost as brief as that).<sup>41</sup>

In addition, the approach to selection has implications for agenda-setting. Where women are included as part of non-gender-specific delegations, they may be

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39 S. Razavi, "Liberalisation and the Debates on Women's Access to Land," *Third World Quarterly* 28:8 (2007), pp. 1479–500.

40 T. Paffenholz et al., "What Makes or Breaks National Dialogues?" Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative (2017), [www.inclusivepeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/report-national-dialogues-en.pdf](http://www.inclusivepeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/report-national-dialogues-en.pdf) [last accessed: 16 September 2022].

41 "Accord politique d'Ivato" (2010), <https://peaceadmin.languageofpeace.org/v3/agreements/1383/pdf> [last accessed: 16 September 2022], ch. 1, art. 1.

reluctant to speak to issues of gender for fear they will be seen as unserious or will be sidelined. In contrast, where women are included through women's civil society organisations or a women's delegation, this often creates an expectation that they will confine themselves to women's issues or that women can only speak to women's issues (see Section 2.1.2 for strategies that can be used to manage these issues). The solution to this is training and awareness-raising (among both men and women) on social norms, internalised gender biases, and the vital role of women in all social discussions.

**Table 2. The Most Common National Dialogue Agenda Topics and How to Make Them Gender Inclusive<sup>42</sup>**

General Topics	Gender Dimensions
<b>Security Issues</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cessation of hostilities</li> <li>• Disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR)</li> <li>• Security sector reform (SSR) and other security issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women combatants are often not eligible for reintegration programmes.</li> <li>• SSR often neglects everyday gendered violence by security forces.</li> <li>• Ceasefire monitoring needs to include sexual violence in conflict.</li> <li>• DDR should aim to transform perceptions of masculinity, facilitating the creation of non-violent identities as members of a peaceful society.</li> <li>• Traditional perceptions of victims versus perpetrators may mean that forced conscripts do not receive the necessary DDR support, including mental health and psychosocial support.</li> </ul>

<sup>42</sup> Created using the UN Peacemaker Language of Peace tool ([www.languageofpeace.org](http://www.languageofpeace.org)) and filtering the full list of agreements by Inclusive Peace's own list of national dialogues. Language of Peace was created through the Legal Tools for Peace-Making Project, carried out by a research team at the Lauterpacht Centre for International Law (University of Cambridge) in collaboration with the UN's Mediation Support Unit.



General Topics	Gender Dimensions
<b>Governance Issues</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land and territorial issues</li> <li>• Autonomy and self-determination of a people or region</li> <li>• Political representation</li> <li>• Governance reform</li> <li>• Political reform and democratisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choices about the form of political system have gendered implications. For example, women do better in multi-member electoral districts and under proportional representation elections.</li> <li>• Governance is also where issues such as a women's quota for parliament will be discussed.</li> <li>• Traditional governance systems and systems with a colonial legacy often exclude women and minorities.</li> </ul>
<b>Truth and Justice</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Justice and accountability</li> <li>• Truth and reconciliation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crimes against women are more likely to be surrounded by taboos of silence, making truth and justice more difficult to achieve.</li> <li>• Sexual violence has been recognised as a specific war crime but is often neglected in truth and justice processes. Men also suffer sexual violence and are limited from seeking justice by gender-related expectations.</li> </ul>
<b>Economic Issues</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taxation</li> <li>• Economic issues and resource rights</li> <li>• Environmental exploitation</li> <li>• Restitution and the war economy</li> <li>• Welfare entitlements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women are (in many countries) much less likely to hold the formal title to their land, making it much harder for them to recover land stolen during conflict.</li> <li>• Women may face bureaucratic barriers in business registration processes or when attempting to access finance or credit.</li> <li>• Welfare entitlements often neglect the needs of women and children.</li> </ul>

General Topics	Gender Dimensions
Citizenship and National Identity	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture, heritage, and language</li> <li>• Refugee return</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whether women are mentioned in a constitutional preamble (and any other prominent documents) can help to set the tone for their political participation.</li> <li>• Women are often denied the right to transfer citizenship to their children.</li> <li>• Women have different needs from men in relation to refugee return programmes.</li> <li>• Children born during conflict without legal documents may be excluded from services and basic rights.</li> </ul>

## 2.2 Creation of New National Dialogue Modalities

In addition to reforms to the procedures of national dialogues (as described in Section 2.1), women activists and their supporters can push for the creation of new structures that bring participants and ideas into the process.

