



# Building and Sustaining Peace from the Ground Up:

A Global Study of Civil Society and Local Women's Perception of Sustaining Peace

Report by  GNWP

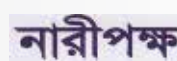
Global Network of Women Peacebuilders



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Special thanks go to our research partners namely, Afghan Women's Network; Naripokkho in Bangladesh; Fontaine ISOKO in Burundi; Women, Peace and Security Network - Canada; Red Nacional de Mujeres in Colombia; Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia; Together We Build It in Libya; Think Peace Mali; Center for Peace Education-Miriam College in the Philippines; National Organization for Women Sierra Leone; Eve Organization from South Sudan; Operation 1325 in Sweden; Centre for Civil Society and Democracy in Syria; and Democracy Development Centre in Ukraine for their contributions to this research.

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# List of Acronyms

<b>AGE</b>	Advisory Group of Experts
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>DRC</b>	The Democratic Republic of the Congo
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>GNWP</b>	Global Network of Women Peacebuilders
<b>KII</b>	Key Informant Interviews
<b>SEA</b>	South East Asia
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UN Women</b>	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
<b>UNSC</b>	United Nations Security Council
<b>UNSCR</b>	United Nations Security Council Resolution
<b>WPS</b>	Women, Peace and Security

# Introduction

The promise of “maintaining international peace and security”<sup>1</sup> is one of the most important commitments of the United Nations (UN), and securing peace one of its most central tasks. Yet, it is also a promise that has proven to be the most elusive. Conflict and instability continue to be widespread across the world. According to the Global Peace Index, in 2018, “global peacefulness declined for the fourth straight year (...) as a result of growing authoritarianism, unresolved conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, and increased political instability across the world.”<sup>2</sup> The recent years witnessed major security crises, such as the war against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria; the Rohingya crisis, with over a million fleeing from persecution in Myanmar; and further security deterioration in 92 countries.<sup>3</sup> Even in countries where peace agreements have been signed – such as Colombia, the Philippines, and South Sudan – their implementation remains slow and challenging, and high levels of violence and insecurity persist. In countries that do not experience armed conflict, peace is often disrupted by other forms of insecurity – such as the shrinking of the democratic space, and the persecution, arrests, torture and murder of human rights activists. The failure to achieve and sustain peace has devastating impacts on the lives of thousands of people. As of December 2018, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees documented 68.5 million individuals forced to flee their homes, primarily because of violent conflicts.<sup>4</sup> The negative impact of armed conflict on the achievement of development goals has also been documented.<sup>5</sup>

We need to do better to prevent conflict and build peace. Recognizing this, in 2014, the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Security Council requested an Advisory Group of Experts (AGE) to review the UN peacebuilding architecture. Completed in 2015, the review

*We need to do better to prevent conflict and build peace.*

1 United Nations Charter, Preamble. Available at: <http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/un-charter-full-text/>

2 Institute for Economics and Peace, “Global Peace Index 2018,” <http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2018/06/Global-Peace-Index-2018-2.pdf>.

3 Ibid

4 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, <http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>

5 United Nations, Millennium Development Goals Report, 2014.



led to the adoption of UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2282 and a substantively identical General Assembly Resolution 70/262, which introduced the concept of Sustaining Peace. The two resolutions put forth a vision of peacebuilding that is context-specific, locally-driven and demands coherence, coordination and concerted actions across the UN system, Member States, civil society and other stakeholders. They underscored that sustaining peace should be understood as a “goal and a process to build a common vision of a society, ensuring that the needs of all segments of the population were taken into account.”<sup>6</sup> As such, the resolutions can be seen as “a pledge by the international community to go beyond mere rhetorical commitments to devise innovative, concrete and lasting solutions to conflict – not as a peripheral activity, but as a core task of the UN.”<sup>7</sup>

Both resolutions stress the centrality of women’s leadership and meaningful participation in the prevention and resolution of conflict and peacebuilding. They recognize the need to increase the representation of women at all levels of decision-making and call for strengthened partnerships with women’s groups and other civil society actors. There is also a growing appreciation of the importance of focusing on, and investing in, conflict prevention. As the United Nations and World Bank “Pathways for Peace” study highlighted, “prevention is economically beneficial. Even in the most pessimistic scenario, in which preventive action is rarely successful, the average net savings is close to \$5 billion per year.”<sup>8</sup> A very important aspect of these new commitments to conflict prevention and sustaining peace is the need to confront the structural and root causes of crisis, including gender inequality.<sup>9</sup>

Sustaining Peace is therefore a bold and novel agenda. However, while it is groundbreaking in many ways, the Sustaining Peace agenda is not entirely new for women’s rights organizations. Local women’s rights activists, especially in their efforts to implement the

6 See United Nations Security Council Resolution 2282: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/document/sres2282.php> and General Assembly Resolution 70/262: [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/262](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/262)

7 Center of International Cooperation, Global Peace Operations Review, April 2016. Available at: [https://peaceoperationsreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/gpor\\_monthly\\_newsletter\\_apr\\_2016.pdf](https://peaceoperationsreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/gpor_monthly_newsletter_apr_2016.pdf)

8 United Nations and World Bank. 2017. “Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict—Main Messages and Emerging Policy Directions.” World Bank, Washington, DC. doi:10.1596/978-1-4648-1162-3. License: Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0 IGO

9 Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 13-15.

WPS resolutions, operate with a long-term vision, involve various actors, and promote local leadership and national ownership. In other words, sustaining peace is inherent to women's rights and peace activists. Local women are therefore the leaders and pioneers of Sustaining Peace. Including them in the shaping of the agenda is not only right; it is also smart, as it benefits entire communities. The rich experience and local expertise of women's civil society makes their insights invaluable and necessary to ensure that the Sustaining Peace agenda is effectively implemented.

To highlight the perspectives of women's civil society on what Sustaining Peace means and how it should be operationalized, GNWP has utilized its wide network of women activists and CSOs to coordinate a global research, with support from UN Women. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burundi, Canada, Colombia, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Mexico, the Philippines, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Sweden, Syria and Ukraine. A multilingual survey was also disseminated widely in these countries, and beyond – receiving nearly 1,000 responses across 48 countries. In total, over 1,600 people participated in the research through the survey, KIIs and FGDs.

We reiterate our thanks to all our research partners and in-country research coordinators, as well as to UN Women for their partnership and support for this project.

On the eve of the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325, 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, and 75th anniversary of the United Nations, it is more important than ever to reflect on more effective ways of preventing conflict, building and sustaining peace.

Local women and civil society's great interest and enthusiastic participation in this research on Sustaining Peace sends a clear message at this historic and critical juncture: "We want to be heard! We want to be part of the global discussions and decision-making on sustaining peace!" This report presents the key findings and recommendations stemming from the research. We hope that it will become a useful reference for policy- and decision-makers as they develop policies and programs to operationalize the Sustaining Peace agenda. We also hope that it will inform the commitments that will be made ahead of the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 and Beijing +25 commemoration, and the ensuing interventions.

*The message of local women and civil society is clear: "We want to be heard in the discussions and decision-making on the Sustaining Peace agenda!"*

  
Mavic Cabrera-Balleza

  
Agnieszka Fal Dutra Santos

## Executive Summary

Following the review of the UN peacebuilding architecture in 2015, the UN General Assembly and Security Council adopted twin resolutions in 2016: UNSC Resolution 2282 and General Assembly Resolution 70.262. The resolutions emphasize the importance of a broad approach to peacebuilding that encompasses all stages of peace, not only the immediate post-conflict reconstruction. This inclusive approach was further elaborated on in the UN Secretary-General 2018 report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace.<sup>10</sup> The Sustaining Peace approach recognizes that efforts to sustain peace are “necessary not only once conflict had broken out but also long beforehand, through the prevention of conflict and addressing its root causes.”<sup>11</sup> It underlines that a multi-sectoral, locally-driven and locally-owned action is needed to ensure effective peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

The Sustaining Peace agenda holds great promise for a new and inclusive approach to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Yet, in order to fulfill this promise, it has to be effectively implemented and translated into practical and necessary actions on the ground. This cannot happen without the full and meaningful inclusion of women’s civil society at all stages of the agenda’s development. To capture how women understand Sustaining Peace, and how they are already operationalizing it, GNWP, with support from UN Women, coordinated a global research from April 2018 to March 2019. The research methodology comprised of Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in 15 countries, as well as a multilingual survey. In total, over 1,600 people participated in the research.

<sup>10</sup> Report of the Secretary-General on Peacebuilding and sustaining peace. S/2018/43, 18 January 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. Paragraph 3 and 13

The key findings and recommendations are presented in this report. The findings are divided into four chapters, each focusing on a key research area:

- 1. Defining “Peace” and “Sustaining Peace”** – This chapter features discussions on what “peace” and “sustaining peace” mean from the perspective of local women and women’s civil society.
- 2. Women’s participation in peace negotiations and the implementation of peace agreements** – This chapter includes analysis of the changes in the level of women’s participation, as well as the persisting barriers to participation.
- 3. Women’s civil society contributions to sustaining peace** – This chapter provides numerous examples of initiatives by women’s civil society to build and sustain peace, and prevent conflict in their countries and communities.
- 4. Evaluating donor support to Sustaining Peace** – This chapter analyzes civil society’s assessment of donor support to efforts in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

The primary purpose of this report is to amplify the voices of local women peacebuilders and activists. Their experience and expertise – reflected in the key findings and recommendations – provide a useful reference for policy and decision-makers as they deliberate and make decisions to implement the Sustaining Peace agenda. We also hope the report can serve as an important resource to inform future interventions in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

# Key Findings

- ▶ **Key Finding 1:** Peace cannot be defined merely as an absence of war or armed conflict. To women's civil society around the world, human rights and human security, sustainable development, responsible natural resource management, good governance and a harmonious community relying on non-violent conflict resolution are the foundation of peace.
- ▶ **Key Finding 2:** The Sustaining Peace agenda should focus on long-term changes, such as supporting inclusive and accountable institutions; challenging militarized response to conflict and fostering a "culture of peace"; implementing sustainable development programs; and guaranteeing access to education and employment.
- ▶ **Key Finding 3:** There has been some progress in the inclusion of women in both formal and informal peace processes. However, women remain excluded many peace processes. Moreover, there is still a need to ensure that the inclusion extends to all women – especially young women, women with disabilities, indigenous women, refugee and internally displaced women, and other marginalized groups – are fully included, and that their roles go beyond being observers or advisors to being key influencers and co-decision-makers.
- ▶ **Key Finding 4:** Patriarchal culture and societal practices, the political and economic exclusion of women, low levels of education and awareness, and the lack of resources and poverty prevent women from participating in peace processes and decision-making. To address these challenges, it is necessary to create enabling conditions and platforms for grassroots women's effective participation.

**Key Finding 5:** Women's participation in the implementation of peace agreements is generally poorer than their participation in peace negotiations. The lack of political will, and insufficient support from governments, donors and the international community were identified as key challenges. This highlights the need to provide support for women's participation in the implementation of peace agreements and at all stages and facets of peace processes.

**Key Finding 6:** Despite the challenges they face, women are active in building and sustaining peace at both national and local levels. When they participate in the implementation of peace agreements, they help ensure that implementation is effective and that it benefits everyone. Where there are no peace agreements, women work at the grassroots level to advocate and campaign for peace, as well as to deliver relief, promote sustainable development and address root causes of conflict, particularly climate change and gender inequality.

