LEAP
4Peace

a partnership to promote women's leadership for peace

"If you don't have peace, you have nothing":

What the international community can do to increase women's participation in peacebuilding

Contents

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

ASEAN - Association of Southeast Asian Nations

BLTP - Burundi Leadership Training Program

CEDAW - Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

DAC - Development Assistance Committee

FARC-EP - Revolutionary Armed Forces   of Colombia – People's Army

GAPS - Gender Action for Peace and Security

GEN Myanmar - Gender Equality Network Myanmar

KII - Key informant interview

LEAP4Peace - Women Leadership and Participation for Peace programme

MFA - Ministry of Foreign Affairs

NAP - National Action Plan

NCA - Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement

NIMD - Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy

NIWC - Northern Ireland Women's Coalition

ODA - Official Development Assistance

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PBSO - Peacebuilding Support Office

SWAB - Syrian Women's Advisory Board

UK - United Kingdom

UN - United Nations

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

UNSCR 1325 - United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325

WPS - Women, Peace and Security

I.   Executive summary

This paper is part of a series of papers looking at a central theme of innovative and transformative approaches to the systems and structures of peacebuilding, with a focus on a bottom-up approach by local and community women peacebuilders. The other papers in the series focus on three specific countries, which participate in the LEAP4Peace Consortium: **Burundi, Colombia** and **Myanmar**. These papers each address an aspect of the theme through a context-specific lens, with primary research and consultations with proximate peacebuilders. The country-focused papers also refer to the work undertaken by partners as part of the LEAP4Peace Consortium's project activities.

This paper takes a global approach, drawing heavily on the country-focused papers and primary research to highlight success stories from across the world. The series as a whole builds on a previous paper developed under the LEAP4Peace Consortium: Pillars for Peace.

The introductory section of the paper discusses the context of women's participation in peacebuilding globally and through the LEAP4Peace Consortium. It then explores the findings from the primary research and the country-focused papers on what women peacebuilders are doing and how they are pushing boundaries to transform the peacebuilding landscape and improve the participation of women. The examples are grouped into seven main actions that have proved to be transformative: building networks, influencing peace negotiation, demanding a place at the table, adapting and working holistically, mobilising underrepresented women, navigating tokenism and challenging gender stereotypes.

Following on from this, the next section draws out the research findings that reflect specifically on the role of the international community in supporting, blocking and influencing the work of women peacebuilders. The examples and dynamics are grouped into four categories: international governments, UN bodies, civil society networks, and donors (which may overlap with the other groups). In this paper, the term 'international community' is used to refer to anyone (or any organisation) outside of the national context, working on issues directly related to that context and with some level of influence on either the national context or on global Women, Peace and Security structures, including the authors of this paper.

Through the examples of innovative approaches, the paper identifies the barriers to improving women's participation, and the role and responsibility of donors and the international community in enabling – or indeed blocking – this crucial work. Several interviewees highlighted the same examples of complex dynamics underlying women's participation in peacebuilding. These have therefore been explored more deeply in two specific case studies – Northern Ireland and Syria – bringing out transferrable lessons that complement those from the three country-focused papers. The paper also lays out several tangible recommendations for what the international community, and especially donors, can do to support women peacebuilders, women's rights organisations, national and transnational networks and the types of initiatives discussed in this paper.

To quote women's rights advocate Graça Machel: "Let it be a reminder that prioritising women's inclusion in peacemaking is a global responsibility."

Based on the findings from this research and from the wider series and the work of the LEAP4Peace Consortium, this paper concludes and recommends that funding partners, states and multilateral organisations must:

- **advocate for the inclusion of women representatives on all sides and at every stage of a peace process, enable them to leverage diplomatic relationships to insist on gender representation**
- **recruit and embed gender experts within their staff working on peace processes and conflict resolution, as these champions are key for pushing change**
- **support and fund alliances and networks of women peacebuilders and women's rights organisations to amplify and accelerate improvement in women's meaningful participation**

What are women peacebuilders doing?

- Challenging gender norms
- Building networks
- Influencing peace negotiations
- Navigating tokenism
- Demanding a place at the table
- Mobilising underrepresented women
- Adapting and working holistically

key features that are found in the paper to be supportive and needed for this work by women:

- Flexible and responsive financing to women's needs by funding partners and international/multilateral agencies

- Informed and mainstream gender transformative approaches in all areas of work by funding partners/ multilaterals in peacebuilding/peace negoitations set-up

II. Context

Women's participation in peacebuilding is a crucial step in furthering gender equality, achieving women's rights, and reflecting the needs and perspectives of women directly impacted by conflict – which are often ignored. The participation and inclusion of women, girls and marginalised groups, who are often the most impacted by conflict, are essential in addressing the underlying and structural inequalities and rights deficits that drive conflict. In the pursuit of redressing this, Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) was adopted by the UN Security Council in the year 2000. The WPS agenda recognises and codifies that women are essential to international peace and security. It highlights the importance of women's participation in conflict, peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Women's roles as experts, frontline responders, community organisers and mediators in conflict and crisis settings are well evidenced. However, implementation and meaningful application of UNSCR 1325, and its subsequent resolutions, has been slow and selective.