### 2.2.1 Women Observers, Witnesses, and Advisers

There are several options that allow political constituencies access to a national dialogue venue but with restricted decision-making power. Observers are permitted to be physically present at some or all sessions but are normally prohibited from voting or speaking formally. Instead, they may take advantage of informal moments between sessions to engage in advocacy or deliver targeted proposals. Informal spaces can be important sites of influence in dialogue processes but are often highly gendered in a way that can be even more difficult to address than in the formal dialogue. Observers may also be permitted to take part in working groups. In the Accra Peace Agreement negotiations, focused on ending the conflict in Liberia, 18 political parties and six civil society organisations played roles as official observers.

Advisers are similar to observers; however, they are usually dependent on the sponsorship of one party, whereas observers are normally meant to be independent. Witnesses are invited to recount a specific experience to the dialogue. The Colombia International Victims Forum, where victims of the Colombian conflict presented their own experiences as well as messages developed in consultation with other victims, is an example of women participating as witnesses (see Box 7).

## Box 7. An Ambitious Quota Demand in Colombia

As part of the 2012–16 Colombia peace process between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), five delegations of victims of the conflict visited the site of the negotiations in Havana. These delegations were preceded by three local and one national victims' forum, which gathered testimony and proposals from victims' organisations and other civil society and collated this into documents, which were transferred to the negotiating table. The selection of participants in the victims' delegation was highly contentious, with each party initially maintaining that it had not committed abuses and therefore only the other side should face its victims. Later, the parties manoeuvred to ensure they would face fewer victims than their adversary (to imply proportionately less guilt).

Following a similar logic, some stakeholders, led by women's movements (such as Corporación Sisma Mujer, Ruta Pacifica, and Casa de la Mujer), argued that since women had been victimised much more by the war than men, a women's quota of 100 percent was appropriate. While this was an unlikely scenario and was not ultimately reached, the benchmark set by the initial ambitious demand helped to raise expectations and likely contributed to the eventual 60 percent women's quota that was achieved (36 women delegates to 24 men).<sup>43</sup>

### 2.2.2 Consultations to Understand Women's Needs

**Consultations are forums or approaches that aim to solicit opinions from a population. They can be an official part of a national dialogue, or unofficial. Official consultations are usually conducted by a specialist body within the national dialogue. These specialist bodies are often cross-party in composition, but official consultations are also sometimes delegated to civil society bodies in recognition of their expertise and experience in gathering popular opinion. Unofficial consultations are typically part of a strategy either to build a coalition (to transparently establish common ground among a diverse group of women) or to engage in agenda-setting advocacy. They are, therefore, mostly conducted by civil society organisations or coalitions, or political parties (and sometimes armed factions).**

The agenda-setting process (see Section 2.1.5) is particularly important for gender issues, which are by no means guaranteed to be viewed as necessary additions to a dialogue agenda. As an example of effective advocacy creating a conversation around gender, the Women's National Coalition in South Africa conducted nationwide public consultations on issues of particular interest to

43 R. Brett, "The Role of the Victims' Delegations in the Santos– FARC Peace Talks," in V. Druliolle (ed.), *The Politics of Victimhood in Post-conflict Societies: Comparative and Analytical Perspectives* (Cham: Springer, 2018), pp. 267–99.

women in the 1990s. The results of these consultations helped to shape the publication of the Women's Charter for Effective Equality. This document significantly influenced equality provisions in the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.<sup>44</sup>

### 2.2.3 Gender and Broader Mainstreaming Bodies

**Some processes that can be compared to national dialogues (national legislatures and comprehensive peace processes) have put in place committees charged with ensuring that gender issues are mainstreamed in their working procedures.** These bodies have contributed to the achievement of gender-responsive and gender-transformative outcomes in parliaments around the world.<sup>45</sup> These efforts generally include consultations on the drafting of new legislation but also on the way parliaments operate.

According to figures from the Inter-Parliamentary Union, around 60 percent of parliaments have “specialised gender equality bodies.”<sup>46</sup> In the Colombian peace process (2012–16), there was a gender sub-commission (later known as the Gender Commission) composed of delegates from the various parties. This commission was responsible for ensuring that each issue that the parties were discussing was gender-mainstreamed and treated with gender-responsive language. The commission was made up of five or six delegates from each party, including at least one man, and could draw on technical expertise and support from national and international gender advisers. Inspired by the victims’ forum (see Box 7), the gender sub-commission sought to incorporate perspectives that were representative and inclusive of the diversity of experiences in Colombia, highlighting the need to address the specific and differentiated needs of men, women, boys, and girls. This resulted in a high number of gender equality provisions appearing in the peace agreement. The advantage of a gender commission is clear: it normalises the gender-mainstreaming approach and relieves women at the table of the often misplaced responsibility to advance a “gender agenda.”<sup>47</sup>

Other countries preparing for national dialogues have explored the establishment of inclusion-monitoring bodies to ensure that the conduct of the dialogue is and remains inclusive of women, youth, and other potentially excluded groups, topics, and geographical areas from the preparation phase to the implementation phase.

