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Increasing the Participation of Women in Peace Processes

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Executive Summary

- Increasing the participation of women in peace processes has been a key part of the UN Security Council's agenda since the historic adoption of resolution 1325 in 2000, which recognized the disproportionate and differential impact of conflict on women and the importance of their participation in all matters of conflict prevention, mitigation, resolution, and peacebuilding.
- Despite evidence demonstrating that peace agreements have a 35 percent chance of lasting at least fifteen years when women are included in the peace process, women are still systematically excluded.
- Women experience conflict differently: while men make up the majority of combatants and are most likely to die from the direct impacts of war, women are more likely to die from war's indirect effects after conflict ends – from causes relating to the breakdown in social order, human rights abuses, economic devastation, and the spread of infectious diseases.
- As such, women who have the chance to meaningfully participate in peace negotiations often broaden the range of topics being discussed at the table, from one of security, to wider issues of human rights and development.
- As peace processes evolve from outlining ceasefires, dividing territory, and power-sharing, to further incorporating the elements that make up a society's architecture – education, healthcare, infrastructure, access to justice – women's participation is critical, as they bring to the table a unique set of perspectives based on their life experiences.
- In peace processes, women are perceived by both men and women as honest brokers. They tend to reach across religious, ethnic, cultural, and party lines, promote trust, raise issues critical to achieving a positive, durable peace, and prioritize issues of gender equality and women's empowerment both in the peace agreement and its implementation process.
- The main factors enabling or constraining women's participation and influence are elite support, public buy-in, and the influence of regional and international actors in peace processes.

The Issue

In 2000, the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325 (2000)), formally acknowledging the changing nature of warfare and the disproportionate and differential impact of conflict on women. This resolution affirms the importance of the participation of women and the inclusion of gender perspectives throughout all aspects of conflict prevention, mitigation, and resolution, particularly in peace negotiations, humanitarian planning, peacekeeping operations, and post-conflict peacebuilding and governance.

In the eighteen years since UNSCR 1325 (2000) formally institutionalized the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in the international legal framework, seven subsequent resolutions have been adopted by the Security Council, further bolstering the WPS agenda by strengthening implementation and recognizing gender equality and women's empowerment as critical to international peace and security.

Yet, the participation of women in peace processes is still lagging, despite forming one of the core tenets of UNSCR 1325 (2000). According to the UN Women Sourcebook on Women, Peace and Security, between 1992 and 2011, just four percent of witnesses and signatories to peace agreements and two percent of chief mediators at peace tables were women, while women comprised just nine percent of negotiators.¹ Only two women in history have ever served as chief negotiators: Miriam Coronel Ferrer of the Philippines and Tzipi Livni of Israel. Coronel Ferrer is the only woman to have ever signed a final peace agreement as a chief negotiator.

Women are often excluded from formal peace processes because the traditional model of negotiating a peace agreement tends to bring the belligerents to the table – those exacting conflict in society – and this seldom includes women. There is often skepticism about the ulterior motives of outside groups not traditionally considered to be part of the peace process – even those who did not take up arms, including women's groups whose sole objective is to advocate for peace – and a reluctance to share power with others at the negotiating table. Further, peacebuilding priorities are often negotiated by elites in private – predominately by men – and in political settlements, without giving due consideration to nontraditional parties to the peace process, such as women and women's groups.

There is often a tension between the desire to reach a short-term cessation of hostilities – which is why peace processes often bring belligerents to the table in an effort to agree to a laying down of arms – and the goal of

building a durable peace. According to the International Peace Institute, oftentimes, 'belligerents and mediators perceive a trade-off between the goals of ending violence and building peace, and pursue mediation in a way that emphasizes favorable short-term results even if it ultimately increases the probability that crisis will recur in the long term.'²

Yet, qualitative and quantitative data have proven the positive impact that women's participation in the peace process has on the likelihood of a durable, positive peace – one that goes beyond the immediate absence of violence, and strives to achieve justice for all. This EDA Insight looks at how women's participation at the peace table impacts the longevity and durability of the peace, and includes strategies and recommendations on how to bolster women's participation at the peace table.

Why Is It Important?

- As conflicts grow and proliferate worldwide, it will be critical for parties to reach a sustainable peace that not only addresses the short-term cessation of hostilities, but also the longer-term sustainability of the peace – a peace that is not solely defined by the absence of violence, but one that aims to rebuild society. Women's participation has proven to be critical to creating a lasting, durable peace.
- As peace processes evolve to encompass a wider range of issues outside of power, territory, and the state, evidence has demonstrated that women bring a broader set of issues to the peace process, including a focus on human rights and development, as well as an emphasis on education, healthcare, infrastructure, and access to justice – sectors which create the foundation for a thriving society. This will be necessary if parties to conflict are to rebuild societies, representing the needs and perspectives of all members of the population.
- Peace processes are a defining moment in a country's history, where new political structures, institutions, and often constitutions are re-written and re-imagined. This is a unique inflection point where existing power structures can be challenged, and gender equality provisions can be written into and adopted by different structures. This is a critical step in the process, as evidence has shown that societies with higher rates of gender equality are less likely to break out into and/or relapse into conflict. An inclusive peace process has the ability to truly transform a society.

