

POLICY BRIEF

**Inclusion of women in
peacebuilding processes (ne-
gotiation and mediation):
Women's peace and security
agenda**

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**American
Friends
Service
Committee**



Abbreviations

ARCSS	Agreement for Conflict Resolution for South Sudan
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
FemWise	Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation
HoA	Horn of Africa
IDMC	International Displacement Monitoring Centre
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Queer
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MSU	Mediation Support Unit
NAP	National Action Plan
R-ARCSS	Resolution to the Conflict in South Sudan
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SHE WINS	Supporting Her Empowerment: Women's Inclusion for New Security
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WPS	Women, Peace, and Security

Executive summary

Endemic conflicts in the Horn of Africa result in gross human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence. Lasting peace in the Horn of Africa region cannot be achieved without sustained engagement and participation of women. It is, therefore, imperative to amplify efforts toward advancing women's space by strengthening women's recognition, protection, funding, resourcing, and capacity building in peacemaking and peacebuilding to advance the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda.

Suggested rephrasing: According to the United Nations, the Horn of Africa has been ravaged by conflicts that have resulted in gross human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence. To achieve lasting peace, women must have a seat at the table. This means recognizing, protecting, funding, resourcing, and building the capacity of women to participate in peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts, which will advance the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda. It's high time we prioritize these efforts to create a more peaceful and just Horn of Africa for all. Recently, women's value has been recognized in mediation and negotiation processes. However, the participation of women in peace processes globally and in the region is constrained by under-representation, entrenched patriarchal values and norms, non-recognition as legitimate stakeholders, limited resources, and suspicion and mistrust from interested parties.

Suggested rephrasing: Despite growing awareness of the vital role women can play in peacebuilding, they still face significant barriers to full participation, including lack of representation, patriarchal values, limited resources, and suspicion. We must work to break down these barriers and create more opportunities for women to contribute meaningfully to peace negotiations and mediation.

Introduction

Women constitute around 52 percent of the population of the Horn of Africa, HoA (Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan, Somalia, Sudan, and Uganda). This justifies their meaningful inclusion in all peace processes. Although there is evidence that they are involved and have achieved palpable results in peace work, they remain a distinct minority in formal peace processes.

A study by the Council of Foreign Relations (2019), which analyzed forty-two (42) peace processes and agreements across the globe between 1992-2019, revealed a troubling statistic: women accounted for a mere average of 9.5 percent of peace mediators involved in these processes. This pattern is evident in the HoA region. For example, during the 2015 Agreement for the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan, A-RCSS, and the peace negotiations in South Sudan, women made up only 15% of This stark underrepresentation underscores the pressing need for more inclusive and gender-balanced participation in peace initiatives across the board.

The culture of excluding women is compounded by their treatment as victims of conflicts rather than agents of change. This diminishes their agency.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, unanimously adopted in October 2000, highlights the paramount importance of incorporating women into peace and security processes. This groundbreaking Resolution advocates for preventing violence against women, safeguarding their rights, promoting their active involvement in decision-making at all levels, and integrating a gender perspective into conflict prevention and resolution, as well as other peacebuilding endeavors. This Resolution serves as the cornerstone of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda, fortified by nine subsequent resolutions, which collectively demonstrate a global commitment to gender equality and empowering women in building and maintaining peace and security.

The African Union has demonstrated its commit-

ment to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda through various legal and policy instruments, including the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003), the AU Continental Results Framework for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the agenda, the AUC's Common African Position on the 2020 Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture, and the AU's policies on post-conflict reconstruction and development (2006) and transitional justice (2019).

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) adopted the Regional Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 in 2011 to promote gender equality in peace and security efforts. Following this, IGAD's Mediation Support Unit (MSU) has developed programs that engage women in mediation and negotiation, resulting in women having increased influence and voices, expanding their reach, and exhibiting improved contributions to policy development and implementation of peacebuilding programs.