While women have participated in 80 per cent of UN-led or co-led peace processes in 2022, the actual numbers of women involved remained low – a proportion that has in fact been decreasing. Women made up only 16 per cent of total participants in peace processes in 2022 and were completely absent from many of these, including Myanmar, Sudan, Ethiopia and more. The meaningful participation of and contributions from women in policy-making around conflict is especially important, as the number of women and girls living in fragile and conflict-affected contexts continues to rise – reaching 614 million in 2022, as reported in the UN Secretary-General's annual report on WPS.

Moving beyond these headline figures and improving women's participation on a tangible level for grassroots and proximate women peacebuilders has not been successful, with support from the international community lacking. In 2021–22, women's rights organisations and movements received less than one per cent of Official Development Assistance (ODA) from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee.

Past research, including the previous paper published by the LEAP4Peace Consortium *Pillars for Peace*, has examined some barriers to women's participation and called for donor states, multilateral organisations and international NGOs to address them. This paper builds upon *Pillars for Peace* to explore transformative approaches to systems and structures of peacebuilding, with a specific focus on local and community women peacebuilders. The real-life examples highlighted within this paper are all examples that have been found through desk-based research and through speaking with WPS experts and practitioners. The analysis and recommendations in this paper draw on the findings of this research and invite the reader to consider how to better support grassroots women peacebuilders.

i.   LEAP4Peace Consortium

The Women Leadership and Participation for Peace (LEAP4Peace) programme is a Consortium of organisations from Burundi, Colombia, Myanmar, the Netherlands and the UK. The consortium was formed with the specific goal of advancing the role that women play in peacebuilding and political

processes in the three target countries – Burundi, Colombia and Myanmar – and promoting that role at a global level. The consortium consists of the Burundi Leadership Training Program (BLTP), Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS), the Gender Equality Network (GEN) in Myanmar, the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) Netherlands, NIMD Myanmar and NIMD Colombia. The programme was launched in 2021 and will end in 2025, and is funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

The LEAP4Peace Programme addresses the structural underrepresentation of women in peacebuilding and politics and supports women's political leadership and the participation of women in decision-making processes. At the outset of the programme, the consortium identified four barriers to meaningful participation and the empowerment of women in peacebuilding that have been highlighted in programming over the years and which can be easily recognised within both Pillars for Peace as well as the case studies and examples discussed in this paper:

1. **persistent patriarchal and exclusionary power structures that reproduce social norms and perpetuate gender inequality**
2. **ignorance, a lack of willingness, and intended and unintended barriers for women with regards to political participation and decision-making processes**
3. **inadequate and exclusionary legal and policy frameworks in post-conflict settings**
4. **a diminishing space for civil society to advocate for gender equality**

LEAP4Peace recognises the interconnectedness of these barriers and the importance of addressing all of them. This is crucial for delivering LEAP4Peace's strategic programme objective of achieving a conducive environment for the full and meaningful inclusion of women in political and decision-making processes, to sustain peace in Burundi, Colombia and Myanmar. People and civil society in these three countries have all previously or are currently grappling with the realities of building gender-inclusive peace and maintaining stability. They are all in different stages of development of national action plans and implementation of the WPS agenda.

The long-term objectives that this series of papers, and the programme as a whole, aim to achieve are:
- **the meaningful representation of women in all their diversity in decision-making roles for peacebuilding**
- **a supportive policy framework for women's rights and political participation in peacebuilding**

The ongoing activities within LEAP4Peace as a whole include skills training, media and awareness campaigns, workshops for political stakeholders, democracy education and other actions associated with the empowerment of women involved in politics. Some of these activities are described in detail in the country-focused papers published in this series and demonstrate the type of transformative approaches to improving women's participation in peacebuilding that this paper hopes to highlight. The LEAP4Peace Programme recognises the varied roles played by women in all political activities and the extraordinary contribution that women make towards promoting and maintaining peace – from informal rights-based, community-level activism to international high-level formal peace processes. The activities undertaken in each country address the specific and interlinked barriers to participation and gender equality.

ii. Focus country summaries

Burundi

Burundi has been engaged in promoting the equitable participation of women through various political initiatives and policies, including the ratification of most of the international and regional instruments promoting women's rights. Advocacy by Burundian women during the negotiation of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in Tanzania in 2000 led to the inclusion in the 2005 constitution of a quota of at least 30 per cent women in various decision-making bodies. This was considered an important step forward in promoting the right of Burundian women to participate, in that it allows a certain number of women to be present in institutions that are important for the running of the country.

Recent studies conducted in the wake of the 2020 elections show that Burundi has made progress in introducing the 30 per cent quota in some decision-making bodies, including in Parliament, as communal administrators and in the justice sector. The quota has yet to be applied to the post of councillor however, and the participation rate of women has not yet reached 30 per cent. Women are still under-represented in positions of responsibility, both elected and appointed, particularly in elected assemblies, public administration, the private sector, civil society and the media. There are still socio-cultural barriers to women standing for political office. Lack of information or sufficient capacity also mean that women have fewer opportunities than men to mobilise the resources needed to become competitive in the political arena.

The Burundi country-focused paper explores this context through research and a series of case studies from Burundian women peacebuilders. The central theme of transformative approaches to systems and structures of peacebuilding, with a focus on a bottom-up approach from local and community women peacebuilders, is applied through the specific lens of changing legislation in Burundi to improve women's participation in peace processes and the work of local women's rights organisations to address the barriers to participation.