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44 G. Waylen, “What Can the South African Transition Tell Us about Gender and Democratization?” Centre for Advancement of Women in Politics, School of Politics, Queens University Belfast (2004).

45 M. Sawyer, “Gender Mainstreaming and the Substantive Representation of Women: Where Do Parliamentary Bodies Fit?” *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 8:3 (2020), pp. 648–60.

46 “Specialized Bodies: Gender Equality,” Inter-Parliamentary Union (2021), <https://data.ipu.org/specialized-bodies/gender-equality> [last accessed: 16 September 2022].

47 K. Herbolzheimer, “Innovations in the Colombian Peace Process,” Conciliation Resources (2016), [www.c-r.org/resource/innovations-colombian-peace-process](http://www.c-r.org/resource/innovations-colombian-peace-process) [last accessed: 16 September 2022].

The Gender Equality Continuum (see page 9) is one tool that could be adapted for the purposes of advocacy and monitoring of a national dialogue, while also being used to inform the shape of mainstreaming bodies.

#### **2.2.4 Support Mechanisms for Women**

**Support mechanisms allow women to be more effective in making differentiated and meaningful contributions; they also strengthen women's role and influence during negotiations and implementation.** Gender-responsive technical support can help those involved (not only and not necessarily women) with a variety of challenges related to the complexities of a dialogue process. Support can include providing comparative examples along the lines of those in this guide, helping those involved to understand the effects of process design features (e.g. how different approaches to decision-making will affect women), and anticipating the gendered implications of dialogue agenda topics. Support mechanisms can also help women involved in dialogues to affirm their right to participate, understand their assets and contributions, and gain the confidence to voice their expertise and solutions (especially in a context that might be hostile towards women's participation).

Resource centres established during negotiations to offer technical support (e.g. computers and internet access) and to provide gender and other content-specific expertise have been important in some national dialogues. Other options for support structures include workshops and training sessions that address specific issues raised during the talks (see Box 8). Not only can these structures increase the overall preparedness of women but they can also contribute to women pushing for more gender-specific goals.<sup>48</sup>

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48 T. Paffenholz, "Women in Peace Negotiations," in K. Aggestam and A. E. Towns (eds), *Gendering Diplomacy and International Negotiation* (Cham: Springer, 2018), pp. 169–91.

### **Box 8. Leveraging Coalitions as Sources of Support in Somalia**

Somali women's civil society organisations participating in the Somalia National Reconciliation Conference, held in the Kenyan cities of Eldoret and Mbagathi between October 2002 and October 2004, maintained coalitions with each other, with other Somali civil society actors, and with international organisations. These helped the women delegates at the formal negotiations to present a unified agenda to the conference and enabled women activists in Mogadishu to organise protests to put pressure on faction and political leaders. These coalitions were maintained through joint activities such as solution-finding workshops and training. In March 2003, all 34 Somali women delegates to the conference attended a three-day workshop facilitated by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM, now UN Women). They presented the resulting recommendations to the executive secretary of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and selected five delegates to present their agenda to the conference. The IIDA Women's Development Organisation held a cross-clan workshop with 70 women from south-central Somalia. Participants produced a strategic plan for peace and an agenda for women's priorities, which were distributed to all conflict parties and regional and international bodies.

Support structures can be built into the negotiation process, provided through outside-facilitated arrangements, or both. Overall, the findings show that women benefit more from targeted support structures than other included actors, and the provision of such support structures prior to, during, and after a national dialogue has been found to substantially enhance their influence (see Box 9).<sup>49</sup>

### **Box 9. Problem-Solving Workshop for Women in the Inter-Congolese Dialogue**

A problem-solving workshop exclusively organised for women at the beginning of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in February 2002 provides an excellent example of how effective such workshops can be. The workshop—facilitated and organised by UNIFEM and local non-governmental organisations, such as Femmes Africa Solidarité—prepared 64 women (mainly from civil society, but also from other delegations) for participation at the peace talks in Sun City in South Africa. During the workshop, UNIFEM held crucial sessions on gender dimensions of reforms and effective participation, and women agreed on a declaration and a plan of action. This also led to an increase in the number of women delegates.

<sup>49</sup> Paffenholz, "Making Women Count—Not Just Counting Women," p. 48.



### 3 Anticipating and Overcoming Challenges

Seizing the opportunities presented by a national dialogue requires women political actors and their supporters to prepare for and understand the relationships between the institutions and processes that compose it. But this type of proactive awareness alone is not sufficient. Women and their supporters will not have free rein to push a positive agenda—they will face challenges and resistance, and will require strategies to help them build and protect a political agenda against these challenges (see Table 3).