**Key Finding 7:** Donor programming often excludes local communities, especially women, from design, planning and implementation. Donors need to be inclusive and flexible, and provide support to women's rights organizations of varying sizes – including grassroots organizations – and encourage diverse initiatives.

# Recommendations

1. Recognizing that peace is more than the absence of war, the UN, Member States and civil society should **ensure that Sustaining Peace initiatives focus on long-term goals**, such as: strengthening state institutions; fostering a culture of peace and non-violent conflict resolution; promoting access to social services, including health and education; and providing economic empowerment and employment opportunities. This requires strengthening the nexus between peace and security efforts, in particular between the WPS agenda, human rights, and development and humanitarian action. (See Key Findings 1 and 2)
2. The UN and Member States should **ensure women's meaningful participation in formal peace negotiations, the crafting and implementation of peace agreements and political transitions**, and ensure that women's civil society and women of diverse backgrounds are fairly represented. (See Key Findings 3 and 4)
3. The UN and Member States should **create, sustain and strengthen institutionalized but flexible platforms for women's civil society and local women** to meaningfully participate in formal and informal peace negotiations and monitor implementation of peace agreements. (See Key Findings 3 and 4)
4. Member States should **stop the use of military interventions as a means of resolving conflicts**. Member States should also ensure that they do not contribute to illicit trafficking in arms and instead support non-violent, civil society-led initiatives in conflict prevention and resolution. (See Key Finding 1)
5. The UN and civil society should **monitor and hold governments accountable for the inclusive implementation of peace agreements** as well as laws and policies related to **gender equality and peace and security**, including the WPS Resolutions and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 5 and Goal 16. (See Key Finding 5)
6. The UN and Member States should **ensure that women, especially youth, women of all abilities, indigenous women, refugees, internally displaced, and other**



**marginalized groups, are fully included at all stages of the implementation of peace agreements, as well as in all building and sustaining peace and conflict prevention initiatives.** They should guarantee that women's voices are heard, and that their contributions are recognized and supported. This entails making sure that gender-sensitive provisions and language proposed by women are included in the final peace agreement and not removed in the course of negotiations. Civil society should continuously monitor and hold the UN and Member States to account on this matter. (See Key Findings 3 and 7)

7. **Civil society from countries that have not experienced armed conflict in recent history should organize experience-sharing exchanges with local and grassroots civil society in conflict-affected and post-conflict countries,** to enhance solidarity, build capacity, and develop joint advocacy strategies for Sustaining Peace. (See Key Findings 4 and 5)
8. **The UN, Member States and the donor community should support the meaningful participation of women from diverse backgrounds and sectors in the implementation of peace agreements.** It is equally, if not more, important to ensure that women co-lead the implementation of peace agreements. The UN, Member States, regional organizations and donor community should also work together to eliminate socio-cultural and institutional barriers to women's participation including gender norms, lack of resources and lack of clear mechanisms for implementation of peace agreements. (See Key Findings 5 and 6)
9. **The UN, Member States and the donor community should increase funding for peacebuilding, conflict prevention and Sustaining Peace,** especially for initiatives led by women's civil society, and make sure this funding is long-term and predictable. Such funding should also be made flexible and accessible to local organizations, and be available at all stages of Sustaining Peace: before, during and after conflict. Women should be able to contribute to shaping donor priorities – including through their meaningful participation in donor conferences. (See Key Finding 7)

# Overview of the Research

This research on **Peace from the Ground Up: A Study of What Sustaining Peace Means to Women from Local Communities and Civil Society** aims to ensure civil society's meaningful participation in shaping the Sustaining Peace agenda by amplifying their voices in global policy discussions and decision-making about this new agenda.

## Research Objectives

The objectives of the research are:

1. To better understand the perspectives of civil society and local populations, especially women, on sustainable peace; and
2. To highlight the work already done by civil society and local women to sustain peace.

The research was designed to answer the following broad research questions:

1. What does sustainable peace mean for local populations? What does it mean to local women peacebuilders?
2. How have women and women's civil society groups been included in both formal and informal peace processes, and what lessons for the Sustaining Peace agenda can be learned from their experience of in these processes?
3. What are the ways in which local women and local civil society already work to sustain peace?
4. What are the factors that facilitate sustainable peace in local communities and should be strengthened/built upon by the Sustaining Peace agenda?
5. What are the gaps in the work on human rights, women's rights, gender equality, sustainable development, conflict prevention and peacebuilding that the Sustainable Peace agenda should fill?

## Selection of Country Case Studies for the Research

When selecting the countries to participate in the study, GNWP, in consultation with UN Women, strived to maintain a regional balance, as well as a balance between countries currently

experiencing conflict, post-conflict countries, and countries that have not experienced conflict in recent history.

- ▶ **Post-conflict countries** are defined as countries that have been found eligible for the Peacebuilding Fund support **OR** have signed a peace agreement in the past five years.
- ▶ **Countries currently experiencing conflict** are defined as countries that were on the agenda of the Security Council in 2017 and/or 2018.
- ▶ **Non-conflict countries** are defined as countries that do not fulfill either of the above conditions. In selecting non-conflict countries, countries that have contributed to the Peacebuilding Fund were prioritized.

The conflict and post-conflict categories also included countries with **ongoing formal or informal peace processes**.

- ▶ **Formal peace processes** are defined as official processes characterized by a clear, often written, mandate. Negotiating parties are official representatives who carry a mandate from a government, state-like authorities, a regional organization or an international organization. Formal peace processes occur at the level of formal politics.
- ▶ **Informal peace processes** are defined as non-official processes, often characterized by an implicit mandate and based on a relationship of trust. They are usually undertaken by national, regional or international NGOs and other civil society groups.

In addition, GNWP made sure that the selected countries had been involved in some way in the discussions on the Sustaining Peace agenda.

## Research Methods

GNWP and its research partners ensured the triangulation of data sources using the following research methods:

- ▶ **Survey questionnaire**, distributed to civil society organizations, mostly women's organizations across the world. The survey was available in Arabic, English, French and Spanish, and was completed online, as well as on paper. GNWP partners disseminated it widely to ensure a wide representation in the

responses. The survey included both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. The data obtained through the survey was analyzed by the GNWP team. To enable comparative analysis of the open-ended questions, the responses were coded by the team, and grouped into categories. When needed, this was done in close consultation with the local researchers and data collectors, to ensure correct interpretation of the open-ended responses.

- ▶ **Focus group discussions (FGDs)** with civil society organizations and local women's rights groups. These discussions complemented the survey with more in-depth questions and qualitative analysis of what the Sustaining Peace agenda means for local populations, and how it can strengthen and complement their ongoing efforts. GNWP and its partners facilitated 3 Focus Group Discussions in each of the 14 selected countries, covering different regions.
- ▶ **Key informant interviews (KIIs)** with civil society organizations, local populations including women, youth and community leaders and other key stakeholders in 15 target countries. GNWP and its partners conducted approximately 10 in-depth interviews with key women peacebuilders/civil society leaders in each of the 15 countries.
- ▶ **Review and analysis of relevant documents** on the Sustaining Peace agenda, such as Sustaining Peace resolutions, existing reports and analysis, as well as reports and documentation on various efforts to build and sustain peace in the target countries.

### Demographic Information about the Respondents

The research participants came from diverse backgrounds and presented a broad range of perspectives. Together, the findings of the research create a comprehensive picture of civil society's – especially women's civil society's – understanding of sustaining peace and the most effective ways to operationalize it.

The multi-lingual survey received a total of 1,029 responses from 48 countries: Afghanistan, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Burundi, Cameroon, Canada, Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire, Cyprus, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Fiji, France, Georgia, Germany, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Japan, Kenya, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Mali, Moldova,

Morocco, Nepal, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, Peru, the Philippines, Sierra Leone, South Korea, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Syria, Tunisia, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States, and Ukraine.

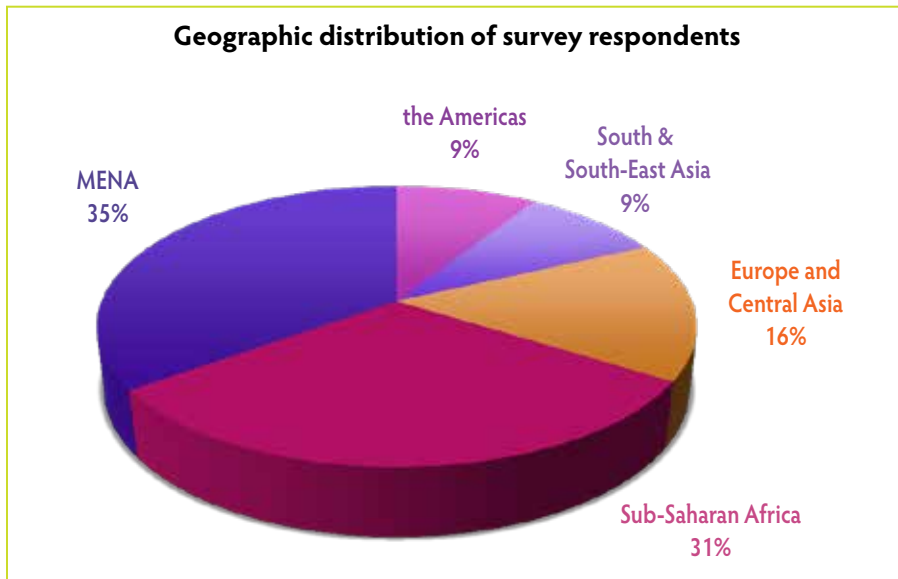
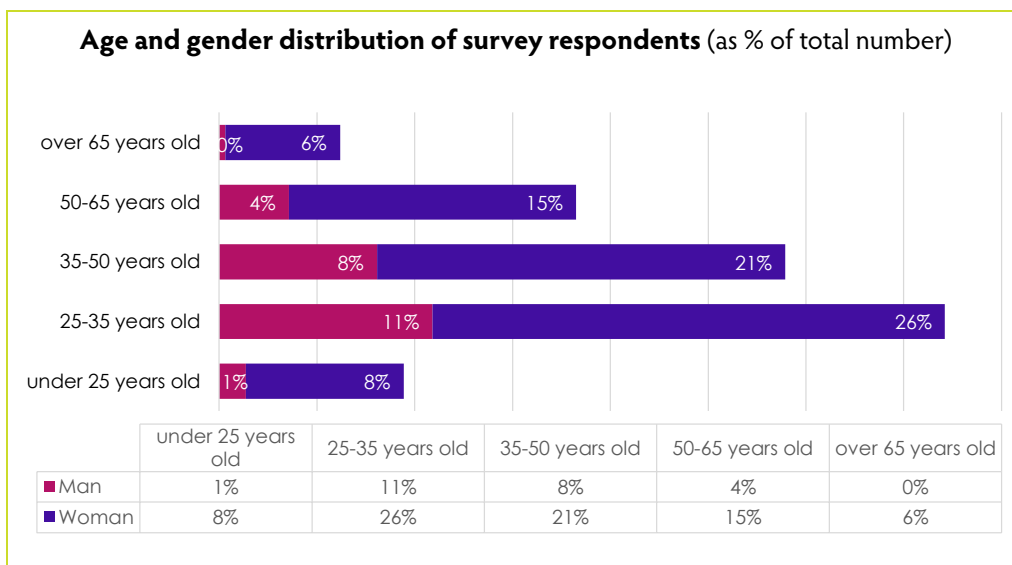


Figure 1: Geographic distribution of responses

The highest number of responses came from Middle East and North Africa (336 responses from 7 countries, or 34 per cent of all responses) and Sub-Saharan Africa (294 responses from 12 countries or 30 per cent of all responses). Fifteen per cent of responses (150 responses from 14 countries) came from Western, Central and Eastern Europe and 12 per cent (113 responses from 11 countries) from South and South-East Asia. The smallest proportion of responses came from the Americas (87 responses from 4 countries, or around 9 per cent of the total).