Colombia

Colombia has been affected by an internal armed conflict for over 60 years. The conflict has involved confrontations between various actors, and has led to various processes of dialogue and agreements in the search for peace, with political parties, armed insurgent guerrilla actors, paramilitaries, criminal gangs and urban groups. Only the most recent peace agreement of 2016, recognised as a historic milestone, incorporated a gender perspective, with equality, non-discrimination and women's human rights as guiding principles. The participation of women as peacebuilders has been the result of many years of advocacy by women's organisations in Colombia to be recognised as legitimate political subjects. This has led to their requests and needs being considered at the negotiating table, the creation of a gender commission, and the inclusion of a gender perspective in the peace agreement. The current government of Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez (2022–2026) is committed to 'total peace' as a state policy and a transversal axis in all of the country's affairs, involving communities in negotiations through regional and binding dialogues.

In Colombia, due to the internal armed conflict, the WPS agenda has been a particularly important issue for the women's movement and the feminist movement. As an international instrument, UNSCR 1325 has not been understood at the local level, and therefore advocacy to achieve a National Action Plan as a state policy and implement the Resolution at the local level is highly important. Advocacy efforts to realise the commitment to build a National Action Plan for Resolution 1325 (NAP 1325) with the participation of women in all their diversities became a reality when, on 24 October 2022, the current government affirmed its commitment to its participatory formulation.

The Colombia country-focused paper in this series uses interviews and research with women peacebuilders and peace activists in Colombia to explore the NAP 1325 development process, as well as initiatives developed by Colombian women's rights organisations to promote better participation of women in the NAP 1325 process and in the peace process.

Myanmar

Myanmar's long-running civil war resulted from historical grievances between the central government dominated by the Bamar majority and various ethnic nationalities struggling for autonomy and self-determination. Successive military regimes have attempted to consolidate power and marginalise ethnic minorities through structural and direct violence. The military's abrupt coup d'état in 2021 disrupted the fragile peace process built on the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). This agreement, despite having many flaws and narrow space for civil society's participation, intended

to initiate national political dialogues and pave the way towards reconciliation and stability. The NCA has failed, however, with devastating effects following the military coup.

The Myanmar military has intensified its indiscriminate offensives against both resistance forces and ethnic resistance organisations, targeting civilians living in the vicinity of these resistance groups. The conflict in Myanmar, which now engulfs two-thirds of the country, has led to widespread and prolonged displacement, especially among the Rohingya community. This situation includes both recurring and new displacement, with the total number of internally displaced people (IDPs) surpassing 2.7 million (This figure is accurate at the time of writing the paper in early 2024) and refugees seeking asylum exceeding 1.35 million. Out of the 2.7 million IDPs, half are women and children. Insecurities are manifesting in various forms, including an increasing number of incidents involving violence against women, femicide and gender-based crimes, alongside economic hardship, food insecurity and a rise in poverty.

Women human rights defenders, women peace ambassadors and women peacebuilders – including LEAP4Peace partners – continue to face unprecedented challenges, worsening an already adverse environment for many women and girls. Yet, despite the tumultuous political landscape fraught with gender-based violations, failing state infrastructure, a rise in conflict-induced poverty, displacement and impunity from the military junta, women actors continue to play vital roles in advocating for the participation, protection and empowerment of women.

The Myanmar country-focused paper looks at the participation, protection and empowerment of women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders who are building women's networks at local levels and connecting these with global networks. It draws on the experiences of women in Myanmar working in this ongoing fraught context to bring peace and stability to their communities and their country.

iii.   Methodology

Inception

This series of papers has been produced as part of the LEAP4Peace Consortium, coordinated and supported by the consortium partner GAPS. The series comprises four papers – three country-focused papers looking at Burundi, Colombia and Myanmar, and this paper with a global perspective – all with a common theme: transformative approaches to systems and structures of peacebuilding, with a focus on a bottom-up approach by local and community women peacebuilders.

Consortium partners identified country-specific sub-themes that addressed an aspect of the overall theme and which were most relevant to their context. Each country-focused paper used the sub-themes as a basis to combine desk-based research with consultations – key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions – with women peacebuilders, women's rights organisations and women politicians from each of their country contexts, and produce analysis and country-specific recommendations. Across the three country-specific papers, the focus group discussions and KIIs involved 55 individuals. These country-focused papers were developed, researched, written and validated by LEAP4Peace staff, consultants and experts from each respective country, with the coordination support of GAPS and NIMD. The people consulted came from diverse backgrounds. Further details on the methodology of each process is available in the country-focused papers. The country-focused papers are available on the LEAP4Peace website.

Research methods

The global paper draws deeply on content and evidence in the country-focused papers, and also uses a mixed methods approach, comprising KIIs and desk-based research of existing literature. The methods chosen allowed for the collection of the participants' knowledge, perceptions, experiences and opinions. This provides a global perspective with examples and insights from other countries and stakeholders, demonstrating the connections and linkages between the country-focused papers.

