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## Women, Peace and Security: Women's Organizations in Peace-Making



Women in the Peacebuilding Network WIPNET staging a protest march in front of the ECOMIL headquarters in Monrovia, Liberia. Photo: Pius Utomi Ekpei / AFP / TT.

### JOINT BRIEF SERIES: NEW INSIGHTS ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY (WPS) FOR THE NEXT DECADE

On 31 October 2000, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Several other resolutions followed, which together constitute the normative framework for the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. This brief series was initiated in connection to the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 and promotes the realization of the WPS agenda through evidence-based policy and practice. It is the result of a collaboration between the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA), the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), and UN Women.

The editorial board has consisted of Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs and Sophia Wrede from FBA, Louise Olsson from PRIO, and Katarina Salmela and Pablo Castillo Diaz from UN Women. The views and opinions expressed in the brief series are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the collaborating partners.

### ■ INTRODUCTION

Peace-making has for long been characterized by its exclusive nature and by the fact that it has been almost completely dominated by men. With the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), efforts to open up peace-making processes to include representatives from the other half of the population – women – came explicitly into focus. A central pillar of the WPS agenda has since been to strengthen women's meaningful participation in peace processes and peace negotiations. It is important to recognize that there have been important advances made at the time of the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325. However, the understanding of the more specific role of *women's organizations* in peace-making remains limited and fragmented. One important reason is that there have been few attempts to collect data and comparative information on a large number of processes in order to systematically examine the wide range of involvement by women's organizations during peace processes.

In order to improve our understanding of the varying roles of women's organizations in peace-making, this brief contributes new data recently collected from the Non-Warring Actors in Peace-Making (NOWA) dataset.<sup>1</sup>

This data covers involvement by civil society organizations and political parties in peace-making across 70 intrastate armed conflicts in the Americas and Africa from 1989 to 2018.<sup>2</sup> The overall aim of the data is to create a better understanding of the agency of civilians in the context of civil wars and intrastate armed conflicts by including information on a wide range of non-warring actors, including women's organizations, religious actors, youth groups, human rights actors and trade unions. Based on this data, this research brief provides an overall mapping of the involvement of women's organizations in peace-making initiatives. In this brief, we focus specifically on 'groups and organizations that profile themselves as women's organizations' which are 'commonly driven by women and work for, *inter alia*, women's rights and/or inclusion.'<sup>3</sup> This means that we do not look at women's broader involvement in peace processes, nor do we specifically focus on all so-called women peacebuilders more generally. Moreover, we do not include instances where women are involved as representatives of armed actors. The peace-making efforts we study involve many different activities, such as engagement in mass action, problem-solving efforts and formal participation at peace talks. It is important to recognize that the NOWA data, which covers such peace-making efforts, builds on events officially reported in the news media, which by necessity will exclude many activities that are below the radar of news attention. Nevertheless, this allows us to provide data for comparative and comprehensive analysis across time and space.<sup>4</sup>

Below we map out the extent to which women's organizations are included in peace-making efforts in intrastate armed conflicts. We also examine what roles women's organizations play in such peace-making activities. This brief also explores some of the contexts in which women's organizations are involved in peace-making. Lastly, we summarize our key findings, highlighting, in particular, the neglected potential for women's organizations in formal peace negotiations, as well as the need to take into account the multifaceted role of women's organizations in peace-making.

## PATTERNS OF PEACE-MAKING

### How much are women's organizations included in peace-making?

The NOWA dataset allows us to explore the role of women's organizations in the context of broader civil society and

political party involvement in peace processes. Most armed conflicts experienced some form of peace-making over the course of the conflict. In 40 out of a total of 70 intrastate armed conflicts in the Americas and Africa during the period under study, we see the involvement of either political parties or civil society organizations in such peace-making efforts. Hence, in more than half of all armed conflicts (57 per cent) included in our dataset, we see non-warring actors engaged in some kind of peace-making activity. Looking at women's organizations specifically, we find that they participated in peace-making efforts in 18 of these 70 conflicts. That is, in about one-fourth of all armed conflicts, or 26 per cent, women organizations were actively involved in some kind of peace-making capacity. This also means that in 18 of the 40 armed conflicts that had some type of civil society and political party involvement (45 per cent), women's organizations played a role. That is, the data provides us with a sense of how common the involvement of women's organization is overall.