Advocacy strategies create awareness and build pressure in favour of women's priorities (which will have been revealed through consultations or developed through coalition-building processes). Advocacy strategies include, but are not limited to, issuing public statements, press releases, and peace messages, and running social media campaigns. Shifting the overarching norms and expectations about women's participation in public life is a larger task than a single advocacy campaign can hope to achieve, but it is important in laying the groundwork for the success of targeted advocacy campaigns (e.g. to press for women's participation in a specific dialogue).

**Table 3. Challenges for Women in National Dialogues and Response Strategies**

Challenge	Strategy
Provisions for women's participation are inadequate (e.g. women are not among the constituencies listed for an upcoming dialogue or the women's quota is insufficient)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Advocacy for women's selection directed at the national government:</b> national political leaders may be influenced by advocacy messages that emphasise obligations voluntarily assumed by previous governments under agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women or through multilateral processes such as the Sustainable Development Goals, both of which feature strong commitments to women's participation in high-level political processes.</li><li>• <b>Advocacy for women's selection directed at other national dialogue stakeholders:</b> it may be possible to put pressure on other parties (e.g. political parties) to either advocate for women's participation or at least ensure that women are represented among their own delegates. This will need careful communication to avoid perceptions of any changes being an external imposition rather than based on national demands.</li></ul>

Challenge	Strategy
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>International diplomatic pressure for women's participation:</b> if a dialogue is funded by donors, they may have some leverage to push for women's participation. <b>The UN, most regional organisations, and many national foreign and development ministries have adopted strong commitments to advancing women's political participation.</b> This will need careful communication to avoid perceptions of any changes being an external imposition rather than based on national demands.</li> </ul>
Decision procedures are unfavourable to women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision-making procedures are usually agreed during the preparation phase. Vote-based procedures and limited party discipline are more conducive to women's influence (see Section 2.1.4). <b>If parties will make decisions as one unit, building support within a political party or faction for a gendered agenda is likely to be more important than building a cross-party coalition.</b></li> <li>• During the dialogue phase, <b>women's coalitions</b> and <b>international pressure</b> can help women to increase their influence over decisions. See sources of support and solidarity for women, below.</li> </ul>
The agenda is gender blind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Advocacy directed at the dialogue preparatory committee and major influencers:</b> securing a gendered agenda in the preparation phase usually requires mobilisation from women and their supporters (see Appendices 3 and 4).</li> <li>• <b>Gender-inclusive consultations</b> in any phase, if supported by <b>advocacy strategies</b>, can help to raise the visibility of gender issues. If the official process does not provide for gender-inclusive consultations, unofficial consultations with a strategy-building element supported by advocacy can be an effective strategy.</li> </ul>
Women participants have not formed a coalition or caucus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>There is a need to create space for women participants to interact both with each other and with women outside the dialogue.</b> Achieving a women's coalition in a national dialogue is difficult and carries risks. Networking and strategy workshops and resource rooms for women can help women participants to build relationships of trust, which can form a basis for coalitions and caucuses.</li> </ul>

Challenge	Strategy
Competition exists between international actors (donors, UN agencies, and international non-governmental organisations) to support national women's rights organisations, coalitions, and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Such external interest and support can be critical if it aligns with the needs and priorities of national actors; is provided in a coordinated, complementary, and coherent manner; and is sequenced and timed so that it relates to the stages of the national dialogue process. Uncoordinated or competitive support from international actors can lead to sustainability issues (by breaking the accountability mechanisms built up by national civil society in leaner times) and can put partners at risk (by creating partisan divisions in civil society where these did not previously exist).</li> <li>• <b>Coalition-building among relevant national actors and organisations can help to mitigate this tendency while also providing a platform where actors can identify and express their specific needs, priorities, concerns, and ideas, which can inform external support.</b></li> </ul>
The national dialogue is co-opted (see Appendix 7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Women must decide whether or not to engage in a co-opted dialogue.</b> A co-opted dialogue is unlikely to lead to transformative change, for women or anyone else. Participants in these dialogues may tarnish their reputation. There may also be backlash from government if women do not engage in a co-opted process. Women must weigh up the risks of engaging versus not engaging and examine how decisions are communicated. Ideally, a decision not to engage would be communicated as a group to limit retaliation against individuals.</li> </ul>
Sexual harassment and threats of violence are carried out against women dialogue participants, including social media hate campaigns and smear campaigns, and there are security risks involved in travel to national dialogue events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some women facing threats related to their political profile have relied on police officers or bodyguards. <b>Others have preferred unarmed bodyguards or unarmed representatives of international organisations as a less militarised form of personal protection.</b></li> <li>• <b>Creating spaces for digital participation may help to alleviate security risks related to travel.</b> The COVID-19 pandemic has normalised digital and hybrid work.</li> </ul>

## 4 Conclusion

The great national dialogues of the past were about empowering the sovereign public that would replace kings, queens, or colonial rulers. National dialogues in the 21st century must recognise the needs and aspirations of everyone who lives within their remit—especially women. Countries that include women in economic and political life are more prosperous, more peaceful, and better governed.<sup>50</sup> National dialogues are (or are meant to be) moments of transition or realignment. The recognition that the old order has failed can open up revolutionary possibilities to change the culture and institutions of politics. But these moments do not inevitably lead countries towards greater gender equality and justice. Periods of realignment are also frequently periods of tension and heightened conflict, and reactionary forces can prevail over agents of progress.