Over 75 per cent of respondents were women; and 77 per cent of all respondents represented civil society. Others came from the academia, media, government and the UN. All age groups were well represented in the research, as demonstrated by Figure 2. There was a strong representation of young women in the research. The highest number of respondents came from the 25-35 years age group, and nearly 10 per cent of respondents were under 25.



**Figure 2: Age and gender distribution of respondents**

Over 50 per cent of respondents self-identified as coming from a non-peaceful country. Sixty-five per cent said that there is a formal or informal ongoing peace process in their country; and 40 per cent said that there has been a recent peace agreement signed in their country.

Over 40 per cent of the respondents have collaborated with or received funds from the UN, including the Peacebuilding Fund and other UN agencies and entities. Of those, nearly 40 per cent received both financial and programmatic support; 20 per cent received only financial support; and 12 per cent received only programmatic (technical) support.

In addition, 600 persons (491 women and 109 men) took part in the FGDs and KIIs in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burundi, Canada, Colombia, Liberia, Libya, Mali, the Philippines, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Sweden, Syria and Ukraine. This brings the total number of research participants to 1,629.

# Defining “Peace” and “Sustaining Peace”

In order to effectively sustain peace, it is first necessary to understand what peace means to different groups within a society. As a respondent from the Philippines put it, “in order for us to sustain peace, we must first evaluate what are the factors [preventing] a community from having a peaceful society. There must be a common understanding of what ‘peace’ means.”<sup>12</sup>

To provide insight into how women’s civil society perceive peace, GNWP asked the following inter-related questions:

- ▶ Do you consider your country and community to be peaceful?
- ▶ What does it mean for a community to be peaceful?
- ▶ What are the key challenges to peace in your country/ community?
- ▶ What does it mean to sustain peace?

GNWP received responses to these questions from respondents across 48 countries, including those traditionally perceived as peaceful, such as Canada and Sweden.

**Key Finding 1** – Peace cannot be defined merely as an absence of war or armed conflict. To women’s civil society around the world, human rights and human security, sustainable development, responsible natural resource management, good governance and a harmonious community relying on non-violent conflict resolution are the foundation of peace.

Responses to the question “Do you consider your country/ community to be peaceful?” indicate that the absence of armed conflict does not mean that community members perceive their community to be peaceful. For example, a respondent from Sweden explained that she did not view her country as peaceful due to the fact that it “exports and makes profits out of weapons” and that other forms of violence, including trafficking, abuse and sexual exploitation

<sup>12</sup> All quotes come from the Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant interviews conducted in the course of the research, as well as the survey. They are shared with the consent of the research participants.

also exist there. A respondent from Canada said that there is “no peace (...) partly because the Canadian government and its citizens have not done enough to address the systemic discrimination and prejudice against [Canada’s] Indigenous community – especially women and girls who are disproportionately targeted [in sexual and gender-based violence crimes].”

Conversely, respondents from conflict-affected countries often considered their local communities to be peaceful. For instance, 48 per cent of the Syrian respondents said that their community was peaceful. The Syrian respondents explained that Syrians believe in a culture of peace, and many Syrians have “peaceful minds.” As one respondent put it, “despite the violence and war experienced by Syria for eight years (...) in the liberated area north of Idlib, more than 6 million people work and live normal lives on a daily basis. Despite the presence of some extremist groups, civil society was not prevented from protecting women’s rights and involving them in civic institutions (...) [This] indicates that the Syrian society is generally inclined to peace.” Many other respondents pointed to the peaceful coexistence of different factions in the regions of Syria where they live, and to the “inherent peacefulness” of the Syrian people. One participant concluded that while there was no peace at the country level, there was peace at the level of the community.

These examples demonstrate that peace is a complex concept, which is defined through people’s attitudes, perceptions and relationship to one another, rather than simply the absence of armed violence. Figure 3 demonstrates how participants from 12 different countries responded to the question “Do you consider your country/community peaceful?”

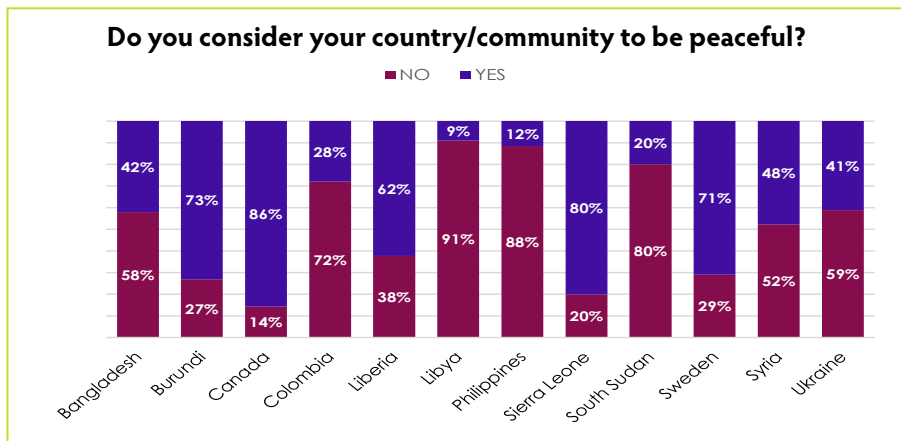


Figure 3: Responses to question: “Do you consider your country/ community to be peaceful” by country



Responses to the question “What does it mean for a community to be peaceful?” further validate the fact that, from the perspective of local women and women’s civil society, peace cannot be defined merely as the absence of war. Less than 25 per cent of respondents defined peace in negative terms – as absence of war or violence.

The largest group of survey respondents (over 28 per cent), defined peace as the presence of a “culture of peace” – that is, a culture of tolerance, forgiveness, harmony and resolving conflicts without resorting to violence. The FGDs and KIIs further corroborated this point. One respondent from Sierra Leone said that peace requires people to “cultivate love and respect for each other – especially at the level of community.”



Figure 4: What does it mean for a community to be peaceful

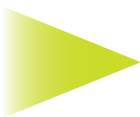
FGD participants in Burundi also identified the need to create “favorable conditions for community dialogue” and to spread a “culture of non-violence and an inclusive conflict resolution.” Ariana Yaftali from the Canadian Afghan Women organization in Canada expressed the same idea, saying: “In a peaceful society, we would all care for each other regardless of who we are. When we care for each other there would be less violence, more peace, love and unity.” The FGD and KII respondents identified two main ways of achieving a culture of peace. Some insisted on the importance of education, and the fact that “peace begins at home.” Others – including a respondent from Sierra Leone – suggested “work[ing] with the media (radio stations, including at community level) to

pass on peace messages, change mind-sets and promote models of peacebuilding.”

Other important elements of peace identified by the respondents were: good governance (including rule of law, transparency and accountability, and a strong civil society); human security (including social justice, freedom, mobility, and respect for human rights); and development (including access to resources, education, and protection of the environment).

When asked about the challenges to peace, respondents listed: bad governance (lack of transparency, exclusion, and authoritarian rule); divisions and tensions in community; inequality, including gender inequality; negative attitudes (greed, lack of tolerance and hatred); and the lack of education. Only 4 per cent of respondents indicated insecurity as the main challenge to peace, although this percentage was higher in countries currently experiencing conflict, such as Syria (8 per cent). At the same time, 13 per cent of respondents (24 per cent of respondents from Syria) identified militarized culture and vested interests in the conflict, from both internal and external actors, as a challenge to peace. The FGD participants from Libya indicated that the proliferation of weapons and the involvement of armed militia in politics are the main barriers to peace. As Beth Woroniuk from the Women, Peace and Security Network in Canada stated in one of the KII, “As long as we have an enormous and unregulated arms industry that has a vested interest in maintaining armed conflicts around the globe, [sustaining peace] remains a big challenge.” Dr. M.M. Akash, Professor of Economics Department at the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh highlighted the vested interests of different groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts who “are taking over land from local people which is giving rise to conflicts.”

Other respondents, particularly from Syria, also pointed to the role of external interference, and the vested interest of foreign powers – within and beyond the region, as an obstacle to sustaining peace.



**Key Finding 2** – The Sustaining Peace agenda should focus on long-term changes, such as supporting inclusive and accountable institutions; challenging militarized response to conflict and fostering a “culture of peace”; implementing sustainable development programs; and guaranteeing access to education and employment.

When asked about what is needed to **sustain peace**, less than 5 per cent of the respondents thought that ensuring security and preventing armed violence is sufficient to achieve this objective. To women's civil society, "sustaining peace" means making long-term, transformative changes to address the root causes of conflict through:



**Strong laws and inclusive institutions  
(40 per cent)**

*"There should be awareness among people that the role of law enforcers is to ensure public safety, peace and order. Law enforcers should be ready and able to help the public whenever they are at risk or in danger." (FGD participant, Bangladesh)*

*"Security cannot be sustainable without an effective judiciary. Accountability systems are key in curbing security violations and addressing their roots." (FGD participant, Libya)*

"Good governance" – defined as transparent, accountable and inclusive government, following clear laws and listening to the concerns of the people – was identified by over 40 per cent of respondents as the most important element of the Sustaining Peace agenda. This was also supported by the FGDs, during which the participants highlighted the importance of institutionalizing peace. As Professor Aurora de Dios from the Women and Gender Institute in the Philippines underscored, to sustain peace "you have to achieve working institutions such as rule of law, peace agreements and processes and accountability. These should be institutionalized – not just functioning." Good governance was also likened to accountability and access to justice. An FGD participant from Bangladesh said she does not consider her country to be peaceful because "if I face harassment, I have to think about the different possible [scenarios] before deciding to file a case or seek legal aid. I am afraid to go to the police station [because I might be] further harassed; and [I'm worried about] how society will see me in the future."



**Fostering a "culture of peace," including through education and the media (15 per cent)**

*"[To sustain peace you need to] educate young people to believe that non-violent conflict resolution is the only way forward." (FGD participant, Sweden)*

Fifteen per cent of respondents pointed to building a culture of peace – including through peace education – as the most important element of sustaining peace. As a respondent from the Philippines pointed out, “More than laws and policies, there has to be a recognition of human dignity and basic human rights (...) that becomes a culture or norm in society. For example, human rights education must be pursued not only for students but also the policemen, military, and government officials.”

**Education** was most often indicated as a way of fostering a culture of peace within a community. As a participant from the Philippines said, “sustainable peace building takes effect through affordable and quality education that tackles peace studies and love for country and environment.” Additionally, participants of FGDs highlighted the need to instill the value of peace in young people. A respondent from Sweden noted that in order to sustain peace, it is necessary to “educate young people to believe that non-violent conflict resolution is the only way forward.”

**The power of the media** to promote a culture of peace was also recognized by respondents from Bangladesh, Canada, Libya, South Sudan, Syria, Sweden and Ukraine. A participant from Ukraine noted that the “lack of reliable information channels (...) generates conflicts and reduces the opportunity to build a peaceful policy throughout Ukraine and the occupied lands.” Furthermore, FGD participants in Ukraine listed the lack of information about peacebuilding opportunities and initiatives as the main challenge to sustaining peace. Other participants also shared that Russian-speaking media promote false narratives and messages that are divisive and prolong conflict. A participant from South Sudan also emphasized the role of the media in spreading hate speech and thereby contributing to the conflict. On the other hand, a participant from Colombia believed that it is possible to “reclaim” the media to promote peaceful attitudes among citizens.