Additional KIIs with eight interviewees were conducted specifically for this paper and were all with stakeholders who are experts in women's participation in peace processes, and included women peacebuilders, donor states, multilaterals organisations, international civil society networks, regional civil society networks, academics and think tanks. The interviewees in general had a global remit, though some had specific focus areas and specialities including the Arab Region, the UK government's WPS focus countries, and other conflict-affected contexts. They have been anonymised within this paper to promote open reflection and ensure safety. By including interviewees with a wide range of backgrounds, the paper aims to cover a wider range of examples and possible evidence. A set of guiding questions based on the theme and the interviewees' backgrounds was drafted and shared with interviewees ahead of their KII. This was developed from the set of guiding questions used in the research for the country-focused papers. The KIIs were all held virtually with video recording and transcription taken. The experiences of working in and on multiple countries and regions enabled the interviewees to provide examples from different contexts and offer their own perspectives on the overarching challenges and themes.

Analysis and limitations

The findings from the country-focused papers, the literature review and the KIIs were reviewed using a thematic analysis approach to identify the common themes. The examples have been summarised and used as evidence to support these themes. The authors note that this paper reflects the issues raised by the research and the interviewees, and may not cover issues that were not within the scope or which did not emerge in the research; for example, the dynamics within national civil society groups and the adaptability of women politicians, despite being relevant to the overall theme.

The KIIs aimed for a wide geographical scope that could complement the desk-based research and the country-focused papers without duplication. Interviewees were chosen based on existing relationships and capacity for consultation. GAPS undertook a scoping of the international WPS sector to compile a list of potential interviewees and met with those who agreed to speak as part of this research. GAPS and the LEAP4Peace Consortium acknowledges the limitations and gaps inherent in this approach, within the time and resources available and the lack of interpretation services. All interviews were conducted solely in English, which limited the possible interviewees.

All research undertaken as part of this series of papers was conducted in line with principles and actions set out in the *Beyond Consultations tool*, which was developed by GAPS and member organisations within the GAPS network. GAPS, as a feminist network, interrogates the production of knowledge along historical and contemporary inequalities while remaining aware of its positionality being based in the Global North, specifically in the UK – the source and ongoing perpetrator of many instances of global colonialism. The research methodologies, including ethics, reflect GAPS's feminist commitments to knowledge production and validation.

III. Findings: What are women peacebuilders doing?

i. Overview

The findings from the research highlighted many examples of the efforts undertaken by women peacebuilders to be able to participate in all levels of peace processes. The examples within this section are considered innovative and transformative due to the approaches being uncommon or unique within the WPS space, directly challenging existing power structures, and/or being spearheaded by women and women's movements against establishment pushback. Alongside these examples, this section also examines the enabling environment for participation and supporting activities by women peacebuilders identified by interviewees, the country papers and in the literature analysis.

The paper groups these examples and discussion points into seven main themes: women building networks and coalitions; women influencing peace negotiations; women demanding a place at the table; women adapting and working holistically; mobilising underrepresented women; women navigating tokenism; and women challenging gendered norms and stereotypes. Overarching challenges and barriers that arose from the research but which were not covered in these themes are then explored at the end of this section. All the highlighted quotes are from the KIIs.

The findings in this section describe how women often face barriers to speaking for themselves, and how their identities are generalised, assuming one woman can represent all. True participation must include diverse women from across society to ensure all voices and needs are addressed. The examples and dynamics discussed by interviewees and found in the literature analysis demonstrate why the international community should support, but not lead, peace efforts – with local women's rights organisations guiding the process. It is evident that successful peace processes are often those that are locally driven, with international support when requested by local entities.

i.   Building networks and coalitions

"We are not the same…The difference makes us stronger" - Research participant

Forming alliances and networks and movement building were mentioned by most interviewees as a key ingredient by women peacebuilders for improving women's participation. These feminist movements and women's movements often bring together women and women's organisations that cover different constituencies, which are made up of diverse groups of women including minoritised ethnic groups, LGBTQ+ people, women who live in rural areas and women who are disabled. This coalition building transforms the civil society landscape and goes beyond the normal approaches of community engagement. Networks and coalitions also frequently cross geographical borders which can bring depth and nuance to the perspectives of these groups.

The women shared how creating established support systems through these networks can support important enabling conditions for effective participation, including safe spaces, counselling, medical assistance and community engagement. This is in addition to the coordination of activism that strengthens their work.

Interviewees for this paper discussed how the WPS framework can serve as a tool for women to use to create networks and make demands from the international community on improving women's participation. The framework offers a common language, based on the core pillars of the WPS agenda and most states being signatories to the resolution. As an example, the **Myanmar** country-focused paper explores this through the creation of WPS forums. In recent years WPS forums have been organised on **Myanmar** by local civil society, which have included workshops, seminars and training programmes on digital security, advocacy strategy development, international justice and accountability mechanisms. This has allowed women to work together on shared goals in the complex political environment, where discussions of 'peace' have been seen as too political since the start of the military junta's regime.

Women peacebuilders in **Myanmar** who were interviewed as part of this research shared the benefits of these WPS forums – in particular the virtual training workshops which were more flexible and accessible for them, although limited access to technology or limited literacy for some women, especially women who are displaced, can make digital workshops less impactful. The training workshops were supported and organised by the WPS forums and therefore could be responsive to the changing needs of women in **Myanmar**. The forums also provided space for women politicians to convene and build their resilience and capacity for engaging with anti-gender actors.