A study on the state of women's engagement in peace mediation and negotiations in the HoA was conducted by the Salama Hub Project (AFSC) based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to showcase the varied experiences of women in peace processes. The Salama Hub Project is a joint venture of AFSC and the All Africa Conference of Churches.. The project presents an opportunity to contribute significantly by equipping African civil society and faith-based organizations in the HoA region with research evidence to influence policy development, thereby contributing to peace. Led by AFSC, the study focused on the roles and contributions of women in mediation and negotiations in the HoA region, the challenges experienced, and how to strengthen their involvement. The findings form a basis for formulating necessary policy shifts towards comprehensive, more inclusive, and gender-responsive peace processes. The study used a mixed-method approach using desk research, interviews, consultations, and questionnaires. The findings of the study are summarized below.

Roles and contributions of women in mediation and negotiations

The participation of women in peace processes in countries of the HoA has yielded demonstrable results in the region's different countries. Women's involvement in peacebuilding has contributed to positive changes and progress in the region's countries.

South Sudanese women engaged in peace processes, particularly the IGAD-led discussions between 1999–2005, leading to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005. After this, several women were appointed to various structures to prepare for establishing the new South Sudanese transitional government. When the civil war erupted in December 2013, women demanded and were included in the peace negotiation, given twelve seats, and were among the signatories to the eventual peace agreement.

One of the key contributions of women was to call for the participation of refugees and internally displaced persons in the negotiations and a dignified return to their places of origin. This led to incorporating humanitarian and social issues into the Agreement for Conflict Resolution for South Sudan (ARCSS). Women also called for greater accountability for sexual violence in conflict and the need for transitional justice. As a result, a recommendation was made to establish the Hybrid Court for South Sudan.

In the ensuing Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution to the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in 2017, women called on negotiators to consider the unique and particular needs of women and children associated with armed groups and gender mainstreaming in security sector reforms, including the establishment of a Women's Enterprise Development Fund to address the gendered relief and recovery needs.

In **Somalia**, women have participated in mediation and negotiation since the Arta peace process held in Djibouti in 2000, which established the Transitional National Parliament and Government. They also advocated inclusion as

the "Sixth Clan of Somalia" to overcome their marginalization by the political framework of five patrilineal clans used to determine who participated.

Somali women have engaged in national, sub-national, and local peacebuilding processes, including identifying related challenges and how they impact women and girls. Such challenges include Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) arising from attacks by Al-Shabaab. They have mediated disputes between warring factions and established peace committees, reducing violence and fostering tolerance in their regions.

Somalia adopted its National Action Plan (NAP) to implement UNSCR 1325 in January 2023. The NAP seeks to respond to persistent and emerging peace and security issues affecting women, including conflict-related SGBV, strengthened access to justice for women, and meaningful engagement and participation in all initiatives and mechanisms for peace.

Between 2018 and 2022, **Ethiopia** faced multiple instances of internal political instability. One of the major conflicts was between the Tigray Liberation Front and the Ethiopian Federal Government, which began in November 2020. As a result of the conflict, many people were displaced, and women and children were disproportionately affected. According to the International Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), in 2022, more than 52% of the 2.1 million displaced people were women. Unfortunately, the prevalence of SGBV made it difficult for women to participate in peacebuilding efforts actively. When communities were embroiled in fierce border clashes in the eastern part of the country in 2018, women's collective action diffused the tensions and restored border security. In 2020, Ethiopian women's organizations established the Coalition for Women's Voice on the National Dialogue. The Coalition developed a women's agenda, which, among other things, sought to

ensure that the national dialogue was inclusive and prioritized women's needs and perspectives.

In August 2021, the AU appointed three eminent persons to facilitate the Agreement for Lasting Peace and Cessation of Hostilities on 2 November 2022, signed by the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front. Among the eminent persons was Madame Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the former Deputy President of South Africa.

Regarding **Eritrea**, the participation of women in peacebuilding has been marginal. However, organizations such as the National Union of Eritrean Women, established in 1979, and the Network of Eritrean Women, established in 2013, work towards advancing women's rights, including addressing SGBV.