**Stable economies, access to services and employment (12 per cent)**

*“When citizens are able to run their businesses, and they have flourishing livelihood and access to basic needs such as education, health, food and security, good infrastructure, justice and equal opportunities, they will think twice before engaging in conflict.” (FGD participant, South Sudan)*

**Development** was recognized as the critical element of sustaining peace by 12 per cent of respondents. This highlights the importance of strengthening the nexus between peace and development, and breaking the silos between humanitarian, development, and peace and security institutions and organizations. Most respondents who identified development as part of sustaining peace pointed to the need for equitable access to resources and employment opportunities. As a respondent from Canada stressed, “often, people come into conflict over limited resources and their unfair distribution. Creating economic incentives can be a part of sustaining peace. (...) As people start to enjoy the benefits of peace, they may have the incentive to sustain it.” In this context, respondents emphasized that women’s access to economic resources and opportunities, and participation in decision-making on economic development and post-conflict reconstruction are of critical importance. As discussed in more detail in Box 1 below, respondents also highlighted the importance of responsible resource management and care for the environment as foundations of sustainable peace.

Nearly all respondents who identified the need to create employment opportunities emphasized the importance of creating such opportunities for the youth – highlighting both the particular vulnerability of youth to violence, and their potential to become leaders and peacebuilders.



**Ensuring inclusion and participation in decision-making; and consultation in all institutions and processes related to peace and development (13 per cent)**

*“People should be consulted. When people have no ownership of decisions made that would affect their lives, peace will not be sustained.” (Ms. Mariam Barandia, Kapamagogopa, Inc., Philippines)*

Thirteen per cent of respondents believed that building inclusive and participatory institutions is key to sustaining peace. Among those, 10 per cent specifically mentioned the **inclusion of marginalized groups** – especially women, youth and indigenous peoples – in decision-making as a necessary condition for Sustaining Peace. A survey respondent from Sierra Leone suggested “regular monthly meetings to identify the needs in the community” as one of the ways in which the government could contribute to diffusing tensions and preventing conflict. A respondent from Libya highlighted that “the most important element is to make people

involved and build the sense of ownership in any [decision-making] process." The respondent also added that government transparency is key and that inclusive community policing is a very important element to sustain peace in small communities.

The **inclusion of women in decision-making and the need for gender equality** was particularly highlighted by most respondents. As Gertrud Åström, UN-association in Sweden said, "A country where women's rights are not respected will never be peaceful." The inclusion of youth, indigenous people and persons with disabilities were also mentioned as priorities. As one of the participants from a FGD in Idlib, Syria pointed out, "the absence of youth institutions [in peacebuilding projects] and the marginalization of youth waste the energy and potential inherent in this age group."



### **Demilitarization (10 per cent)**

*"[To sustain peace] I believe that we should first stop considering war and weapons as a solution."  
(Survey participant, Libya)*

*"When Sweden earns money on exporting weapons it is no longer a peaceful society. It is necessary to demilitarize defense and make civil defense of Sweden something that is compulsory; and all citizens should be trained in nonviolence."  
(FGD participant, Sweden)*

**Demilitarization** was identified as an essential component of Sustaining Peace by 10 per cent of respondents. About 3 per cent also explicitly identified the ability to resolve conflicts in a non-violent manner as an important characteristic of a peaceful community.

Militarism was the sixth most often noted challenge to peace among the respondents, after bad governance, community tensions, inequality, negative attitudes, and lack of education. Research participants defined militarized culture as characterized by the proliferation of armed militias, easy access to weapons at the national level, and a robust global arms industry. A respondent from Syria further explained militarism as a specific mentality, favoring "military and security solutions" to conflict.

Respondents stressed that demilitarization needs to happen on multiple levels. At the global level, reducing arms trade and abolishing nuclear weapons were a priority. At the local level,

disarmament of armed militias and controlling the spread of small weapons needs to take place along with the development or strengthening of non-violent conflict resolution mechanisms.

### **Strengthening the Nexus between Peace and Development – Examples from the Field**

Strengthening the economy and eliminating poverty, ensuring adequate and accessible healthcare, providing quality education, guaranteeing gender equality, ensuring equitable access to resources, (including land and water), providing employment opportunities, and protecting environment – all of these objectives are part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the principal framework for global development work. All of these objectives were also emphasized by the respondents of the survey as essential components of peace.

A number of research studies underscore the importance of peace as a foundation for sustainable development.<sup>13</sup> The link between peace and development is also highlighted in the 2014 Millennium Development Goals Report, which stresses the negative impact of conflict on education and poverty.<sup>14</sup> This link is also at the core of Sustainable Development Goal 16 – “Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.”

Women and men from civil society who participated in this research affirmed that peace and development are mutually dependent. Not only is peace a necessary precondition for sustainable development, but also lasting peace cannot be achieved without sustainable development. As the respondents from the FGD in Aleppo, Syria highlighted, “sustainable development generates stability in society and allows individuals to reach a personal well-being, thus reducing the appeal of war and conflict.”

The aspects of development that were most often linked to sustaining peace included:



**Equitable access to resources** – Several respondents identified conflict over resources as the main challenge to peace. Moreover, inequitable access to resources – including

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Gates, S. et al., “Development consequences of armed conflict”, *World Development*, Vol. 40, No. 9, September 2012; Stewart, F., “Conflict and the Millennium Development Goals”, *Journal of Human Development*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 2003.; Denney L., “Security: The missing bottom of the Millennium Development Goals? Prospects for inclusion in the post-MDG development framework”, Overseas Development Institute, August 2012.

<sup>14</sup> United Nations, Millennium Development Goals Report, 2014.

land and water – was perceived as one of the indicators of inequality and a source of structural violence making a community “unpeaceful.”

Unsustainable or irresponsible use of natural resources was also identified as a root cause of conflict. As an FGD participant from Bangladesh pointed out, “the profit oriented multinational companies, which have headquarters in developed countries, are using non-renewable resources in developing countries in an inefficient way, which increases the chances of conflict.”



**Protecting the environment** – The issue of equitable access to resources was closely linked to that of the protection of the environment. An FGD participant in South Sudan explained that “sustainable development requires being cautious about the environment which gives us natural resources. If we are not cautious about the environment, conflict will be inevitable since the local community does not feel they are benefiting from the resources within their own surrounding.” Respondents also noted that protecting the environment is necessary to reduce the climate change-induced conflict and contribute to more peaceful and stable communities. FGD participants in Burundi highlighted that climate change affects crops, which in turn increases poverty and leads people to crime and looting.



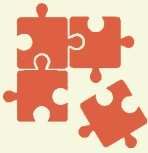
**Economic stability and food security** – The need to protect the environment was further emphasized by the respondents who equated peace with food security. As Edith Villanueva from the Negros Peace Congress II in the Philippines put it, “economic stability, having food on the table every single day is peace. But if agriculture is wrecked, we don’t have food sustenance. How do we feed ourselves?”



**Youth education and employment** – Education and youth employment were often mentioned as necessary elements of sustaining peace.



As a respondent from Colombia observed, “education and employment opportunities for youth prevent them from joining organizations outside the law and common crime,” thereby helping to prevent violence and sustain peace.



**Women’s economic inclusion** – Women activists are deeply aware of the nexus between peace and development. They already incorporate development activities into their peacebuilding work. Nine per cent of survey respondents identified development and relief aid activities as the most important contribution of women’s civil society in sustaining peace. As an FGD participant from Burundi, Sibomana Laurence, emphasized, “civil society organizations have played an instrumental role in sustaining the negotiated peace. They have worked hard to spark an economic recovery especially for the demobilized combatants.” Several respondents said that women’s organizations help other women achieve economic empowerment and independence, for example through savings associations. This was also confirmed by another FGD participant in Burundi, who recalled that when many kids dropped out of school in Kabasazi community, women started lending and saving associations. These allowed other women to have some income and send their children to school.

Women also help address the negative effects of conflicts, and their underlying causes. A survey respondent from Bangladesh highlighted that following politico-ethnic violence in Chittagong in April 2017, hundreds of households were burned down. With support from UNDP, local civil society groups “came forward to establish peace in a different approach. They installed tube wells and solar powered energy stations for Longodu community which is in a very remote, hilly area with very little resources. This way the community will be bound to share the water and

energy sources that will fade away the communal tension between the conflicting parties.”

In this context, it is critical that women be involved in post-conflict reconstruction not only as first responders at the grassroots level, but as decision-makers in economic recovery and development processes. **Women’s economic inclusion is a necessary prerequisite of sustaining peace.** This requires not only economic empowerment at the micro-level, but a broader societal and policy change at the national level, to ensure women’s equal access to resources and opportunities.

The remainder of this report provides further insights into the operationalization of the Sustaining Peace agenda, by analyzing the progress already achieved and the efforts already being undertaken by local women’s civil society. It presents the remaining gaps and challenges in the achievement and maintenance of inclusive and sustainable peace.

The analysis examines three areas: the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements; civil society contributions to conflict prevention and sustaining peace outside of the formal and informal peace processes; and the donor support to such efforts.

## Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Implementation of Peace Agreements

**Key Finding 3** – There has been some progress in the inclusion of women in both formal and informal peace processes. However, women remain excluded many peace processes. Moreover, there is still a need to ensure that the inclusion extends to all women – especially young women, women with disabilities, indigenous women, refugee and internally displaced women, and other marginalized groups – are fully included, and that their roles go beyond being observers or advisors to being key influencers and co-decision-makers.

There has been some progress in the inclusion of women in both formal and informal peace processes in recent years.<sup>15</sup> Reflecting this progress, over 70 per cent of survey respondents reported that women have been included “to some extent” in formal peace negotiations in their country. A similar figure – nearly 70 per cent – reported that women were included in informal processes. Over 15 per cent of survey respondents felt that women were included “fully” in both formal and informal processes.

The FGD and KII participants further corroborated this finding, by providing concrete examples of mechanisms for women's inclusion, such as in the Afghan High Peace Council; the indigenous Truth and Reconciliation process in Canada; the ongoing peace negotiation and High Level Revitalization Forum in South Sudan; and the Advisory Council and the Women's Chamber of Civil Society Support in the Geneva Peace Process on the Syrian conflict. However, the extent to which these mechanisms were effectively used to ensure women's inclusion varied, and several respondents emphasized that the establishment of a formal mechanism for inclusion is not sufficient. As Storai Tapesh, Deputy Director of the Afghan Women's Network, noted, “Some

<sup>15</sup> See: Radhika Coomaraswamy, “Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325”, UN Women 2015, p. 44: “Prior to 2000, only 11 per cent carried such a reference. Post-2000, this percentage has increased to 27 per cent.”

women have been involved in the peace talks, which is positive achievement. However, we want women's representation to be meaningful. There is a strong women's movement in Afghanistan that represents all strata of the society. These women must be involved in the peace talks. Women's involvement in the talks must not be reduced to party politics."