The WPS forums have also included women peacebuilders from other countries, which has provided a space for international solidarity and knowledge exchange. LEAP4Peace Consortium partner GEN **Myanmar** has organised knowledge-sharing forums bringing together women from inside and outside **Myanmar**, which has enabled these women peacebuilders to come together and assess the post-coup threats to women's well-being and equality issues. These forums have been invaluable to have frank and open discussions of the political situation and to build solidarity.

Transnational feminist solidarity movements have staged protests and represented **Myanmar's** cause at their own embassies and within other international spaces; for example, women peacebuilders from Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), these are Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam. protested at the Indonesian embassy on behalf of **Myanmar**. In general, the solidarity networks (both international and national) were greatly appreciated by the women peacebuilders from **Myanmar** who were interviewed for this paper as places where they could form networks that could later be used to disseminate information, provide emergency response training, and even to facilitate the covert delivery of WPS activities. This advocacy was supported and strengthened by the complementary advocacy of international networks.

Interviewees from our research shared other examples from **Liberia, Libya** and **Yemen** where women were able to create networks from different faith groups, different communities and different political groups, jointly advocate for peace and have dialogues in ways interviewees

reported that men in those contexts were not able to. Women in these contexts, including young women, played an important role in active peace efforts, including resolving water disputes, opening roads, persuading militias to leave communities alone, and getting detainees released.

Women's involvement in peace processes changes the dynamics within the groups in charge. For example, in **Libya** women involved in the peace dialogue became whistle-blowers to shame and report men who had been taking bribes. These women pushed forward with this, despite facing backlash and further corruption from the men involved.

One interviewee proposed that women found it easier to come together and work cohesively in these examples as they shared similar day-to-day experiences, such as difficulties around going to the hospital, their children accessing education, access to safe drinking water, incomes and job security. They all are also subject to the impact of patriarchy, especially as gender-based violence increases following the rise of armed conflicts. Nonetheless, the need for context-specific work with representation of women from different groups was summed up by one interviewee: *"We are not the same, we have to be very honest, what is your priority is not my priority. The difference makes us stronger."*

ii.   Influencing peace negotiations

"When we women come together we transform and build peace" - Research participant

As all interviewees said, women are already involved in peacebuilding and peace processes, including those considered 'unofficial' by the international community, and they have had a significant impact on peace negotiations and other political structures.

Women peacebuilders from **Colombia** who were interviewed for the **Colombia** country-focused paper spoke about the Women's Summit for Peace *('Cumbre de Mujeres y Paz')* and how this coalition of over 500 civil society organisations was able to influence Colombian peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) in 2016, calling for the consideration of women's needs and experiences during conflict. Various actors within the international community, including foreign embassies and multilateral organisations, supported this endeavour, which was able to incorporate a gender perspective into the final peace agreement. The call for improved participation of women at peace negotiations was ultimately successful, due to the work of this broad coalition. These women peacebuilders in **Colombia** also monitored the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and continue to push for the incorporation of a gender perspective at the negotiating table.

Women's organisations in **Colombia** formed 'Alliance 1325', which they used to play an instrumental role in the development of the National Action Plan by supporting people's forums to collate perspectives and recommendations, and by building relationships with key actors. This group was formed by women peacebuilders and civil society along a political agenda pushing for better participation and more representation. As discussed in an episode of the 'Mind the GAPS' podcast,

Afro-Colombian women and Indigenous women were initially not well represented but they organised together, along with other women peacebuilders, to ensure intersectional inclusion – demonstrating the power of solidarity and movement building.

As part of its advocacy strategy for women involved in politics, LEAP4Peace Consortium member BLTP held discussions with **Burundian** political leaders to recommend they revise the internal texts of their respective parties to support and further gender mainstreaming in these political structures. A document summarising the commitments and recommendations, entitled *Inclusion of women in politics,* ("Inclusion de la femme en politique" in the original French) was produced and validated by the parties, then forwarded to the ministry responsible for gender. Women MPs in **Burundi** were then able to use this document in their advocacy for better gender representation and gender mainstreaming.

Interviewees from the **Colombia** country-focused paper shared the achievements of a gender sub-commission and of women being appointed as delegates within the peace process thanks to the work of women's groups and feminists. These achievements led to a commitment that the peace agreement should have a gender focus, and was a result of women peacebuilders insisting that they must be recognised as legitimate political subjects. As one interviewee from **Colombia** said: *"Women grow like water when they come together. When we women come together we transform and build peace, if we are not together, we will not be able to build peace."*

Interviewees shared how women in **Northern Ireland** also built networks that were able to influence peace negotiations, through the formation of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC), which was the first single-issue party in the country, and which is made up of women across the political spectrum in **Northern Ireland**. The NIWC utilised a political mechanism that ensures the representation of minority parties to gain two seats in the Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue. As discussed in the full case study in this paper, though the women's sector in **Northern Ireland** was greatly impacted by the peace process, both positively and negatively, this shows another example of women circumventing barriers to their participation and defying the gendered expectations of women quietly accepting their situation, when their requests for gender balance are ignored and dismissed.

These examples of women's coalitions and networks formed to support peacebuilding efforts, and examples of networks directly influencing peace processes, demonstrates the power of mobilising women. It also shows the potential for significant change when women are able to come together and articulate their own needs and interests.