Why does Women's Participation Matter at the Peace Table?

The body of research on the impact that women's participation has on peace processes has been steadily growing. Qualitative and quantitative evidence demonstrates that security efforts will be more sustainable – and peace has a better chance of lasting longer – when women contribute to conflict prevention and early warning, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and post-conflict resolution and rebuilding.

This is not simply a matter of representation, where women have a seat at the table because they constitute fifty percent of the world's population. Rather, it is a matter of operational effectiveness: when women play meaningful roles throughout conflict prevention, mitigation, resolution, and peacebuilding – in this case, at the peace table – societies are more stable, secure, and are less likely to relapse into conflict.

Women experience conflict differently:

It is widely accepted that women experience conflict differently than men. This understanding of the disproportionate and differential impact of war on women was codified in UNSCR 1325 (2000). Research from the International Peace Institute draws on the work of Pluemper and Neumeyer, reminding us that 'men make up the majority of combatants during conflict and are more likely than women to die from war's direct effects. Women are more likely to die from war's indirect effects after conflict ends – from causes relating to the breakdown in social order, human rights abuses, economic devastation, and the spread of infectious diseases.'³

As such, women who have had the chance to meaningfully participate in peace negotiations often broaden the range of topics being discussed at the table, from one of security, to wider issues of human rights and development.

Women promote trust and act as honest brokers:

Empirical evidence has demonstrated that women are often perceived as honest brokers and less threatening at the peace table. This is due to the fact that women are often outside or underrepresented in formal power structures and are not perceived to be mobilizing forces in conflict. This perception of women benefits them at the peace table, where they tend to be viewed as impartial mediators.

According to research by the Institute for Inclusive Security, negotiators involved in peace processes in Northern Ireland, South Africa, and Somalia all reported that even though women participants in the peace process were initially viewed with skepticism by male colleagues, they eventually developed a reputation for building trust, engaging all sides, and fostering dialogue.⁴

Women tend to reach across party lines:

Anecdotal evidence has shown that women tend to reach across religious, ethnic, cultural, and party lines, taking a collaborative approach to peacemaking. Women often form coalitions across these lines, as well as vertically, between grassroots peace advocates and elites.

In the Philippines, women in the high-level peace talks that produced the 2014 peace agreement between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front consistently solicited public opinion from civil society across youth, indigenous, religious, and other groups and held extensive consultations, feeding this input back into the peace process, ensuring an inclusive process. Women negotiators on both sides of the table worked together to convince the greater population of the benefits of the peace process.

Reaching a durable peace:

Laurel Stone's quantitative analysis of 156 peace agreements from 1989 to 2011 has demonstrated that when women are included in peace processes, there is a 20 percent increase in the probability of an agreement lasting at least two years, and a 35 percent increase in the probability of an agreement lasting at least 15 years.⁵ This is compared to non-inclusive processes, where an average of fifty percent of peace agreements forged during the 1990s failed within five years.

According to the Council on Foreign Relations, the meaningful participation of women in formal peace processes contributes to both the longevity of the peace, as well as to the achievement of the peace agreement.⁶ These findings follow from a qualitative analysis of forty peace and constitution-drafting negotiations since the 1990s, which found that parties were significantly more likely to agree to talks and subsequently reach an agreement when women's groups exercised strong influence on the negotiation process, as compared to when they had little or no influence.⁷

This is not simply a case of ‘add women and you will have peace’. Research from the International Peace Institute has demonstrated that peace processes have evolved beyond outlining ceasefires, dividing territory, and power-sharing, and now tend to incorporate the elements that make up a society’s architecture: education, healthcare, infrastructure, and so on.⁸

Women raise issues critical to establishing a positive peace:

Women have a unique set of experiences that prove vital at the negotiating table. Overwhelming evidence has demonstrated that when men are alone at the table, the conversation tends to focus on issues of power, territory, and the state. But when women are at the table, they more often raise issues of key economic and social necessity – education, health, infrastructure, and access to justice.

These are oftentimes misconstrued as ‘women’s issues’, but, in fact, the lack of these services can be key drivers that lead to fragility and the breakdown of social order, which is why it is critical that they are addressed in peace agreements. In short, women have tended to more often raise issues that directly affect all of society – women and men, girls and boys – issues on which a lasting peace can be built.

In Colombia, women facilitated the inclusion of provisions in the final 2016 agreement between the government and the FARC (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) on the rights of women and girls, access to property for rural and indigenous communities, women’s political participation, gender-based violence, and post-conflict accountability for sexual violence.