The 2007-8 post-election violence in **Kenya** claimed 1,133 lives and displaced over 300,000 people. More than 60 percent of the latter were women. The mediation team, drawn from the AU Panel of Eminent Persons, consisted of one woman and two men. It is widely recognized that the presence and role of Graça Machel was pivotal in enhancing women's participation in the Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation process through the formation of the Women's Consultation Group, which successfully called for special consideration to be given to the security of women and girls in humanitarian services in the post-election environment. The initiative also positioned women for leadership roles in the transitional period and post-conflict reconstruction initiatives.

During Sudan's 2018/19 revolution, women actively pushed for democracy and accountable governance, primarily through the Sudanese Professional Association. With support from the United Nations Development Programme, the Darfur Community Peace and Stability Fund was established to enhance the capacity of Darfurian women to effectively facilitate dialogue, mediation, and negotiation efforts at the community level. The conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramil-

itary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which broke out in April 2023, has been accompanied by widespread human rights violations, including conflict-related sexual violence targeting girls and women. Yet women were not represented in the ceasefire negotiations held in Jeddah in May and July 2023.

In **Uganda**, Madame Betty Bigombe was the Lead Negotiator in the formal talks between the Government of the Republic of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). She facilitated the agreement by the LRA to enter the Juba Peace Talks, which accelerated peace and allowed peacebuilding work to continue at the community level in affected parts of the country.

In summary, women have participated in and made valuable contributions to peacebuilding work in the HoA. However, the participation has been characterized by some challenges, limiting their presence in mediation and negotiation teams and their contribution to peace processes in the region.

Persistent Challenges to Women's Participation in Peace Processes

Women's participation in peace processes is crucial for achieving sustainable peace and addressing women's unique needs and perspectives in conflict-affected regions, including the Horn of Africa (HoA). However, despite policy recognition of their importance, there are persistent challenges in attaining full participation in this region's peace processes. These challenges are often manifested in the following factors:

- **Embedded cultural norms of exclusion:** Women's expertise is often overlooked in formal and high-level peace initiatives. This arises from deeply embedded patriarchal cultural norms and practices that limit their access to public spaces and decision-making platforms. In Somalia, for example, customary law assigns women the status of minors. In such circumstances of subordination, their demands for involvement are easily dismissed as irrelevant.
- **Inherently discriminatory appointments:** Typically, appointees to mediation processes tend to be people who hold or have held high positions in politics, diplomacy, or military service, spaces in which women are a distinct minority. When conflicts arise, mediators are often nominated by Member States of the AU and IGAD from a predictable pool of primarily men. The net result is the limited presence of women in formal peace processes at national, regional, and international levels.
- **Trivialization:** Women seeking space in peace processes are often labeled anti-establishment activists and relegated to observer status with no institutionalized platforms and mechanisms to nurture and coordinate their participation and contributions. Their calls to be meaningfully represented are often dismissed as secondary to ending the violence.
- **Under-utilization of existing women peace experts:** While advances have been made towards training women in mediation and negotiation, very few are deployed to formal peace processes. This is linked to the lack of a recognized roster of women with the expertise for such work.
- **Protection concerns:** Women peace actors face various threats, intimidation, harassment, and, in some cases, arrests and physical attacks. The militarized nature of conflicts, polarized contexts in which peace work takes place, and the vested interests of the protagonists make the work of women peacebuilders risky. Their calls for consensus are often treated with suspicion and mistrust.
- **Shrinking civic space:** The general clamp-down on fundamental rights and civil society, where women's voices are anchored, is evident in the region. Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, and Uganda have draconian laws and administrative regulations whose main intention and effect is to curtail the operations of human rights defenders and the mass media. An example is Ethiopia's Anti-Terrorism Law of 2002 . In Somalia and Djibouti, elements of Sharia law are applied to restrict spaces in which women can express themselves on peace and security. In Uganda, the Anti-Homosexuality Act of 2023 has crippled advocacy or freedoms of lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, trans-gender and queer (LGBTQ) plus persons.
- **Capacity gaps:** The participation of women in peacebuilding processes is constrained by the capacity gaps related to leadership, governance, strategy, public speaking, stakeholder mobilization, and technical skills. Thus, women are disqualified for needing more skills, experience, and stature required of mediators and negotiators. This creates and perpetuates a culture of elitist and exclusivist peace work dominated by men and their perspectives.
- **Limited resources:** One of the biggest challenges to women's meaningful participation in peace processes is more funding, rendering most of their work voluntary and limited in scope. This mainly affects young women and their organizations, which still need to establish a track record and experience to enable them to compete for funding with better-established counterparts. Unfortunately, development partners have not yet adopted flexible funding arrangements to address this gap.