One central issue on the WPS agenda has concerned the extent to which women are involved in formal peace negotiations. The NOWA dataset includes information on peace talks, which refer to formal peace negotiations between the government and one or more rebel groups that seek to resolve the armed struggle by addressing the issue and/or combatant behaviour. While we recognize that having a seat at the negotiation table does not mean that a group or organization necessarily has clout within the negotiation process, it is nevertheless a useful starting point for any such discussion to explore how frequently women's organizations are represented at the table. We find that formal peace negotiations occurred in 43 of the 70 conflicts included in our study. But in only 9 of these conflicts did women's organizations hold a seat at the negotiation table at some point in time. If we disaggregate this finding and break down the negotiations by monthly activities, the results are even more discouraging. We find that women's organizations held a seat at the table in 43 out of 879 negotiation months in total, which is only about five per cent of the cases. This suggests that women have sometimes been included in one or more negotiation rounds, but most peace talk instances are reserved for men only. This is a meagre result in terms of women's involvement.

### What roles do women's organizations play in peace-making?

Women's organizations play a multifaceted role in peace-

making. It is therefore important to map out and analyse the wider range of activities that women's organizations are involved in beyond formal representation in top-level peace negotiations. We will now look more closely at those peace-making efforts where women's organizations were involved (in the 18 conflicts reported above) to see which forms of participation are the most common. Here we draw on Paffenholz's useful conceptual distinction regarding different roles of participation.<sup>5</sup>

Figure 1. Participation of women's organizations in peace-making in Africa and the Americas, 1989–2018

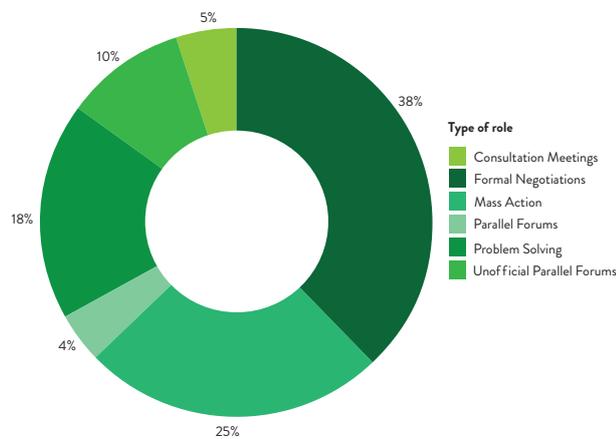


Figure 1 shows the six main ways in which women's organizations were engaged in peace-making: consultation meetings, formal negotiations, mass action, parallel forums, problem-solving and unofficial parallel forums. When looking at women's involvement on a monthly basis across all armed conflicts in Africa and the Americas, we can see that the most common form of participation for women's organizations (38 per cent) was as participants in formal peace negotiations between armed actors, either as observers or as full participants. Thus, even if the overall share of peace negotiations that provided a seat for women's organizations was low – notably also when compared to civil society involvement more generally – it is still the most common form of involvement. In relation to this result, we should, however, also keep in mind that more low-key peacebuilding activities by women's organizations may not garner the same media attention as formal peace negotiations and thus may have been missed in the data source we used for our research.

Mass action is the second-most-common form of involvement for women's organizations, accounting for 25 per cent of the reported cases. Problem-solving efforts, which can entail workshops or meetings with one or more of the warring

actors – either during the pre-negotiation phase or in parallel with formal negotiation – were another common form of involvement, recorded in 18 per cent of the cases. Less common were engagement via unofficial or official parallel forums and consultation meetings. Each of these categories is discussed in greater detail below, with empirical illustrations from a wide range of cases.

Participation in formal negotiations is perhaps the most visible form of engagement. During the Havana peace talks between the government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), women's organizations were prominently involved. Women's role inside the peace process took on a formal character: for example, with the formulation of the Technical Subcommittee on Ending the Conflict, and the Gender Subcommittee in 2014. Women's organization were represented and joined the meetings of the Subcommittees, which were usually conducted in parallel with the official talks, to address issues of security guarantees, bilateral ceasefires, and gender and social equality. Women's organizations offered a gendered analysis of the war, emphasized the role of women as peacebuilders, and in general brought forth the importance of a broader gender perspective.<sup>6</sup>

*Mass-mobilization.* Mass mobilization is a common form of women's organizations' engagement in peace processes. A prominent example is the peace process in Liberia in 2003, where women's organizations involved themselves through mass action in the form of symbolic acts of prayers and sit-ins by the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET). While the women's organization Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) was represented at the negotiations, women outside of the negotiations continued to exert pressure against the slow pace of the peace talks.<sup>7</sup>

*Problem Solving.* Another form of engagement for women's organizations is through problem-solving workshops or meetings. After the failure of the intra-Chadian reconciliatory talks of January 1996 in Gabon, the political parties, trade unions and representatives of civil society associations that attended the talks held a meeting with the president of the state. The meeting aimed to assess the results of the previous talks, and present at the meeting was the head of government and transitional prime minister, as well as Isabelle Seka Attinga from the Chadian Women's Committee for Peace.<sup>8</sup>