Therefore, more needs to be done to ensure women's full and meaningful participation. On the one hand, over 15 per cent believed that women were not included "at all" in both formal and informal peace processes. This was underscored, for example, by FGD participants in Mali

*Women's inclusion is still often limited to "elite groups." Young women and other marginalized groups tend to be excluded.*

who said that while women are included in awareness-raising, there are no formal platforms for discussions between women and the armed groups. On the other hand, even in countries where women were included in Track 1, 1.5 and 2 negotiations, inclusion was often limited to a narrow circle of "elite" women. Young women and youth in general tended to be excluded.

Several respondents from Libya, pointed out that women were included only as figureheads and in a tokenistic manner. One Libyan respondent explained that "during the negotiations for the Sikkhirat Peace Agreement, women-led civil society organizations were not meaningfully included. [Two women were included] not as representatives of women's groups at the table, but only for the image." Another survey respondent from Libya added that the two women who were invited to the table were not able to influence the decisions made during the peace process. FGD participants from Libya also shared that women have not been included in meetings organized by the UN Support Mission in Libya.

In South Sudan, survey respondents and FGD and KII participants spoke of the involvement of women in the ongoing peace negotiation and in the High Level Revitalization Forum as a positive development. Still, a key informant from South Sudan shared that "women are not at the high table to make the same decisions like men (...) agreements are signed without their full participation at all levels." Consistent with this, another respondent from South Sudan emphasized that although women have established a parliamentary caucus group, "their contribution is hardly heard of."

Importantly, the responses varied significantly across countries, as demonstrated by Figure 5. For example, in Ukraine, 33 per cent of survey respondents said women were not involved in the peace process at all. This is twice as many as the global average of respondents who gave the same response. On the contrary, in Colombia, only 1 per cent said women were not included at all, and 48 per cent said women were included “fully” – three times more than a global average of respondents that gave the same answer.

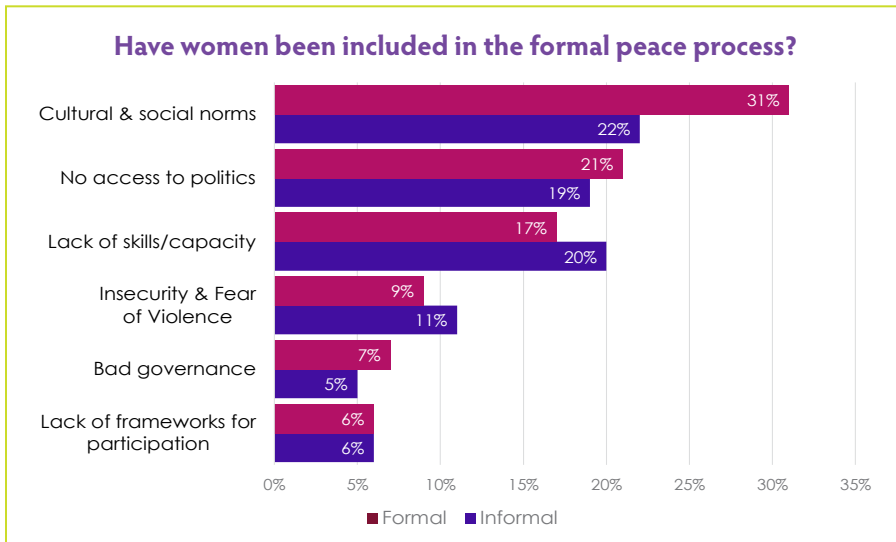


Figure 5: Participation in formal peace processes, by country

Women’s participation in informal peace processes was generally perceived as stronger across all countries, except for Syria, where 26 per cent of respondents said women were not included at all in the informal processes (compared to 22 per cent for the formal processes). As a survey respondent from Philippines stated, “women’s civil society groups are very visible in informal peace process efforts – but not yet fully involved in formal peace process.”

A survey respondent from Bangladesh offered an explanation of this difference, highlighting that “women’s civil society groups are active [...] raising the voices to protect their rights and protest violence against women. [However] there is no formal mechanism to be engaged with the government and law enforcing agencies.” As discussed in more detail below, the lack of platforms and channels for participation is one of the main challenges to women’s participation – and can also be perceived as an explanation of the discrepancy in the involvement of women in formal and informal peace processes.

Respondents were asked to identify the main ways in which women participate in peace processes. The GNWP team coded their responses into categories, described below. Responses were similar for both formal and informal peace processes, and ranged from sitting at the official negotiation table, to raising awareness about the peace process in local communities, to advocacy and campaigning for the adoption or signing of the peace agreement.

► **Women engaging communities (13 per cent – formal processes; 28 per cent – informal processes)**

For 13 per cent of survey respondents, raising awareness about the peace process in local communities is the main way in which women contribute to formal peace processes. Twenty-eight per cent stated that it is the main way in informal peace processes.

With regards to the formal processes, many survey respondents highlighted women's role in facilitating discussions with local communities to ensure that the voices of local populations are heard in official peace processes. This requires finding creative ways to link unofficial and informal processes with official negotiations. A survey respondent from Bangladesh shared that women's civil society implemented various "programs, motivating masses of people and government stakeholders through campaign, rally, talk show, road show, human chain, distributing [information, education and communication] materials." Similarly, a respondent from Sierra Leone pointed out that women's civil society is involved in "voter education" and "capacity building trainings on [participating in elections]" in collaboration with donors and local women's groups.

As to the informal processes, women's civil society organizations contribute to them by leading grassroots peace initiatives such as discussions between female legislators and grassroots activists (as was the case for example in South Sudan), or peacebuilding trainings for the local populations.

► **Women at the negotiating table (14 per cent – formal processes; 5 per cent - informal processes)**

Fourteen per cent of survey respondents claimed that women's civil society have participated in formal peace processes by taking part in actual peace negotiations. This response was most common among respondents from Canada (40 per cent), Colombia (31 per cent), South Sudan (29 per cent), Philippines (28 per cent), Syria (15 per cent) and Libya (15 per cent).

In Canada, women, including indigenous women, have been active in the indigenous Truth and Reconciliation process and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). Mary Scott from the Institute for International Women's Rights/National Council of Women of Canada/Canadian Federation of University Women shared: "I would see some of the current negotiations going on with the indigenous community (...) the indigenous people speaking about treaty rights, land claims, and speaking for the environment (...) these groups have women leaders." The involvement of indigenous women has yielded concrete outcomes. As Danny Glenwright, Executive Director at Action Against Hunger emphasized in one of the FGDs, "a great thing about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is the 94 Calls to Action. It spells out all the many ways that we need to address this existing issue and build peace. It gives people something tangible to attach themselves to."

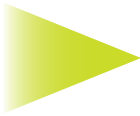
In South Sudan, the awareness raising and consultative meetings through the women's monthly fora and the South Sudan Women Coalition strengthened unity among women's organizations. This led to greater representation of women and minority groups in the High Level Revitalization Forum (HLRF). As a result, the new peace agreement calls for 35 per cent representation of women in all levels of decision making – including the executive, legislative and judiciary, and one woman Vice President.

► **Women in politics, advocacy and elections (15 per cent – formal processes; 19 per cent - informal processes)**

Fifteen per cent of respondents indicated that women's involvement in formal peace processes mainly entails participation in policy- and decision-making, as well as advocacy after the signing of the peace agreement. Examples of such involvement included advocating for the implementation of the agreements; participation in political processes, such as constitution-building; and monitoring the implementation of the peace agreement and maintaining peace, especially around elections. Such responses were the most common among participants from Burundi (43 per cent), Sierra Leone (36 per cent), Bangladesh (23 per cent), and Syria (20 per cent). A survey respondent from Bangladesh highlighted that "women are involved in making rules and laws, national politics, policies and development projects." A respondent from Syria also shared that women participated in political process by "working in local councils...to formulate and implement laws within local communities."

In Sierra Leone, 24 per cent of survey respondents said women's civil society were involved in observing and monitoring the elections; this was considered to be women's their most important contribution to the peace process. Several participants brought up the Women's Situation Room as an example. The Women's Situation Room is an initiative that monitors, observes and reports on the peacefulness before, during and after the elections in Sierra Leone.

Women's groups are also actively involved in lobbying for the continuation of peace processes and – once the peace agreements are signed – in advocacy for the adoption and implementation of the agreements. This is the case in the Philippines, where survey respondents and FGD participants cited advocacy for the Bangsamoro Organic Law, which translates the peace agreement between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front into law, as one of the key contributions of women's civil society. Similarly, a survey respondent from Colombia emphasized that women's civil society “strongly advocated for women's representation in the negotiating teams, submitted proposals to the principal negotiators, and continue to monitor the implementation of the peace agreement.”



**Key Finding 4 – Patriarchal culture and societal practices, the political and economic exclusion of women, low levels of education and awareness, and the lack of resources and poverty prevent women from participating in peace processes and decision-making. To address these challenges, it is necessary to create enabling conditions and platforms for grassroots women's effective participation.**

Respondents identified patriarchal culture and societal practices as key challenges to women's participation in peace processes, both in the context of formal and informal negotiations. As captured in Figure 6 and the analysis below, respondents cited many other specific challenges, including the lack of women's participation in decision-making and political life, insecurity and the fear of violence and insecurity, as well as the lack of awareness of the ongoing processes and limited capacity to join them.

► **Cultural and social norms (31 per cent – formal; 22 per cent – informal)**

The “customs,” “religious values,” and “traditional sets of behaviors and beliefs” of society or community members were the most commonly indicated barriers to women's participation in both formal and informal processes.



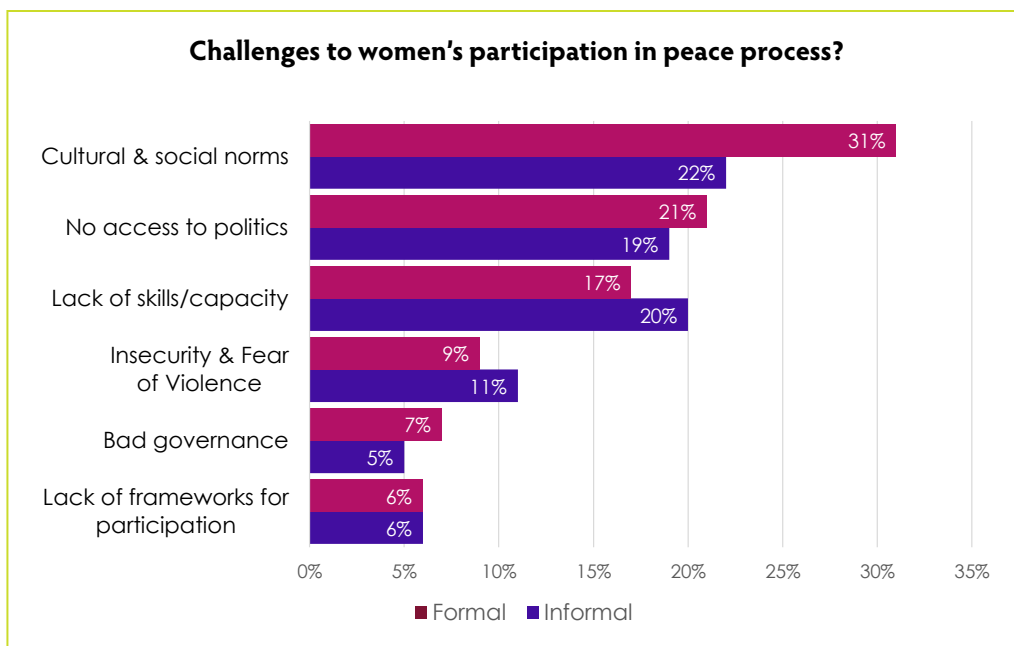


Figure 6: Challenges to women's participation in peace processes

For example, one survey participant from Philippines explained that women from certain parts of the country cannot participate in peace processes, because they are not allowed to leave home without a male guardian. Others pointed out that the uneven share of domestic labor makes it more difficult for women to participate in public life, including in the peace processes. Respondents also felt that even when women did participate, their opinions were taken less seriously and not as respected as those of men. As a survey respondent from the Philippines shared, peace processes and important governmental structures are still “generally a boys’ club.” Other survey respondents pointed to the “lack of respect and support from male counterparts” and “lack of support and refusal from the community” as factors contributing to the non-participation of women in formal peace processes.