Conclusions

There is no doubt that women's engagement in peace processes across the region, informed by their unique understanding of local and regional dynamics, has yielded dividends and laid a foundation for sustainable, durable, and inclusive peace. Primarily working through associations, networks, groups, or organizations, women have applied creative methods to resolve conflicts and achieve palpable results. However, they remain underrepresented in formal peace processes. From the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and Agreement for the Resolution of Conflict (South Sudan) and the Juba Peace Agreement (Sudan) to the Jeddah Agreement (Eritrea and Ethiopia), one recurrent feature is the low presence of women in the formal mediation and negotiation processes.

Therefore, there is a critical need to generate sustained and amplified efforts to effectively support women through various measures implemented by development partners, continental and regional bodies, and national governments and civil society organizations in advancing the WPS Agenda.

Recommendations

Call to International Development Partners to:

- Incentivize women's participation in peace processes by **making their support conditional on a demonstrable commitment** by parties involved to principles of gender equality and inclusion, such as **quota systems** for women.
 - Earmark and sustain **funding** to enable women's participation in peace processes at all stages. Such financing will allow women to consult, develop position papers, and engage substantively in peace processes. Lessons can be borrowed from initiatives such as the "Supporting Her Empowerment: Women's Inclusion for New Security" (SHE WINS) by the government of the United States of America. This requires investing in and partnering with women-led structures involved in peace work.
 - Establish **urgent action funds** to foster women's rapid deployment and participation in peace processes at all levels, including preventive diplomacy missions, election observations, and conflict resolution.
 - Make available **rapid support funds** for legal, psycho-social, logistical, digital, and physical protection of women peacebuilders at risk due to their work.
 - Ensure peace processes are more inclusive by creating synergies and strengthening women's peace networks through **convening intergenerational dialogues** facilitating ideas' cross-fertilization. Such dialogues can also be spaces to share experiences, draw lessons, and harness good practices.
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Call to Regional Economic Communities (the African Union, IGAD, and the East African Community) to

- Use the **AU Peace Fund** and similar mechanisms to facilitate the meaningful participation of women in all peace processes through women's organizations, networks, and associations.
- Require Member States to **establish quotas for women** in relevant national and regional peace structures and include them in the design and development of legal frameworks, policies, and guidelines on peace and security and in monitoring and evaluation teams.
- Institutionalize the **training of all their peace experts** on inclusion and gender mainstreaming in peace processes.
- Call on Member States to **increase the number of women** in leadership and decision-making positions, such as politics and public service, to provide them with the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary for meaningful participation in formal peace processes.
- Systematize the **deployment of women** to peace processes by **establishing and using training rosters** as well as relying on those developed by mechanisms such as the Network of African Women Leaders, Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise), and IGAD Women's Forum for Peace, to identify and deploy women to conflict and post-conflict settings.
- Leverage cultural, political, and economic influence to pressure Member States to **develop, adopt, and implement NAPs on UNSCR 1325** and the entire WPS Agenda, in addition to continental and regional frame-

works that promote the participation of women in peace processes.