Recommendation: Donors must fund alliance building of women's rights organizations, women peacebuilders and local, national and regional networks, as effective way to support women's to engage and influence peace processes and peace building in all their diversity.

iii. Demanding a place at the table

Women's participation in peace negotiations is not always straightforward or welcomed: as a result of the patriarchy often embedded within institutions and systems, many peace negotiation actors exclude or ignore women and obstruct equal access or equal opportunities for meaningful participation in formal and UN-led processes. Interviewees shared how women are often not given the chance to speak for themselves, or their identities are flattened – one woman is assumed to be able to speak for all women. Women are not a homogenous group, and meaningful participation must include women within all their diversity and from across society.

The evidence base explored in this section shows that in response to this exclusion, women are not waiting to be invited into 'official' peace processes but are instead organising and leading community peacebuilding initiatives and negotiations in different and creative ways.

An example of **Libyan** women peacebuilders was cited as a success story by one interviewee, where **Libyan** women took the initiative to build a constituency, hold dialogues with their own community and push to participate. They did not wait for official processes to include them, but instigated grassroots efforts and demanded access to formal structures. Their work and contributions to the peace process were, in the words of one interviewee, *"despite the international community, not because of it".* These **Libyan** women were involved with grassroots groups and mediators, and pushed for themselves to be included as decision makers at the highest level. They always highlighted the need for gender-sensitive negotiations, despite facing pushback from multilateral bodies.

The country paper on **Burundi** highlighted the example of women in Burundi who were initially refused access to the Arusha peace negotiations, but then decisively turned up to and participated in the second round of peace negotiations without prior authorisation. The **Burundian** women peacebuilders had jointly identified core priority demands and presented them to the mediators and facilitators: these priorities focused on representation, the impact of conflict on women and gender sensitivity. Their efforts were successful and almost all their recommendations were included in the peace negotiations. The exception was a demand for a 30 per cent quota for representation at all levels, although after further advocacy this too was eventually accepted and is now enshrined in the **Burundian** constitution. The increased awareness and mobilisation of women's rights organisations in **Burundi** also led to better legislation in other areas.

Northern Irish women were also mentioned by multiple interviewees as an example of women creating their own spaces for engagement using existing political structures to demand a place at the table. They did this by forming the NIWC, advocating on their own issues and forcing those in power to listen to them. The role of women in **Northern Ireland**'s Good Friday Agreement was a crucial driver and another success story. One of the many lessons from this is to support local civil society and women's right organisations as they have the expertise and motivation to push for and achieve meaningful change.

Even within these impactful examples, women still faced pushback and other challenges. With the example of **Burundi**, despite their successful organising, the women faced resistance from negotiating parties and their influence was constrained by existing procedures. The gender provisions within the peace agreement are not easy to implement and have yet to be reached. We can see how women and women's groups organise themselves and produce more community cohesion and understanding, but also how their potential can be either enabled or stymied depending on the environment. Therefore, it is crucial for the international community to acknowledge and support this work, while also in parallel ensuring that these women are involved at high levels and their policy asks are recognised and implemented by decision makers.

Time and time again, we find examples where women had to demand a place for themselves at the table, and taking the space even when they are refused access. These examples show women taking the initiative without waiting for decision makers and the international community to step in and propose approaches.

iv.　Adapting and working holistically

"Trust is the most precious currency" - Research participant

Women's participation in peacebuilding is vital for achieving more equitable and sustainable peace, but more importantly must be recognised as having a key link with all issues within a conflict-affected country. This is seen across contexts, and was explored in all the country-focused papers. In **Myanmar**, women peacebuilders interviewed for the country-focused paper spoke about how they have responded to crises by coordinating humanitarian response efforts in addition to their long-term work on peacebuilding. This is an inevitable consequence of peacebuilders who are from and part of the communities that they are supporting; they have the ability to respond to the immediate and pressing issues of the community. This also strengthens their peacebuilding work as it lays the foundations for more stable societies and builds trust within the communities. Women in **Myanmar** are also working to address the root causes and drivers of gender inequality, conflict and genocide, including gendered attitudes, gender norms and customary laws as part of their peacebuilding work.

In **Burundi** interviewees noted how women have organised themselves during recurring crises to provide relief to victims of violence committed by armed groups, and have subsequently worked for reconciliation. The **Colombia** paper describes how women's organisations have provided psychosocial and legal support services to women victims of violence.

As one interviewee from a civil society network said, *"...we are not teaching them [women's rights organisations] anything".* The work is being done already, and the international community can be more effective and efficient by supporting the existing work of feminists.

These examples contrast with the siloed and narrow approach of many global peacebuilding efforts. The collapse of the National Ceasefire Agreement and subsequent military coup propelled **Myanmar** women peace activists, human rights defenders and peacebuilders towards more grassroots approaches, actively engaging in bottom-up activities in the absence of formal peace structures. They continue to adapt, including through using terms other than 'politics' and 'peace' which will endanger their own safety. Nonetheless, these women are still under threat from military actors, and face intimidation, violence and pressure to remain silent, even when engaging in activities outside of traditional peacebuilding – such as gender-based violence response. Women activists have used their gender and gendered norms in society against the military junta, who take a misogynistic and anti-gender approach.