Seizing the moment requires a coordinated community of women political and civil society actors and their supporters who are prepared for the opportunities presented by a national dialogue; understand the relationships between the institutions and processes that compose it; and comprehend how to build and protect a political agenda within those institutions and processes. This is not to suggest that women are a homogeneous group with identical needs. Beyond a limited range of issues, such as women's political franchise (including their right to participate in a national dialogue) or explicitly gendered areas of law, women's political views are as diverse as those of the broader population. This entails that women's participation must be intersectional, which requires the participation of women from different generations, geographical regions (both urban and rural), backgrounds (both elite and non-elite), ethnicities, and religions. An inclusive national dialogue is a gender-inclusive national dialogue.

This guide has described the typical structure and procedures of national dialogues, the position of national dialogues within broader political change processes, the range of issues that typically feature in discussions and their possible gender dimensions, and how these insights can be adapted to create an inclusive or transformative agenda. An integrated approach to achieving a gender-transformative national dialogue requires that women participate in the dialogue at or near parity, and with attention to intersectionalities; that women are represented in leadership positions; that women are involved in agenda-setting and participate in all working groups; and that discussions engage with gender, not only the needs and experiences of women. This can require women and their supporters to push for modifications to the procedures of the dialogue and for the addition of new modalities and spaces as part of a long-term strategy that also encompasses mobilisation and advocacy from outside the formal process.

50 A. Elomäki, "The Economic Case for Gender Equality in the European Union: Selling Gender Equality to Decision-Makers and Neoliberalism to Women's Organizations," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 22:3 (2015), pp. 288–302; E. Melander, "Gender Equality and Intrastate Armed Conflict," *International Studies Quarterly* 49:4 (2005), pp. 695–714; C. Welzel et al., "Gender Equality and Democracy," *Comparative Sociology* 1:3–4 (2002), pp. 321–45.

## Appendix 1: National Dialogues Gender Equality Continuum

	Gender Discriminatory	Gender Blind	Gender Sensitive	Gender Responsive	Gender Transformative
Inclusion/selection approach	Few or no women participate in the dialogue.	Few women participate in the dialogue. No special measures are taken to ensure their participation.	Women participate in the dialogue in significant numbers but without attention to intersectionalities (e.g. the selection approach results in only elite women accessing the dialogue).	Women participate in the dialogue at or near the parity threshold.	Women participate in the dialogue at or near parity, and with attention to intersectionalities. Women are also represented in leadership positions.
Agenda and content of discussions	The content of discussions and/or the agreement exacerbates existing gender inequalities.	The content of the discussions and/or agreement ignores the gender-related implications of issues.	Women are involved in agenda-setting and participate in all working groups.	Women have some influence (see Box 1) in agenda-setting and participate in all working groups.	Women have influence in agenda-setting and participate in all working groups. Discussions engage with gender and not just the needs and experiences of women.

## Appendix 2: Gender-Supportive Features of a Dialogue: Modifications to the Procedures of a National Dialogue

Modification	Explanation
Women's quotas: gender as a selection criterion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women participate in national dialogues as members of other delegations or factions.</li> <li>• Where women participate as members of other delegations, it can be helpful to introduce support and advocacy strategies that help them to express their own political programme (e.g. through coaching or training by specialist organisations), to feel less alone (through confidential advocacy strategies by civil society), or to be seen to be supported (e.g. through public advocacy and political campaigns at important moments in the process).</li> </ul>
Women's delegations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women can participate in national dialogues (1) through women's civil society organisations or bipartisan women's delegations or (2) as members of other factions. Where women participate as part of their own delegation, high-level support from international diplomatic actors (e.g. foreign ministries or the UN) may help them to influence the process.</li> </ul>
Special recognition of women's role and needs in national dialogues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition of women in the administration of a national dialogue includes ensuring their safety as participants, as well as providing for gendered needs such as childcare.</li> </ul>
Women and decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision-making procedures determine how the contents of national dialogue outcomes will be reached (e.g. how a constitutional provision will be adopted). Decisions can be taken by majority vote, as a matter of consensus, unilaterally by a chair or similar, or through variations on and combinations of these processes. Most large national dialogues rely on voting-based procedures.</li> </ul>