Women prioritize gender equality:

Women are more likely to raise issues of gender equality and women’s rights in the peace process. This is critical because research has demonstrated that societies with higher levels of gender equality are less likely to break out into and/or relapse into conflict.

In fact, references to women and gender-sensitive language in peace agreements have increased since the WPS agenda became part of the Security Council’s agenda in 2000. The 2015 annual report of the UN Secretary-General on Women, Peace and Security notes that from 1990-2000, 17 out of 664 peace agreements included at least one reference to women. Out of the 504 agreements signed since the adoption of UNSCR 1325 (2000) through 2015, 138 (27 percent) included references to women.⁹

In South Africa, the participation and advocacy of women in the peace process led to gender equality being enshrined in the new constitution. In Burundi, the pressure that women placed on negotiating parties ahead of the 2000 peace agreement led to a thirty percent quota for women in parliament.

Interestingly, even when women’s concerns are not integrated into peace agreements or new constitutions, anecdotal evidence from across Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia has shown that women’s participation in parliament has increased exponentially, compared with countries not in conflict.¹⁰

Strategies and Modalities of Women’s Participation in Peace Processes

In peace processes, women can play a multitude of roles. Women can be mediators, delegates to negotiating parties or members of all-women negotiating parties representing a ‘women’s agenda’, signatories, witnesses, and representatives of women’s civil society with an observer role. They can also be active in a parallel forum, through consultation, or as a movement. They can act as gender advisers to mediators, facilitators, or delegates, as members of technical committees, or as part of informal and/or grassroots groups advocating for peace and mobilizing communities throughout the peace process.

It is in this latter category of grassroots advocacy groups that women tend to be disproportionately represented, pushing for peace at the margins, as they are often excluded from the formal peace process. In fact, informal participation has proven to be the most accessible way to influence the process.

Research from the Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative has found that the main factors enabling or constraining women’s participation and influence are elite support, public buy-in, and the influence of regional and international actors in peace processes.¹¹

The UN and the international community have a role to play in making clear that women’s participation throughout the peace process is a priority. Case studies have demonstrated that when women and women’s coalitions are included during the pre-negotiation stage, women are more likely to be meaningful participants in the peace negotiation and implementation process.

Direct representation at the negotiating table is also key, and quotas can be a strategic way to guarantee women’s representation. However, quotas alone will not guarantee that women’s voices will be heard, or that women will have a meaningful role to play at the

peace table, as party loyalty often trumps women's interests. For example, in Yemen, where women benefitted from a thirty percent quota in the national dialogue, they did not form a unified group and rarely voted as a bloc – even on issues of joint concern to them. Oftentimes, women have more of an impact as part of all-women negotiating delegations, particularly when they can coordinate across delegations to formulate joint positions.

Women are most often represented when taking part in formal or informal consultations that take place in parallel with peace talks. Ensuring direct lines of communication to communicate the results of consultations with negotiators and mediators is key to ensuring that women's influence is impactful. Women are most influential in consultations when they form joint positions on key issues, which are then presented to the negotiating parties.

Mediators also have an important role to play. When they are inclusion-friendly and know how to use inclusion strategically, this has increased the influence of women's groups.

Research from UN Women's report on Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations demonstrates that when individual women are placed in formal, official roles at the peace table – particularly as gender advisers to the mediation team, or legal professionals aiding the mediation teams or the party delegations – their impact on the language of the text and the inclusion of provisions specific to women is frequently significant.¹²

Conclusion

Overwhelming evidence has demonstrated that the participation of women in peace processes both increases the likelihood that a peace agreement will be reached, and that the peace itself has a 35 percent chance of lasting at least 15 years. Women experience conflict differently, and their perspective is critical to achieving a durable, positive peace. It is incumbent upon regional and international actors, local elites, and the local population's buy-in to the peace process to enable women's meaningful participation.

Endnotes

- 1) *UN Women Sourcebook on Women, Peace and Security*. New York: UN Women, October 2012.
- 2) O'Reilly, Marie, Andrea Ó Súilleabháin, and Thania Paffenholz. *Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes*. New York: International Peace Institute, June 2015.
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- 4) O, Reilly, Marie. *Why Women? Inclusive Security and Peaceful Societies*. The Institute for Inclusive Security, October 2015.
- 5) Stone, Laurel. Study of 156 peace agreements, controlling for other variables, Quantitative Analysis of Women's participation in Peace Processes in *Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes, Annex II*. 2015.
- 6) Council on Foreign Relations. "Women's Participation in Peace Processes." www.cfr.org. <https://www.cfr.org/interactive/womens-participation-in-peace-processes> (accessed April 2, 2018).
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- 9) UN Security Council. *Report of the Secretary-General on Women, Peace and Security*. 2015.
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