This need for flexibility is not always recognised by funding partners, who provide short-term and inflexible fixed funding that does not adapt to the ways women's rights organisations have to shift their approaches. When women peacebuilders do receive funding for their core work, the lack of flexibility also impacts their credibility with communities. As discussed in this paper, trust between communities and civil society is key to successful advocacy and representation. The **Myanmar** paper, however, highlighted examples where strict funding partner requirements did not allow women's rights organisations to re-allocate funding from long-term work to immediate humanitarian assistance or other urgent and community-identified programmatic and political work during conflict. Proximate organisations that are responsive to the needs of the community are crucial for peacebuilding, as they help maintain basic services and safety that are necessary for any further peacebuilding work.

The lack of flexibility leads to civil society appearing to be unaware and insensitive to the community's basic needs, as they can only offer project activities that were previously approved by the donor that may no longer be relevant or even possible to implement. In the examples shared in the **Myanmar** country-focused paper, this has damaged trust between the community and women peacebuilders, which sets back broader peacebuilding efforts. As explained by one interviewee for the country-focused paper: *"Peacebuilding is a long-term endeavour with communities; trust is the most precious currency. If communities ask for life-saving assistance, we cannot explain to them that we have funding for women's leadership capacity-building activities, but not for women's dignity kits." cannot explain to them that we have funding for women's leadership capacity-building activities, but not for women's dignity kits."*

This was also highlighted in an episode of GAPS's podcast funded by LEAP4Peace, 'Mind the GAPS' – which focused on **Northern Ireland** – which highlighted the need to resource organisations based in affected communities not only during peace processes but also afterwards, during the implementation and monitoring stage, in order to be truly successful. These processes can and should be supported by everyone in the international community, but they must be led by the people who are impacted.

As one interviewee said, *"...we will see success if a peace process is really locally led, if INGOs really dare to step back and only support when it's needed if local organisations and women's groups reach out to say they need that"*.

One workaround was shared by interviewees: women peacebuilders and the **Myanmar** diaspora pooled their resources to provide no-strings attached funding for local women's rights organisations and peacebuilders. This is a great example of international solidarity. However, this would not be necessary if donor states revised their approach and offered long-term, core and flexible funding for women peacebuilders that allows grantees to create their own adaptable objectives. This is in line not only with decades of recommendations from civil society but also with the commitments for flexible and multi-year funding found in the Grand Bargain, which has signatories from most large donor states and many other multilateral agencies and international NGOs.

Women interviewed in **Burundi** shared that they are seen as being distinct from the perpetrators of trauma during conflict and are therefore able to lead dialogues and bring groups together. Some women's organisations in Burundi have fostered a neutral political image, which has allowed them to observe and report on elections – strengthening the democratic process and giving those groups more experience and authority which could be leveraged in future advocacy work. With this (perception of) neutrality, women have been able to be peacemakers and move formal peace processes forward. This reiterates the importance for advocacy at the international level that ensures that women who reach decision-making levels are sensitive to the needs and specificities of women.

In **Myanmar**, the participation of women peacebuilders and peacebuilding efforts have been deprioritised in the face of seemingly more urgent issues. However, as discussed above, women peacebuilders are not only some of the key actors in addressing urgent crises but, due to this, are also best placed to contribute to dialogue processes and peace processes. One interviewee from UN Women stated that *"...gender equality time and time again gets sacrificed for so-called expediency"*. This section shows how 'expediency' – and the wider, more general success of peacebuilding goals – is in fact served by women's participation in programming and better resources for women's rights organisations.

> **Recommendation:** Donors must radically shift their funding approach for women peacebuilders, women's rights organisations and national civil society networks working on peace to long-term, core and flexible funding, in recognition of the expertise held by these groups, the complexities of working in a conflict-affected setting, and the need for adaptable activities and objectives.

v. Mobilising underrepresented women

The Role of Women and LGBTQI+ Voices in Colombia's National Action Plan on WPS

Women peacebuilders in Colombia reported that the process for the development of the first **Colombian** National Action Plan (NAP) on WPS was very consultative and included contributions from thousands of women, with diverse backgrounds and from all regions, and explicitly included Afro-Colombian, Indigenous and LGBTQI+ women. This process was fed into by **Colombian** civil society, international civil society networks, multilateral organisations and international governments, including the UK.

An alliance of women's civil society designed the process and it was overseen by a steering committee consisting of the alliance, the national government, UN Women and others. National LGBT organisation Colombia Diversa worked to incorporate the needs of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in the NAP, through various initiatives. These included the creation of a toolkit to support those working on the implementation of the WPS agenda from an intersectional perspective, with a focus on the inclusion of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women.

The outcome of this is yet to be fully seen, but the process so far has received positive feedback from **Colombian** women, including those interviewed for the **Colombia** country-focused paper, and can be used as an example of good practice as it has already improved women's participation in this peacebuilding space.

Multiple interviewees flagged the importance of building the leadership of women who are engaged at the grassroots level with communities affected by conflict. These women are often working on community initiatives around peace but are overlooked and not represented at the negotiation table or any formal tracks of peace processes. They are best placed to understand the dynamics and needs of their community, which compounds the injustice of their exclusion.