Modification	Explanation
A gender-responsive agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Agenda-setting” refers to both the formal process of defining the topics of negotiations (e.g. the first stage might be to discuss a ceasefire) and the more abstract process of raising issues in the minds of participants that might lead to discussions—in other words, deciding what is salient, relevant, and important.</li> <li>• Some areas of law are specifically gendered: for example, laws addressing health and reproduction, and laws governing rights to own property, operate a business, pass on citizenship to one’s children, and vote. The gendered implications of other laws are implicit, with women usually being more disadvantaged under the status quo.</li> <li>• Agendas are usually only brief, leaving considerable scope to add substance through agenda-setting discussions and advocacy as a national dialogue approaches or once it is underway.</li> <li>• Agenda definition usually takes place in the preparation phase. Influence strategies that aim to increase women’s position in this phase, and especially within the “technical” bodies charged with setting out the details of the dialogue agenda, are likely to be most effective (compared to the use of such strategies at later stages).</li> </ul>

## Appendix 3: Gender-Supportive Features of a Dialogue: Adding New National Dialogue Modalities

Feature	Details of New Modalities
Women observers, witnesses, and advisers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These three modalities are a supplementary way to ensure women are present in national dialogue spaces and can voice their perspectives, either to support the work of women inside the dialogue or as a second-best option in the context of an otherwise gender-discriminatory dialogue.</li> <li>• Observers are permitted to be physically present at some or all sessions but are normally prohibited from voting or speaking formally.</li> <li>• Advisers are similar to observers; however, they are usually dependent on the sponsorship of one party, whereas observers are normally meant to be independent. Witnesses are invited to recount a specific experience to the dialogue.</li> </ul>
Consultations to understand women's needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultations are forums or approaches that aim to solicit opinions from a population. They can be an official part of a national dialogue, or unofficial.</li> <li>• Official consultations are usually conducted by a specialist body within the national dialogue.</li> <li>• Unofficial consultations are typically part of a strategy either to build a coalition (to transparently establish common ground among a diverse group of women) or to engage in agenda-setting advocacy strategy. They are, therefore, mostly conducted by civil society organisations or coalitions, or political parties (and sometimes armed factions).</li> </ul>
Gender and broader mainstreaming bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some processes that can be compared to national dialogues (national legislatures and comprehensive peace processes) have put in place committees charged with ensuring that gender issues are mainstreamed in their working procedures. These bodies have been a major factor in the achievement of gender-responsive and gender-transformative outcomes.</li> </ul>

Feature	Details of New Modalities
Support mechanisms for women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support mechanisms allow women to be more effective in making differentiated and meaningful contributions; they also strengthen women's role and influence during negotiations and implementation. Gender-responsive technical support can help those involved (not only and not necessarily women) with a variety of challenges related to the complexities of a dialogue process.</li></ul>

