

# Making Women Count: Women's Inclusion in Peace Processes at a Glance

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### The Research Project

This Briefing Note is based on results from the ongoing “Broadening Participation in Political Negotiations and Implementation” research project, led by Dr. Thania Paffenholz at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, Switzerland, since 2011. This project analyses how and under what conditions various actors in addition to the main negotiating parties have participated in and influenced peace processes and political transitions, by comparing more than 40 in-depth qualitative case studies of peace and constitution-making multi-stakeholder negotiations, and the implementation of negotiated agreements, ranging from 1989 to the present.

## Background

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

## Key Findings about Women's Inclusion

### Making women count is more important than just counting women

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

## The chances of agreements being implemented are higher when women's groups influenced the process

The chances of agreements being implemented—i.e. that the resulting peace will be sustained—were also much higher when women's groups had a stronger influence on the process. Comparative research indicates that, in almost all cases where strong women's influence had been exerted, partial or full implementation followed after a peace agreement had been reached. Generally, the stronger women's influence was in reaching an agreement, the higher the likelihood of its subsequent implementation.

## Timing is key to successful women's inclusion

The research found that timing is key to achieving successful and effective inclusion of women in peace and transition negotiations. Early women's involvement - preferably in the pre-negotiation phase - has often paved the way for sustained women's inclusion throughout subsequent negotiations and agreement implementation processes. All case studies show that the international community tends to pay the most attention during the negotiation phase. However, many peace processes fail, or lose the substantial gains made during inclusive negotiations, during an agreement's implementation. This finding echoes UN Security Council Resolution 1889 (2009) and its emphasis on including women in decision-making at the earliest stages in peace and post-conflict processes [SCR 1889 (2009) preamble, para 1, para 15].

## Women's inclusion takes place through different modalities, at the table and beyond

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

- 1 | **Direct representation at the negotiation table:** Women's quotas, as part of selection criteria for negotiation delegations, have proven effective to enlarge women's representation at the table. However, quotas alone did not automatically lead to more women's influence, as party loyalties were often stronger than women interests. Women had much higher chances of exercising influence at the negotiation table when they had their own independent women-only delegation, and/or when they were able to strategically coordinate among women across delegations in order to advance common interests, such as by formulating joint positions on key issues and/or by forming unified women's coalitions across formal delegations.
- 2 | **Observer status:** When women were granted observer status, they could rarely influence the process. No patterns assessing the influence of women as observers emerged; rather, the way in which women were able to use observer status during negotiations varied according to context-specific factors.
- 3 | **Consultations:** Setting up formal (i.e. officially endorsed by the mediation team and the negotiating parties) or informal consultative forums to identify key issues, demands, and proposals made by women - in parallel to ongoing peace negotiations - was found to be the most common modality of women's inclusion in peace and transition processes.

However, for such consultations to be influential in practice, it is necessary to establish clear and effective transfer mechanisms that systematically communicate results of the consultations to negotiators and mediators. Overall, women were most influential within consultations when able to formulate joint women's positions on key issues. Joint positions were then presented, often in concise documents, to explain women's demands to the main negotiating parties, which then were either formally obliged or informally pressured to consider this input in the drafting of a final peace agreement.

- 4 | **Inclusive commissions:** There are generally three types of commissions: those established to prepare and conduct peace and transition processes, post-agreement commissions (e.g. transitional justice mechanisms, ceasefire monitoring, constitution-drafting), and permanent commissions that endure in the long-term. Particularly in post-agreement commissions, women's inclusion was mostly the result of gender-sensitive provisions already written into the peace agreement. Securing women's participation in all commissions across all phases of a peace process requires explicit gender equality provisions (such as specific quotas) to be introduced as early as possible, in order to be present in the language of a final peace agreement.
- 5 | **Problem-solving workshops:** Women were found to be highly underrepresented in this modality. Exceptions to this general finding occurred when workshops were specifically designed for women, as a means of overcoming any political tensions and grievances. Such cases often resulted in the formulation of joint positions, which then increased women's overall influence.
- 6 | **Public decision-making:** In some cases, negotiated peace agreements or new constitutions are put to public vote. There are examples where women have been successful in launching a public campaign in favor of approving a peace deal (i.e. Northern Ireland). Reliable gender-disaggregated data on voting patterns are often lacking; however, when such data were available, it was found that the voting patterns of women did not differ from those of men.
- 7 | **Mass action:** More than any other group, women have performed mass action campaigns in favor of peace deals. They have pressured conflict parties to start negotiations and sign peace deals. Women have also undertaken mass action to push their way into official processes that exclude them.

## What Determines Women's Influence

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

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

For inclusion modalities further from the negotiation table, such as consultations, appropriate **transfer strategies** to bring results to the negotiating table were often neglected. Consultative forums were put in place, but the results of these debates were not necessarily taken into account. Women-only consultative forums may risk turning into debating clubs without real power.

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

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

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

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