► **Lack of access to political life and decision-making and lack of platforms for participation (21 per cent – formal; 19 per cent – informal)**

Participation in political life and decision-making is a prerequisite for women’s meaningful participation in both formal and informal peace processes. Yet, the survey indicates that women often do not know “how to access peace processes designed around the political participation.” Respondents also noted a “lack of knowledge about peace process, language and terminologies used in the formal peace process.” In addition, women often face “difficulty of meeting political heads” as they are not “consulted or invited on official platforms by government.” Women from rural areas in particular lack access to information and visibility. As a survey respondent from Syria put it, there is a “lack of awareness of the warring parties about the existence of women’s civil society.”

As a consequence, women are under-represented in senior positions in the government, as well as military groups, which leads to their exclusion from the peace negotiations. As a participant from an FGD in Syria explained, “[peace] agreements are being negotiated between military parties, with no participation of women or other societal segments (...) CSOs are being marginalized while dignitaries and members of intelligence apparatuses lead the negotiations.”

This is compounded by the absence of media interest in women’s rights, and women’s lack of access to different media. Participants in the FGD in Kherson, Ukraine pointed out that “the Minsk negotiations (...) are not covered in media.” All participants in the Kherson FGD felt they lacked complete information about the process, and therefore, they had little confidence in it.

► **Lack of organizational and negotiating skills and capacity (17 per cent – formal; 20 per cent – informal)**

Seventeen percent of survey respondents claimed that women’s civil society often lack organizational and advocacy skills to get directly involved in formal peace processes. The respondents expressed the need to enhance women’s skills in the following areas: networking, leadership, negotiation and analytical skills. They also highlighted that women’s civil society sometimes lacked coordination, and therefore failed to achieve consensus and speak in a unified voice. Participants from the FGD in Burundi stressed that “there is a lack of coordination among women leaders at national level and local level,” which also sometimes becomes a barrier to their effective participation in peace processes. Several respondents from Libya, Syria and Tunisia pointed out that there is competition among CSOs, which sometimes leads to civil society undermining each other’s work and ridiculing each other’s opinions.

Frances Rieya Piscano, Project Manager, Hivos South East Asia-Philippines said that civil society doesn’t “document [its] challenges and successes. We don’t have a sense of monitoring. When we are done with the best practices, there is no follow through. Hence, we miss on understanding the real impact,” which further highlights a gap in documentation skills, as well as in coordination.

The respondents identified lack of funding as another important factor that contributes to civil society’s limited capacity. Several survey respondents mentioned that women are already struggling with poverty, which makes it difficult for them to participate in peace processes. This further emphasizes the link between

Sustainable Peace and development. If women are unable to feed their families, they will be unable to prioritize participation in peace negotiations. The lack of predictable funding for women's involvement in peace processes – for example, to cover transportation, communications, and other costs – is also an obstacle to women's participation. Ngendakumana Gaudence, one of the participants of an FGD in Burundi explained: "Women's rights organizations are short on financial capacities. Even when we have relevant agenda to advance, we are unable to participate especially when the negotiations are organized abroad. Sometimes we are not legally excluded but de facto we are."

To overcome these challenges, **women's civil society groups are actively collaborating with local women and other local leaders by creating networks of grassroots organizations and linking them with mediators and parties to formal peace processes.** For example, members of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) are invited to meetings with women peace activists in South Sudan to elevate grassroots South Sudanese women's voices during the peace process facilitated by IGAD. The Sustaining Peace agenda requires creative means to create enabling conditions and build platforms for grassroots women's effective participation.

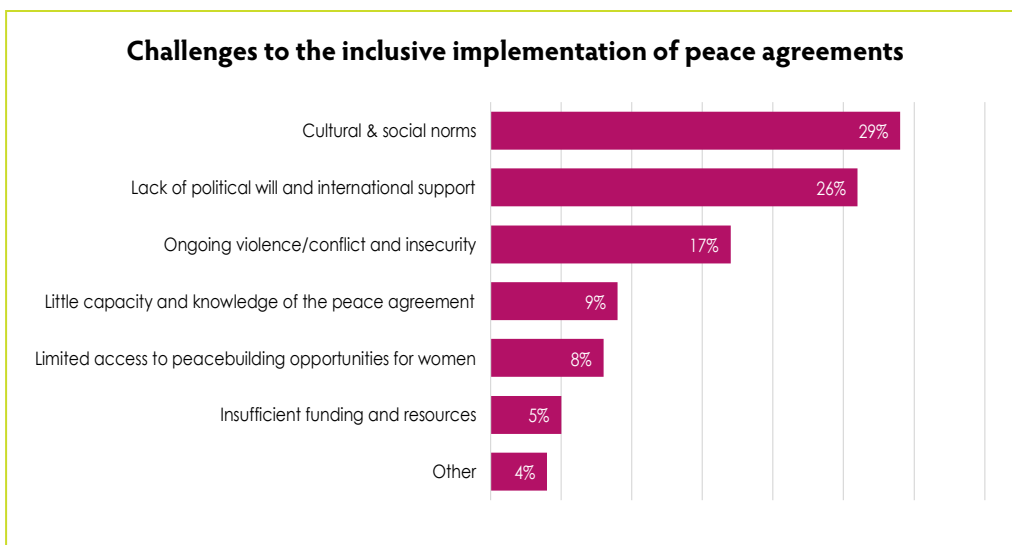


**Key Finding 5** – Women's participation in the implementation of peace agreements is generally poorer than their participation in peace negotiations. The lack of political will, and insufficient support from governments, donors and the international community, were identified as key challenges. This highlights the need to provide support for women's participation in the implementation of peace agreements and at all stages and facets of peace processes.

While many challenges remain, there has been progress in women's participation in peace negotiations. The 2015 Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 concluded that "the overall participation of women in peace processes is inching upwards, albeit at far too slow a rate."<sup>16</sup> Among other things, the Global Study underlined that the number UN-led or co-led processes in which women held senior positions increased from 36 per cent in 2011 to 75 in 2014.

However, the increased participation in peace negotiations does not necessarily translate into participation in the implementation

<sup>16</sup> Radhika Coomaraswamy, "Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325", UN Women 2015, p. 45.



**Figure 7: Challenges to the inclusive implementation of peace agreements**

of the peace agreements. When asked whether women were included in the implementation of peace agreements in their country (at either national or local level), 30 per cent of respondents said, “Not at all.” This is more than twice as many as those who reported women were not included at all in formal/informal peace processes. Respondents identified the challenges below as the principal obstacles to women’s participations in the implementation of peace agreements.

#### ► Cultural and social norms (29 per cent)

Twenty-nine per cent of respondents stated that the main challenges to women’s participation in the implementation of peace agreements were prevalence of gender inequality, harmful stereotypes and male dominance in the field of peace and security. Importantly, patriarchal norms, stereotypes and dominance were listed as key challenges to both women’s participation in peace negotiation (see above) and in the implementation of peace agreements. This further emphasizes that gender inequality is among the main obstacles to peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

Many survey respondents explained that misogyny and patriarchal values are deeply ingrained in their societies, cultures, and interpretations of religion, which results in active discrimination. As one survey respondent from the Philippines pointed out, women are “regarded as non-political beings in a society that very much exercises domination on women’s bodies and mobility.” Survey

respondents from the DRC and Colombia argued that due to patriarchal traditions in their societies, women are excluded from peacebuilding processes or only included as “tokens.” Without an inclusive, gender-sensitive approach to peacebuilding, most survey respondents from Syria, Ukraine, Liberia, Burundi, and Bangladesh agreed that it is difficult to address the root causes and impact of conflict adequately.

► **Lack of political will and international support  
(26 per cent)**

A key challenge to women’s participation in the implementation of peace agreements, cited by more than 25 percent of respondents, is the limited political will and support from both national and international actors.

Survey respondents from Syria, Ukraine, Liberia, and Burundi noted that there is a lack of political will among national government actors to implement peace agreements in general. They stressed that without cooperation within the government, a peace agreement cannot be implemented by any actors, much less women’s civil society organizations. For example, a participant from the Philippines emphasized the need for government commitment to involve women’s civil society organizations in the implementation of the Comprehensive Agreement of the Bangsamoro. The survey respondents also highlighted that international support is critical to ensuring government commitment and accountability for implementation. When asked for recommendations to international actors, 10 per cent of the respondents requested the UN and Member States to put pressure on governments to fulfil their obligations under international law, including by involving women in peace processes and in the implementation of peace agreements.

Power struggles, corruption, internal opposition, vested political interests, and weak political institutions were listed as obstacles to political support. This is linked to the perception that powerful national and international actors have “vested interests” in prolonging conflicts, which undermine the efforts of other actors – especially women’s civil society – to build and sustain peace. Respondents from Syria cited the unwillingness of the international community to “make peace in Syria” as an obstacle to an inclusive and durable peace. Another participant similarly associated the failure to sustain peace in the Nagorno-Karabakh region with the lack of political will at both national and international levels.

► **Ongoing violence and insecurity (17 per cent)**

Ongoing violence and insecurity were also among the main factors identified as preventing women from participating in the implementation of peace agreements. Threats to human security, the presence of warring factions, armed conflict and violence, and the rejection of any peace agreements all make it nearly impossible for women to be involved in peacebuilding efforts. As a participant from Iraq stated, “we must be safe before we participate.” As was the case with patriarchal norms and harmful stereotypes, this challenge was repeated both with relation to women’s participation in peace processes, and their participation in the implementation of peace agreements.

► **Insufficient funding and resources (9 per cent)**

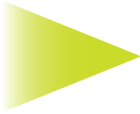
All of the challenges above are exacerbated by the lack of predictable funding and other resources for programming and initiatives that invest in women’s education, leadership, and economic empowerment. This challenge is compounded by the fact that women’s civil society is not sufficiently included in defining funding priorities and designing peacebuilding programs, as will be discussed in more details in Chapter 4.

The lack of awareness, education, and capacity-building opportunities for women aggravates gender inequality, and prevents women’s meaningful participation in political processes and the implementation of peace agreements. This issue was particularly felt by survey respondents from Ukraine (27 per cent) and Syria (21 per cent). The respondents highlighted that without awareness or education on the fundamentals of peace, women’s civil society organizations cannot effectively participate in peacebuilding processes and the implementation of peace agreements. Low literacy rates in many conflict-affected countries further exacerbate this challenge. Limited access to basic education is amongst one of issues raised by the survey results when discussing a lack of capacity-building opportunities for women.

Ultimately, the participation of women in the implementation of inclusive and sustainable peace agreements is limited by a range of factors such as gender inequality, a lack of awareness, education, and capacity-building opportunities, insufficient funding and resources, a lack of political will from governments, and ongoing armed conflict. These challenges persist, despite growing evidence that including women is not only the right thing to do. It is also a smart strategy, which makes peace more durable. As described in the following chapter, women's civil society is at the forefront of the work to sustain peace – working in local communities, at the national level and in regional and international arenas. To maximize the impact of their work, the Sustaining Peace agenda has to ensure that they receive appropriate and long-term support to overcome the challenges described in this chapter.