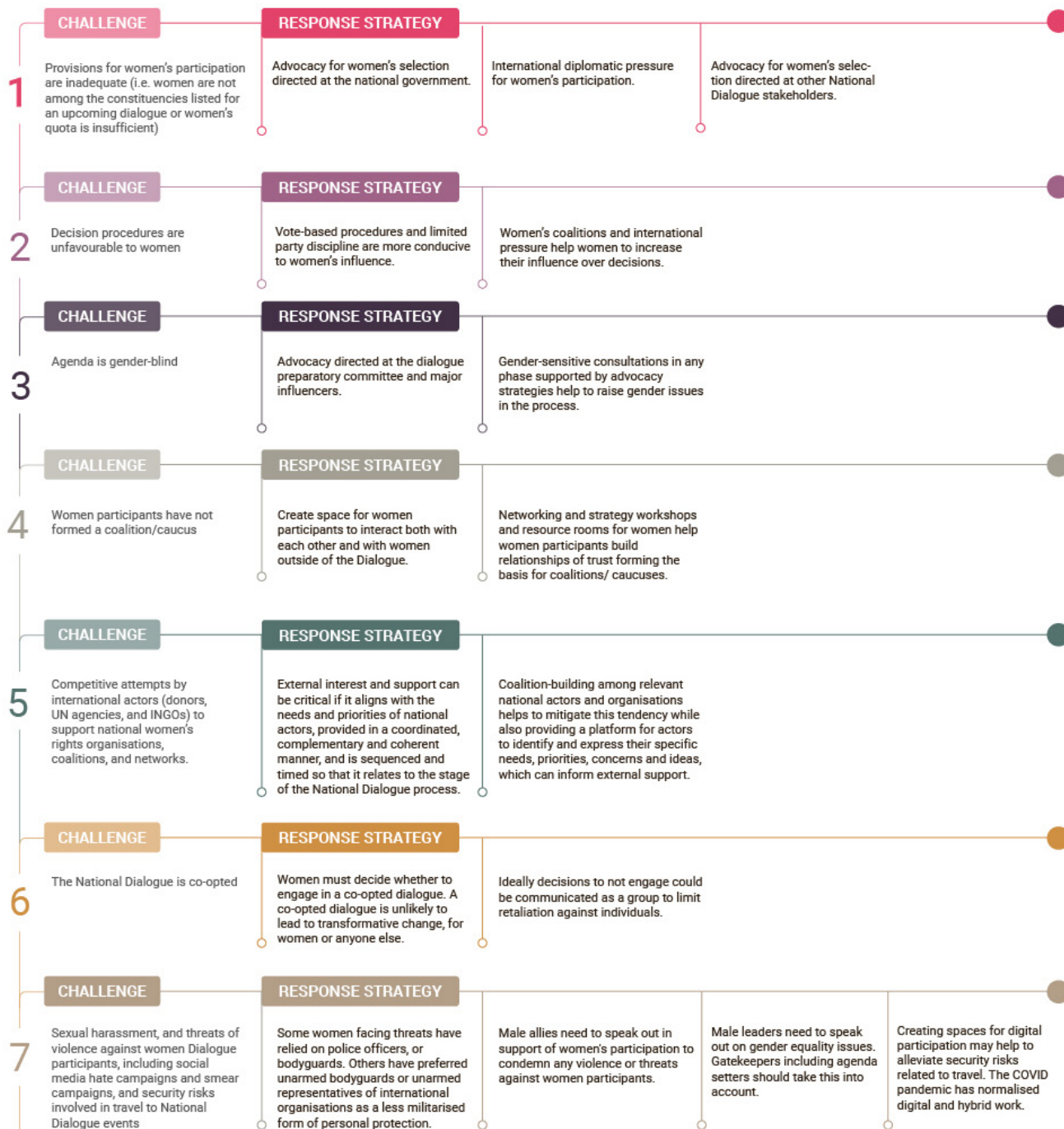
## Appendix 4: Most Common National Dialogue Agenda Topics and How to Make Them Gender Inclusive<sup>51</sup>

General Topics	Gender Dimensions of Common Subtopics
<b>Security Issues</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cessation of hostilities</li> <li>• Disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR)</li> <li>• Security sector reform (SSR) and other security issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women combatants are often not eligible for reintegration programmes.</li> <li>• SSR often neglects everyday gendered violence by security forces.</li> <li>• Ceasefire monitoring needs to include sexual violence in conflict.</li> <li>• DDR should aim to transform perceptions of masculinity, facilitating the creation of non-violent identities as members of a peaceful society.</li> <li>• Traditional perceptions of victims versus perpetrators may mean that forced conscripts do not receive the necessary DDR support, including mental health and psychosocial support.</li> </ul>
<b>Governance Issues</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land and territorial issues</li> <li>• Autonomy and self-determination of a people or region</li> <li>• Political representation</li> <li>• Governance reform</li> <li>• Political reform and democratisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choices about the form of political system have gender implications. For example, women do better in multi-member electoral districts and under proportional representation elections.</li> <li>• Governance is also where issues such as a women's quota for parliament will be discussed.</li> <li>• Traditional governance systems and systems with a colonial legacy often exclude women and minorities.</li> </ul>

<sup>51</sup> Created using the UN Peacemaker Language of Peace tool ([www.languageofpeace.org](http://www.languageofpeace.org)) and filtering the full list of agreements by Inclusive Peace's own list of national dialogues. The Language of Peace was created through the Legal Tools for Peace-Making Project, carried out by a research team at the Lauterpacht Centre for International Law (University of Cambridge) in collaboration with the UN's Mediation Support Unit.

General Topics	Gender Dimensions of Common Subtopics	
Truth and Justice		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Justice and accountability</li><li>Truth and reconciliation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Crimes against women are more likely to be surrounded by taboos of silence, making truth and justice more difficult to achieve.</li><li>Sexual violence has been recognised as a specific war crime but is often neglected in truth and justice processes. Men also suffer sexual violence and are limited from seeking justice by gender-related expectations.</li></ul>	
Economic Issues		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Taxation</li><li>Economic issues and resource rights</li><li>Environmental exploitation</li><li>Restitution and the war economy</li><li>Welfare entitlements</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Women are (in many countries) much less likely to hold the formal title to their land, making it much harder for them to recover land stolen during conflict.</li><li>Women may face bureaucratic barriers in business registration processes or when attempting to access finance or credit.</li><li>Welfare entitlements often neglect the needs of women and children.</li></ul>	
Citizenship and National Identity		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Culture, heritage, and language</li><li>Refugee return</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Whether women are mentioned in a constitutional preamble (and any other prominent documents) can help to set the tone for their political participation.</li><li>Women are often denied the right to transfer citizenship to their children.</li><li>Women have different needs from men in relation to refugee return programmes.</li><li>Children born during conflict without legal documents may be excluded from services and basic rights.</li></ul>	