- Develop **full-fledged programs** for supporting women in peace processes. Such programs can include advocacy and public awareness-raising activities in Member States and with critical stakeholders.
- Translate norms and aspirations for women by **developing guidelines, frameworks, and standard operating procedures** that will compel a paradigm shift that mandates women's inclusion in how peace processes are designed and implemented. They should also insist on establishing **women's thematic committees and panels** to provide substantive inputs to peace processes and agreements.
- Establish and enhance **protection mecha-**

nisms for women peacebuilders to undertake their work independently and without undue interference. The Regional Economic Communities must take extraordinary measures to address threats, harassment, hate speech, and physical attacks on women in peacebuilding work must be taken. Member States must also de-securitize civic spaces.

- Institutionalize **progress monitoring on the WPS Agenda**, with emphasis on the participation of women, using the African Union Continental Results Framework on the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda. Progress monitoring should include convening annual forums on the WPS Agenda.

Call to the national governments of countries in the region to:

- Enhance **legal and policy frameworks** that protect women involved in peace processes.
- Establish gender-responsive infrastructure by **appointing women focal points** for committees and commissions involved in peace work. The focal points can provide policy guidance and advice on making national and local peace processes more inclusive and gender-responsive.
- Strengthen the capacities of women peace actors at the national level by **making available the necessary technical support** to amplify the existing efforts and **developing national databases and rosters** of women peace experts.

Call to civil society organizations, faith-based organizations, think tanks, and academic institutions to:

- Continue **documenting** the contributions of women to peacebuilding processes, identify persistent challenges, and pinpoint policy opportunities. This includes giving awards and public recognition to women peace actors without jeopardizing their safety and security.
- Promote intergenerational, cross-regional learning and movement building by **organizing regional dialogues and workshops** on specific peace processes, including advocating a joint agenda on ongoing regional conflicts.
- **Develop and disseminate knowledge resources** on how to amplify and strengthen the engagement and participation of women in peace processes. Such tools should be tailor-made for the different entities involved in peace work.
- **Train women peacebuilders** on physical and digital security, work-life balance, and psycho-social wellbeing.

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The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) promotes a world free of violence, inequality, and oppression. Guided by the Quaker belief in the divine light within each person, we nurture the seeds of change and respect for human life to fundamentally transform our societies and institutions. We work with people and partners worldwide of all faiths and backgrounds to meet urgent community needs, challenge injustice, and build peace. Through its Africa Regional Office in Kenya, AFSC promotes projects in Kenya, South Sudan, Somalia, Burundi, and Zimbabwe, with an evidence-based advocacy component for policy change in the Horn of Africa, with an office in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. AFSC has decades of experience leading advocacy, evidence-based research, and worldwide civil society strengthening programs. AFSC brings Global South leaders and Civil Society Organizations through the Dialogue and Exchange Program to learn and exchange ideas every year. Due to the challenging situation in the Horn of Africa, AFSC focused intensely on this region to link up with existent civil society networks and Faith Leaders to contribute with its specific expertise.

American Friends Service Committee
1501 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102
Tel: +1 215-241-7000
afsc.org



About the All Africa Conference of Churches, AACC:

The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) is a continental ecumenical body that accounts for over 140 million Christians across the continent. AACC is the largest association of Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, and Indigenous Churches in Africa and is a member of the worldwide ecumenical network. AACC is a fellowship of 204 members comprising Churches, National Christian Councils (NCCs), Theological and Lay Training Institutions, and other Christian Organizations in 43 African Countries. AACC works through member Churches and with member Churches in the continent to address issues facing the people of the African continent. AACC also works with and collaborates with global ecumenical partners (in and out of Africa), multilateral bodies (African Union (AU), United Nations (UN) agencies, development agencies), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), foundations, private Businesses, etc. Through its AU Liaison Office, the AACC follows the ambition of its strategic plan for 2019-2023 for a solid political engagement at the AU level.

All Africa Conference of Churches,
P.O. Box 14205 - 00800
Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: +254 4441483, 4441338/9
aacc-ceta.org



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