## Chapter 3

# Women's Civil Society Contributions to Sustaining Peace



**Key Finding 6** – Despite the challenges they face, women are active in building and sustaining peace at both national and local levels. When they participate in the implementation of peace agreements, they help ensure that implementation is effective and that it benefits everyone. Where there are no peace agreements, women work at the grassroots level to advocate and campaign for peace, as well as to deliver relief, promote sustainable development and address root causes of conflict, particularly climate change and gender inequality.

Despite the challenges they face, women play critical roles in building and sustaining peace and implementing peace agreements – at both national and local levels. Women are active

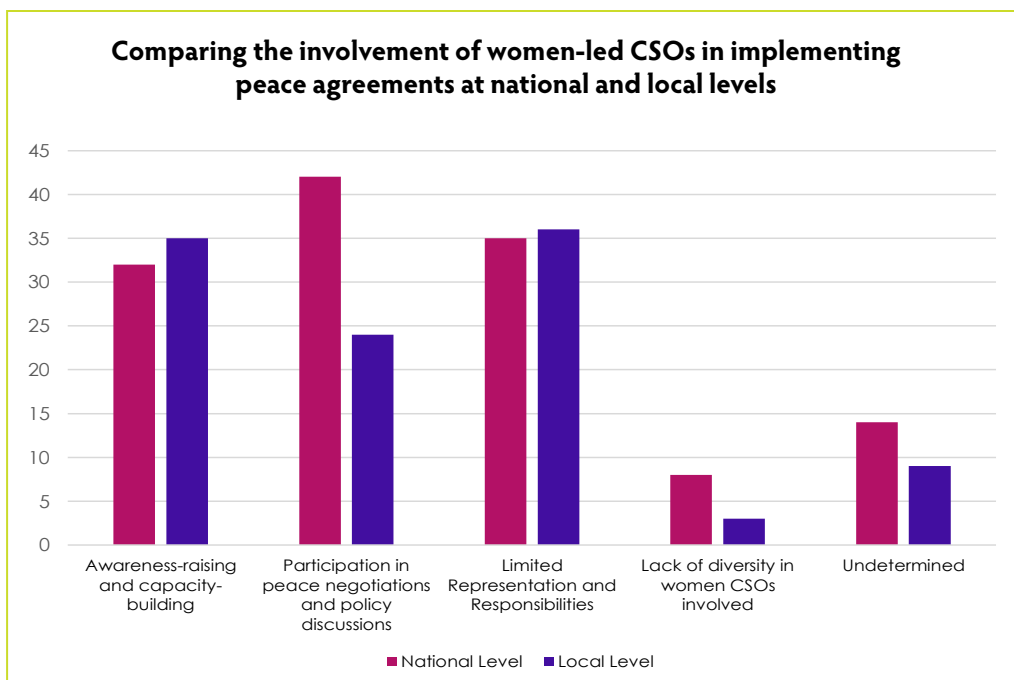
*“When things don’t go well, that shouldn’t stop us, peacebuilders, from working for peace outside of the table.”*

Maria Lourdes Tison, Philippines

both within and outside of the official processes. As Maria Lourdes Tison from Paghilusa sa Paghid-et-Negros in the Philippines said, “When things don’t go well, that shouldn’t stop us peacebuilders from working for peace outside of the table. If it will not bear fruit, the challenge now is how do

we address the root causes of armed conflict, outside of the peace table...and that’s what we did in Negros. We told the government, with or without the peace agreement signed by the parties, our work for peace can be done.” Jean Patindol from the University of St. La Salle in the Philippines similarly advised, “Don’t hang on to the peace process itself. Whether it succeeds or not, we have to strengthen our peacebuilding on the grassroots level because it can happen someday. Negotiations will become irrelevant because roots have been addressed already in the grassroots. Don’t hinge everything on the formal peace process.”





**Figure 8: Women’s civil society involvement in the implementation of peace agreements at the national and local levels**

The responses to the question “How are women involved in the implementation of the peace agreements at the local/national levels?” were generally similar, pointing to the fact that women’s civil society often bridges the gap between national and local implementation. Over 35 per cent of respondents believed that women had limited representation and responsibilities in implementing peace agreements at both national and local level; and 8 per cent of respondents said that women’s representation at the national level was not diverse enough (3 per cent believed the same about their representation at the local level). These respondents emphasized that the women’s civil society organizations that participate in the implementation of peace agreements are often hand-picked by biased government officials. When the same CSOs are represented in discussions, strong feminist perspectives are not brought into the discussions, let alone the decision-making.

Raising awareness and building capacity of their fellow civil society as well as government stakeholders were listed as an important contribution of women’s civil society at both national and local levels (mentioned by 32 and 35 per cent of respondents respectively). Women are also part of the official conversations – both during the peace negotiations and after the peace agreement

was adopted. Understandably, this was more often the case at the national level (42 per cent of respondents said women were involved in negotiations and policy discussions at the national level, compared to 24 per cent who felt that this was the case at the local level). For example, women were involved in the drafting of the Bangsamoro Organic Law, which has translated the peace agreement between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Government of the Philippines into a law. The women have also been at the forefront of advocacy for the implementation of the law – both by raising awareness about the law at the local level, and through sustained advocacy at the national level.

The survey asked respondents to share concrete examples of women and women-led civil society contributions to sustaining peace in their communities. The examples shared ranged from women's advocacy and campaigning to bring the local voices to the national and international policy spaces; to awareness-raising and capacity building at the community level; to addressing root causes of conflict through community mediation and development work, as illustrated below.



**Advocacy and campaigning – Creating platforms for greater inclusion of women and other marginalized groups in peace processes (28 per cent)**

In Libya, respondents shared: “Women objected to the violence and the proliferation of weapons. They distributed pamphlets, participated in sit-ins, issued statements, and initiated contacts with legislative and executive branches to pressure them to abstain from dragging the country into chaos.”

Similarly, in Sweden, many women-led organizations advocate for the implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty.

In Afghanistan, Afghan's Women's Network (AWN) established women's advocacy coalitions and youth committees in a number of provinces, to call for women's meaningful participation in the peace process. The coalitions bring together women, men and youth, as well as religious leaders and tribal elders. As Mary Akrami, the Executive Director of AWN noted, “Even when restricted by war and misogyny, Afghan women taken active part in the development of the country. They have stood for elections, led ministries, provided schooling and healthcare, and broken taboos through their art and activism – even when it meant risking their lives.” The women's movement has also launched an online campaign #AfghanWomenWillNotGoBack to support meaningful inclusion of women in the peace process, which mobilized the support of over 2 million people across the world.

In the Philippines, women conducted a series of consultations with farmers and fisherfolks; with church-goers and many others in local communities to elicit their perspectives on peace. The outcomes of the consultations were then used for advocacy towards the development of a governance framework in designing programs, budget and infrastructure on peace for the provincial government.

Across the countries where the survey was administered, respondents provided examples of women's civil society organizations liaising with government bodies and international actors to solicit accountability. As Karen Tañada from the Gaston Z. Ortigas Peace Institute in the Philippines said, "I think the best practice is really just the patience to sustain the coalition and dialogue with different groups. It's not always easy because sometimes you are accused by the government of favouring one side over the other."



### **Raising local communities' awareness about the peace negotiations, peace agreements (where they exist) and promoting peace (26 per cent)**

In Sierra Leone, women's civil society organizations contributed to the mitigation of post-conflict violence in 2018 "through radio programmes, continuously urging people to be peaceful and accept the election results declared by the National Elections Commission, as well as peace messages in songs and entertainment shows on radio and television."

In South Sudan, members of the South Sudanese Women's Coalition (which is made up of 46 women's organizations) travel to markets, chiefdoms, and villages with microphones, appealing to youths to refrain from violence. South Sudanese women also organized a program "bringing [together] people from different walks of life through intercultural performances using dance [and] inter-clan sport and games [that] promote healthy competition and harmony."

In Syria, where this form of work to implement Sustaining Peace was most commonly cited, "Syrian podium women conduct seminars, which explain the concept of sustainable peace and the desire to establish a democratic state beyond all the pain and tragedies experienced by the Syrian people."



### **Building grassroots women's capacity to participate in peacebuilding decision-making and in the economy (18 per cent)**

In Liberia, women CSOs have been building the capacities of women to become community mediators at community levels to promote access to justice. Creating awareness of the risk of conflict and violence against women at community levels among various stakeholders is also a priority.

In the Philippines, women CSOs organize community meetings to build solidarity and trust amongst leaders and community members to prevent further violence. A women's rights group has provided opportunities for the youth to engage in politics in the country by equipping them with knowledge, a platform, and sense of community.



### **Addressing consequences of conflict and supporting development (9 per cent).**

Women have assisted with the implementation of development and relief aid projects, which indirectly contribute to sustaining peace.

In Burundi, civil society organizations have played an instrumental role in sustaining the negotiated peace. They have worked hard to spark economic recovery, especially for demobilized combatants. Women's organizations also help other women achieve economic empowerment and independence through income-generating initiatives and savings associations, and promote more responsible use of resources.



### **Resolving conflicts at the community level (6 per cent)**

In Bangladesh, in the Chittagong area, to support the implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts peace agreement, civil society uses the Alternative Dispute Resolution to mediate individual disputes at the community level.

In Syria, women's civil society contributed to the formation of committees across the country, that work on reducing conflicts and building community stability. These committees consist of community leaders who work on mediation and conflict resolution at the family, village and community levels, and seek to promote shared values in society and reduce hatred and extremism. An example are the AMAN Committees (community safety committees) in Aleppo's western countryside, which contributed significantly and effectively to resolving and reducing conflicts.

## Evaluating Donor Support to Sustaining Peace

**Key Finding 7** – Donor programming often excludes local communities, especially women, from design, planning and implementation. Donors need to be inclusive and flexible, and provide support to women’s rights organizations of varying sizes – including grassroots organizations – and encourage diverse initiatives.

As discussed in the previous sections, insufficient funding is one of the main challenges to women’s participation in both formal and informal peace processes. It is also a major impediment to women’s participation in the implementation of peace agreements, as well as in peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and development and humanitarian initiatives. Despite the key roles that women play in Sustaining Peace, as described above, less than 10 per cent of financial aid provided to civil society is allocated to activities that are “gender focused,” and less than 1 per cent of this aid goes to civil society organizations in developing countries. More accessible, predictable and gender-responsive funding is a prerequisite of the Sustaining Peace agenda. It must also be pointed out that GNWP’s research has shown that there is still a lot of room for improvement on donor support to women’s civil society working on Sustaining Peace.

Survey respondents and participants in the FGDs and KIs were asked “What are the challenges in the international community’s and donors’ approach to human rights, women’s rights, gender equality, sustainable development, conflict prevention and peacebuilding that should be changed or improved?” They also had the opportunity to formulate recommendations on how international community and donors can better support women in sustaining peace. Their responses are analyzed below.