## Appendix 5: Challenges for Women in National Dialogues and Response Strategies





## Appendix 6: Signs of a Co-opted Dialogue

Category	Signs of Co-optation	Examples
Agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pre-defined agenda by a small group of actors, or by actors representing one side of the political spectrum</li> <li>Agenda intentionally avoids addressing key issues related to the underlying structural factors of the conflict or crisis</li> <li>Agenda is intentionally bloated to undermine the prospect of the national dialogue leading to implementable recommendations</li> </ul>	In Egypt (2011), the agenda did not address key issues behind the protests and was decided by a limited set of actors, which limited the relevance and impact of the national dialogue. <sup>52</sup>
Choice of chair(s) and/or convenor(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chair(s) and/or convenor(s) are selected on the basis of their political affiliation with a particular side of the political spectrum (typically those in power) and/or are not seen to be legitimate by a broad set of stakeholders, including opposition groups and the general public</li> </ul>	In South Sudan (2016), the national dialogue was convened under the auspices of the president and was immediately perceived to be biased. Despite technical measures aiming to enhance inclusivity, the president remained the convenor, which ultimately affected the legitimacy of the process and its outcomes. <sup>53</sup>
Participant selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pre-defined nominations by a small group of actors, or by actors representing one side of the political spectrum</li> <li>Limited or lack of meaningful efforts to engage opposition groups in the process, either directly or through proxies</li> </ul>	In both national dialogues in Afghanistan (2002 and 2003–4), the selection processes were heavily influenced by national elites and external actors, which damaged the legitimacy of the dialogue and the transitional cabinet. <sup>54</sup>

52 E. Çuhadar and T. Paffenholz, "What Is a Constructive Peace Process? Inclusion in Peace Negotiations," in B. W. Dayton and L. Kreisberg (eds), *Perspectives in Waging Conflicts Constructively: Cases, Concepts, and Practice* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), pp. 131–47.

53 C. H. Vhumunu, "The National Dialogue Initiative in South Sudan," Accord (31 May 2018), [www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-national-dialogue-initiative-in-south-sudan](http://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-national-dialogue-initiative-in-south-sudan) [last accessed: 16 September 2022].

54 B. R. Rubin, "Saving Afghanistan," *Foreign Affairs* 86:1 (2007), p. 62.

Category	Signs of Co-optation	Examples
Decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decisions regarding the outcomes of the national dialogue process, or components of it, are made in an exclusive manner, often without transparency</li> <li>Disputes and deadlocks within the decision-making process are resolved by an executive authority or by actors representing one side of the political spectrum</li> </ul>	In Egypt (2011), the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces decided to send constitutional amendments to a referendum shortly before the beginning of the negotiations in the dialogue, undermining the role of the national dialogue in influencing such measures. <sup>55</sup>
Duration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The duration of a national dialogue process alone does not reveal co-optation but, taken with other signs, a swift and rushed manner can indicate the lack of a meaningful, inclusive process</li> <li>Duration can also have implications for the extent of inclusion</li> </ul>	In Egypt (2011), the national dialogue was conducted in less than one week. <sup>56</sup> This was indicative of a superficial process.
Consultation and engagement process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public engagement and consultation processes exclude certain segments of the population to skew the process and/or outcomes, including those representing certain political views or actors, or those residing in certain areas of the country</li> </ul>	In Cameroon (2019), the national dialogue sought to address issues relating to the anglophone regions; however, it excluded representatives from those regions from participating. <sup>57</sup>
Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Cosmetic” inclusion, whereby certain groups and regions are seemingly represented and included in the national dialogue process, but not meaningfully involved or able to exert their influence and contribute either to the process or to shaping the outcomes</li> </ul>	In Yemen (2013), despite a progressive inclusion formula, participants at governorate level were selected by political parties and other elites, which influenced their engagement and limited the meaningful inclusion of groups encompassed by the inclusion formula (women, youth, civil society, and southerners). <sup>58</sup>

55 Quhadar and Paffenholz, “What Is a Constructive Peace Process?”

56 Paffenholz et al., “What Makes or Breaks National Dialogues?” p. 54.

57 “Cameroon’s Anglophone Dialogue: A Work in Progress,” International Crisis Group (26 September 2019), [www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/cameroons-anglophone-dialogue-work-progress](http://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/cameroons-anglophone-dialogue-work-progress) [last accessed: 16 September 2022].

58 Ross, “Women in Peace and Transition Processes.”

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