*Official and Unofficial Parallel Forums.* Even though official and unofficial parallel forums are modes of participation in which women's engagement is less common, the Arusha peace process in Burundi constitutes an illustrative example. The All-Party Women's Peace Conference held in Burundi in June 2000 took the form of an official parallel forum which strove for the formation of a gender-sensitive agreement through the drafting of gender-related clauses.<sup>9</sup>

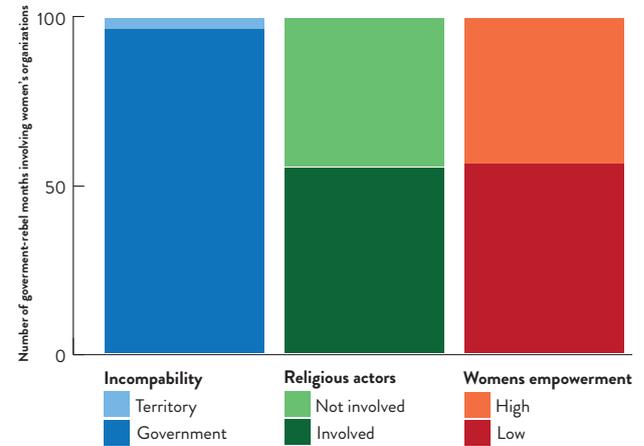
*Consultation Meetings.* Consultations became an important modality of women's inclusion in the Arusha Peace Talks between the government of Burundi and the National Council for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD). Women delegates attended consultations held in Pretoria and Cape Town with mediator Nelson Mandela, as representatives of Burundi civil society, stressing issues of justice and women's inclusion in the new economic and political institutions.<sup>10</sup>

**In what contexts are women's organizations involved?**

In order to understand the participation of women's organizations, we need to recognize that there can be important differences between contexts. As a first step in exploring the role of women's organizations in peace-making, we looked at three potentially important characteristics of contexts at different levels of analysis: 1) country: the level of women empowerment in conflict-affected societies; 2) conflict: the type of conflict issue at stake; and 3) actor: the inclusion of religious civil society organizations. In Figure 2, we explore to what extent women's organizations are involved in these different types of contexts.

First, we find that women's organizations are about as likely to be engaged in societies with a higher degree of women's empowerment compared to those with less. Women's empowerment is here seen to capture 'fundamental civil liberties, women's open discussion of political issues and participation in civil society organizations, and the descriptive representation of women in formal political positions.'<sup>11</sup> Thus, even in societies where we would expect more obstacles to the participation and mobilization of women more generally, women's organizations have been able to create space for their inclusive participation in peace processes. This underlines the critical role that women's organizations can play in societies with fewer opportunities for women to influence political development through formal decision-making. That said, we

Figure 2. In what types of contexts are women's organizations engaged in peace-making efforts?



recognize that such situations may still pose additional severe constraints on women's participation in peace-making, and their overall level of engagement (which we do not focus on here) may be affected.

Second, we find that women's organizations are much more frequently involved in peace-making efforts in armed conflicts over governmental power versus separatist armed conflicts. In these latter types of conflicts, there does not seem to be the same degree of involvement of women's organizations. In fact, our study found that almost all cases of involvement took place in the context of government conflicts. This raises the question of whether territorial conflicts offer less space for women's organizations to take on a peace-making role. It also resonates with the conventional wisdom suggesting that territorial conflicts are more intractable than conflicts over governmental power. Still, our finding points to the underutilization of the potential for women's organizations in peace-making in separatist conflicts.

Third, and interestingly, the inclusion of religious actors, some of which are built on explicitly patriarchal values, generally does not appear to create obstacles for the involvement of women's organizations. Indeed, in about half of the cases, women's organizations were involved alongside religious actors. For example, during the Liberian peace process in 2003, MARWOPNET and the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia (IRCL) both held seats at the formal negotiations in Accra. The fact that women's organizations sometimes are involved together

with religious actors does not exclude the possibility that there may be individual situations where women's organizations have been excluded because religious actors have sought to deliberately marginalize or exclude them. Our data only shows that there is no such overall pattern at work.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In the 20 years that have passed since UNSCR 1325 was adopted, research and policy have increasingly come to recognize the important roles women's organizations play in peace-making around the world. Including women will serve to better the chances for peace – women's inclusion in peace accords is associated with a longer duration of peace.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the inclusion of civil society in peace agreements – where women's organizations make up one component – has been demonstrated to increase the chances of sustainable peace. As emphasized in the Report of the Secretary-General on Women's Participation in Peacebuilding (A/65/354-S/2010/466), 'UN entities will assist in establish[ing] women's CSO forums to ensure that mediation teams and negotiating teams engage in consultation with women's CSOs.' (para 28). In order to engage in meaningful consultations with women's organizations, it is important to map out how, when and in what role they can participate in peace-making. By doing so, this brief has demonstrated that in moving forward on enforcing commitments to full and meaningful participation, it is important to better understand the multiple ways in which women's organizations are involved in peace processes.