### ► “Projectizing” peace

Lack of long-term planning and predictable funding was the single most cited shortcoming of the donor community. It was indicated by almost 30 per cent of survey respondents. This was consistent across respondents from almost all countries, including

Syria, South Sudan, Ukraine, Sierra Leone, and the Philippines. When explaining the lack of sustainability and predictability, the respondents referred to the top-down approach of the donors and their lack of engagement with local communities. Short project timelines, a focus on project results rather than long-term transformative change and a “one-size-fits-all” approach may not be suitable to a specific context. Persistent bureaucratic and administrative obstacles are also prohibitive. In other words, peace is being treated like a short- to mid-term project, rather than a transformative and sustained undertaking that requires and deserves long-term investment.

The Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions provided more insights into this challenge. KII and FGD participants highlighted that the types of projects supported do not always lend themselves to sustainability. For example, the need to invest more in the economic empowerment of women and girls was heavily stressed. One FGD participant from South Sudan said, “long term support and improving livelihood such as growing food instead of providing relief food is important for the purposes of sustainability.” As Luis Daniel Pantoja a.k.a. Lakan Sumulong, from the Peacebuilders Community in Davao, Inc. Philippines pointed out, “we tell communities they must be sustainable, but we cannot sustain our own offices. That is one of the contradictions.”

*“Long-term support and improving livelihoods – such as growing food instead of providing relief food – is important for sustainability”*

FGD participant, South Sudan

Similarly, the funding for addressing root causes of conflicts and conflict prevention was viewed as insufficient. When it was available, it was too short-term to be able to achieve the objectives. As Caroline Leprince from WIIS Canada stated, “when a donor can pledge to give money for an extended period of time (3 years or 5 years) it helps the efforts for conflict prevention, because you don’t have to renew your efforts every year for project funding [...] You can capture better data, see if your efforts have an impact. Only 6 months doesn’t present the same long-term results.” In a similar vein, the FGD respondents from Syria concluded: “we must replace relief projects with development projects that will create resources to benefit everyone.”

► **Excluding local voices and “one-size-fits-all” approaches**

The second most-cited shortcoming of the donor community, mentioned by 14 per cent of respondents, was the **lack of inclusivity** in their planning, priority-setting, project design and implementation. This is consistent with another finding of the survey – the need for stronger local leadership.

When asked to assess donors’ inclusivity, 20 percent of survey respondents reported that local civil society was not able to influence the design of donor programs at all, and 17 per cent reported they could do so only to a limited extent. An FGD participant from Bangladesh suggested that some donors “have the attitude of previous colonial governments [and they] always know what is best for us. This attitude should change – they should accept local expertise.”

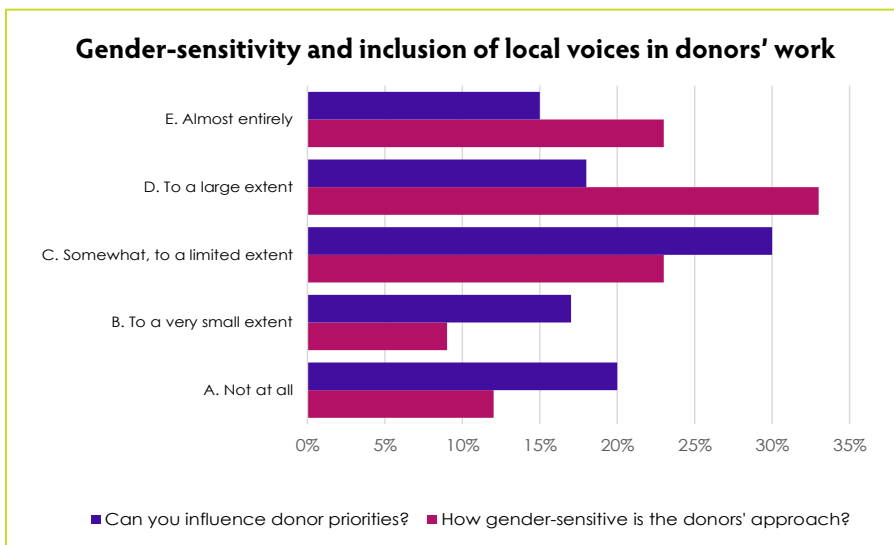


Figure 9: Assessing donors’ gender sensitivity and inclusive approaches

A related shortcoming is the failure of donor approaches to reflect an understanding of the socio-cultural, political and economic context of the local communities, particularly of those in fragile conflict zones. This was indicated by 11 per cent of all respondents. The finding was consistent among respondents from all countries, with a notable exception of Ukraine, where this challenge was indicated by only 4 per cent of respondents.

The survey respondents pointed to the lack of knowledge of the community needs and problems and a “Western approach” disregarding local customs, traditions and priorities. Some also pointed to the language barrier, which prevented those from the

local community to participate in donor-led initiatives, and the lack of trust between the donors and the local communities.

An in-depth understanding of the social, cultural, historical, and local dynamics of a community is necessary for the meaningful inclusion and participation of local population at all stages of Sustaining Peace projects. This includes reaching out to diverse groups, including those that have historically been marginalized, to ensure that the diverging experiences of the entire population, including ex-combatants and victims of sexual violence, are reflected.

Therefore, several KII and FGD participants suggested that the donor community should make sure not only that their programs build on an understanding of the local context, but that they are designed to empower local populations. Gus Miclat from the Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID) organization in Davao, Philippines noted that “Civil society partnership with the UN should be on top of the minds of the UN and Member States. ... [Civil society should] not just [be] consulted in research for input, but also [included] in implementation.” A participant from Canada reinforced this by saying that donors should focus on “finding local organizations and finding strategies to strengthen civil society. [There are] local organizations who may not have the capacity [necessary to implement projects towards Sustaining Peace]. Bridge the gap by getting people to work together.” This is where national, regional and global networks who have experience, track record and membership base in local communities can play a role.

► **Insufficient focus on good governance**

Insufficient attention to human rights, the need for good governance, as well as the failure to hold governments accountable to their obligations towards their citizens were indicated by 14 per cent of the survey respondents as the main shortcomings of the donor community. These were consistently raised by respondents from conflict-affected countries.



Political and institutional accountability is essential to the achievement of security, development, and human rights – all essential components of Sustaining Peace. As discussed above, good governance – which is characterized by the presence of structures for accountability, transparency, as well as citizens' participation in government affairs – was cited as a key condition for Sustaining Peace. In communities where good governance is not practiced, supporting the development of transparent and accountable institutions was cited as one of the main focus areas that donors should support. Moreover, it was highlighted that building transparent and accountable institutions that protect human rights must be locally-led and nationally-owned.

Furthermore, the respondents pointed to a need to adopt more nuanced approaches to accountability and human rights. For example, one survey respondent highlighted that gendered justice should be seen as more than criminal accountability for sexual violence. It should also include a focus on truth, reparations and guarantees of non-recurrence for all human rights violations, including social, economic and cultural rights violations.

Overall, local civil society organizations appreciate the donors' support to gender-sensitive peacebuilding initiatives. As Figure 9 demonstrates, 23 per cent of survey respondents reported that the donors' approach was "almost entirely" gender-sensitive. However, there are still important gaps – especially with regards to accessibility and predictability of donor support.

## Conclusion

Women activists are the pioneers of the Sustaining Peace agenda. The notion that peace is more than just the absence of war, and their keen understanding that sustainable peace is rooted in strong institutions, sustainable livelihoods and a “culture of peace” has long guided their advocacy and programming.

The research presented in this report has clearly shown that women around the world – from Canada to South Sudan, from Bangladesh to Colombia, from Sierra Leone to Ukraine – have a nuanced and complex understanding of peace and of what it means to “sustain peace.” It has also shown that – whether they are included in the formal processes or not – women work towards peace every day of their lives. They work tirelessly within their communities, at local, national, regional and international levels. They address root causes of conflict, foster a culture of peace, and provide services to victims and survivors of violent conflicts. They work with the media, advocate with those in power, and seek political office. They create platforms for inclusion where there are none.

These women will not stop in their efforts. Their work is sustainable because it is integral to their daily lives. It is sustainable, because it is built on an in-depth understanding of what “peace” means to their local communities. It is sustainable because it is both a part of their survival and their efforts to chart a better future for themselves, for their children and their children’s children.

Therefore, to be truly sustainable, the Sustaining Peace agenda should not try to reinvent the wheel, but rather support peacebuilding, conflict prevention, human rights and development efforts that are already led by local women. We hope that this report, and the recommendations it presents will be taken into consideration by policy makers, practitioners, donors and fellow civil society actors as we collectively operationalize and implement the Sustaining Peace agenda.

### Recommendations

1. **Recognizing that peace is more than the absence of war, the UN, Member States and civil society should ensure that Sustaining Peace initiatives focus on long-term**

**goals, such as: strengthening state institutions; fostering a culture of peace and non-violent conflict resolution; promoting access to social services, including health and education; and providing economic empowerment and employment opportunities.** This requires strengthening the nexus between peace and security efforts, in particular between the WPS agenda, human rights, and development and humanitarian action. (See Key Findings 1 and 2)

2. **The UN and Member States should ensure women's meaningful participation in formal peace negotiations, the crafting and implementation of peace agreements and political transitions,** and ensure that women's civil society and women of diverse backgrounds are fairly represented. (See Key Findings 3 and 4)
3. **The UN and Member States should create, sustain and strengthen institutionalized but flexible platforms for women's civil society and local women** to meaningfully participate in formal and informal peace negotiations and monitor implementation of peace agreements. (See Key Findings 3 and 4)
4. **Member States should stop the use of military interventions as a means of resolving conflicts.** Member States should also ensure that they do not contribute to illicit trafficking in arms and instead support non-violent, civil society-led initiatives in conflict prevention and resolution. (See Key Finding 1)
5. **The UN and civil society should monitor and hold governments accountable for the inclusive implementation of peace agreements** as well as laws and policies related to gender equality and peace and security, including the WPS Resolutions and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 5 and Goal 16. (See Key Finding 5)
6. **The UN and Member States should ensure that women, especially youth, women of all abilities, indigenous**

women, refugees, internally displaced, and other marginalized groups, are fully included at all stages of the implementation of peace agreements, as well as in all building and sustaining peace and conflict prevention initiatives. They should guarantee that women's voices are heard, and that their contributions are recognized and supported. This entails making sure that gender-sensitive provisions and language proposed by women are included in the final peace agreement and not removed in the course of negotiations. Civil society should continuously monitor and hold the UN and Member States to account on this matter. (See Key Findings 3 and 7)

7. **Civil society from countries that have not experienced armed conflict in recent history should organize experience-sharing exchanges with local and grassroots civil society in conflict-affected and post-conflict countries,** to enhance solidarity, build capacity, and develop joint advocacy strategies for Sustaining Peace. (See Key Findings 4 and 5)
8. **The UN, Member States and the donor community should support the meaningful participation of women from diverse backgrounds and sectors in the implementation of peace agreements.** It is equally, if not more, important to ensure that women co-lead the implementation of peace agreements. The UN, Member States, regional organizations and donor community should also work together to eliminate socio-cultural and institutional barriers to women's participation including gender norms, lack of resources and lack of clear mechanisms for implementation of peace agreements. (See Key Findings 5 and 6)
9. **The UN, Member States and the donor community should increase funding for peacebuilding, conflict prevention and Sustaining Peace,** especially for initiatives led by women's civil society, and make sure this funding is long-term and predictable. Such funding should also be made flexible and accessible to local organizations, and be available at all stages of Sustaining Peace: before, during and after conflict. Women should be able to contribute to shaping donor priorities – including through their meaningful participation in donor conferences. (See Key Finding 7)







**Global Network of Women Peacebuilders**