There are several key findings that emanate from this mapping of the empirical landscape. Building on the Non-Warring Actors in Peace-Making (NOWA) dataset, this research brief has explored women's organizational participation in peace-making across Africa and the Americas. This brief demonstrates that women's organizations are frequently involved in peace-making in intrastate armed conflicts. In particular, we show the diversity of ways in which women's organizations act in order to promote peace and gender inclusivity. Importantly, in our data participation at the negotiation table remains the most common form of participation for women's organizations. As this is where power and resources are distributed, it remains an area where we need to place additional focus. Our results forcefully underscore that more work needs to be done here. When we disaggregate the data to understand negotiation processes in more depth, we find that women's organizations

hold a seat at a mere 5 per cent of instances of formal peace negotiations. This means that women's organizations remain more or less excluded from contemporary peace negotiations. Thus, in spite of recent advances in terms of granting women access to peace talks, more work is needed in order to realize this key objective of the WPS agenda. Another key finding is that women's organizations play important roles in societies with both higher and lower levels of gender empowerment, which highlights the fact that they can create room for engagement in various contexts, even when there are gendered obstacles to equal participation.

This research points to the importance of taking into account the role of civil society in general, and women's organizations in particular, in the transition from war to peace. Documenting and mapping women's organizations in peace-making is an important step towards a future where peace-making is no longer dominated exclusively by men. ■

## ENDNOTES

- 1 We thank Evanthia Karamichail and Lou van Roozendaal for excellent research assistance in preparing this research brief. This research has been funded by the Folke Bernadotte Academy (no. 17-00297), the Swedish Research Council (no. 2014-03847), Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (no. NHS14-1701:1), and the Marianne and Marcus Wallenberg Stiftelse (no. MMW 2013.0025).
- 2 For information on armed conflicts we rely on data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP). Therése Pettersson, Stina Högladh, and Magnus Öberg. 2019. 'Organized violence, 1989–2018 and peace agreements' *Journal of Peace Research* 56(4).
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- 4 The analysis herein is based on a conflict-dyad-month level of analysis, if not otherwise explicitly noted, enabling us to analyse each government-rebel-relationship separately.
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- 6 Virginia Bouvier. 2016. Gender and the Role of Women in Colombia's Peace Process. UN Women Background Paper. United States Institute of Peace and UN Women.
- 7 Desirée Nilsson, Isak Svensson, Barbara Magalhães Teixeira, Luís Martínez Lorenzo, and Anton Ruus. 2020. 'In the Streets and at the Table: Civil Society Coordination during Peace Negotiations' *International Negotiation* 25(2): 235.

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- 10 BBC Monitoring Africa – Political. 2000. 'Civic leaders to hold talks with Mandela on peace process' 29 May 2000; Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative. 2018. Women in Peace & Transition Processes: Burundi (1996–2014). Case Study Series. The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies.
- 11 We divide the observations into the armed conflicts above and below the median value for the variable: v2x\_gender. For all countries globally the patterns in terms of gender empowerment will look very different. The data comes from V-Dem. Michael Coppedge, John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Staffan I. Lindberg, Jan Teorell, David Altman, Michael Bernhard, M. Steven Fish, Adam Glynn, Allen Hicken, Anna Luhrmann, Kyle L. Marquardt, Kelly McMann, Pamela Paxton, Daniel Pemstein, Brigitte Seim, Rachel Sigman, Svend-Erik Skaaning, Jeffrey Staton, Steven Wilson, Agnes Cornell, Nazifa Alizada, Lisa Gastaldi, Haakon Gjerløw, Garry Hindle, Nina Ilchenko, Laura Maxwell, Valeriya Mechkova, Juraj Medzihorsky, Johannes von Römer, Aksel Sundström, Eitan Tzelgov, Yi-ting Wang, Tore Wig, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2020. "V-Dem Dataset v10 " (2020): 280.
- 12 Jana Krause, Werner Krause, and Pii Bränfors. 2018. 'Women's participation in peace negotiations and the durability of peace' *International Interactions* 44(6).
- 13 Desirée Nilsson. 2012. 'Anchoring the Peace: Civil Society Actors in Peace Accords and Durable Peace' *International Interactions* 38(2).

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**UN Women** is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

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