Women in all their diversity tend to hold multiple roles in both their communities and households and, due to societal gender roles, generally manage day-to-day activities, which are disrupted by conflict. Therefore, they are instrumental in efforts to address these changes, and they understand first-hand the impact of conflict. While women must primarily be able to participate to further their own rights, this paper shows the additional benefits from women's participation in peacebuilding and from women building networks.

An interviewee from a civil society network in the Global South highlighted key actions, which are to mobilise these women and convey that *"Peace is not something far away, it is the schools, it's healthcare, it's education"*, and that women peacebuilders and women's rights activists must use ordinary language and demonstrate how political processes are translatable into everyday life: *"The woman who is selling tomatoes and potatoes is paying tax that pays for the minister's salary. We need to relate those issues."*

The **Colombia** country-focused paper reiterated this same point: that peace is related to the local and the everyday, as well as to the national and militarised. Women peacebuilders in **Colombia** spoke about carrying out this educational and mobilisation work, across the country, in all regions

beyond just the capital, in addition to providing peace education in schools. They held trainings for civil servants and political candidates, and they used learning tools such as virtual games and exhibitions, as well as other educational activities, to sensitise women and local authorities on UNSCR 1325 and the WPS agenda. One of the examples highlighted by the interviewees was the *'Chiva de la Memoria'* – a memory exercise conducted through artistic and playful activities, carried out with people in the municipalities most impacted by violence. This led to women and decision makers becoming more engaged and committed to this work, and to women being more likely to get involved with peacebuilding work.

Furthermore, by being part of and engaged in a community, women are considered to be 'one of them', which gives them further legitimacy and they are more likely to be protected from reprisals. The impact of mobilising women from underrepresented groups is vast, although when considering engagement and sensitisation, civil society and women's rights organisations may need to look beyond their usual networks and use approaches to ensure that all women can participate and recognise their own expertise and relevance to peacebuilding.

vi. Navigating tokenism

"Is it better to have a token or no women at all?" - Research participant

It is also crucial to emphasise the need for participation not to be tokenistic, but for it to lead to genuine representation of the needs and asks of communities affected by conflict and war.

One interviewee working at the multilateral level mentioned the Doha dialogue processes on **Afghanistan,** where on multiple occasions no women were invited to participate. In one instance, a few days before the meeting, a member state realised – or decided to act upon – the lack of women representatives and requested that a woman take part. UN Women were tasked with finding someone who could speak on issues relating to women and provide a meaningful intervention, alongside grappling with the logistics of last-minute travel and visas. The logistical barriers were compounded by the inability to prepare sufficiently and consult with affected communities.

Despite the severe restriction of women's rights and oppression of women within **Afghanistan** by the Taliban, women's participation and perspectives were not prioritised and even in the third Doha meeting, women were not included – which was seen as a concession to the Taliban. Many **Afghan** women, both in the country and in the diaspora, publicly rejected last-minute invitations to participate and called for boycotts of the meeting.

This is a prime example of a tokenistic approach. It had the potential to sow divisions between groups of women involved in the specific conflict, and did not allow adequate time for the women to prepare or consult their wider constituency. The interviewee shared their concerns about the limited representation and the last-minute invite list, asking: *"Is it better to have a token or no women at all?"* This is a central question to many of the examples in this paper, as poorly thought-

out consultation and participation can cause more harm than good – but may be considered necessary as steps towards equality.

As explained in the previous paper produced by the LEAP4Peace Consortium, *Pillars for Peace, 'the participation of women in peacebuilding activities and processes cannot be treated as merely a box-ticking exercise or as a means to an end for a more sustainable peace'.* This is true for many reasons, including the dynamics that were raised by multiple interviewees and in the **Burundi** country-focused paper – that women in positions of power may often defend patriarchal positions and push regressive policies, such as anti-abortion and anti-LGBTQ+ policies. This is the case across the population: many people of all demographics may hold regressive and anti-rights political views. But it can also be seen in instances of people from minoritised groups who have reached senior positions in politics and who receive criticism that they have been allowed this space specifically because of these views, their alignment with regressive government policies and because they are not champions of women's rights or for their own communities.

It is important to consider therefore that representation for representation's sake should not be the goal. Rather, peacebuilding actors should require decision makers to push for gender equality and justice. As discussed throughout this paper, there are many strong examples of women's involvement improving peace processes. However, it should be flagged that their mere presence – often critiqued as 'add women and stir' – is not inherently transformative: women are not inherently more peaceful than men. Various dynamics within populations of women can recreate the power structures that have led to the current situation and to conflict, including elitism, funding partner priorities, respectability politics and poor community representation.

> **Beyond Elites: Expanding Women's Voices in Civic Spaces**
>
> By returning to the same groups of women, we may end up replicating the same power structures and inequalities. An interviewee gave an example from **Ukraine** where global interest and investment in women's issues has peaked since the start of the war – but this is focused on a small group of civil society leaders who are able to travel internationally and speak with decision makers. Ultimately the majority of women and their everyday security is not considered.
>
> This will also directly shape the contours of civic space, enabling certain organisations to grow and receive further resources to occupy more space – which risks squeezing out smaller movements, especially those led by youth or marginalised communities. Women's ability to influence must not be dependent on being able to be accepted by a hierarchical structure.

Consideration of intersectional identities and striving to bring together diverse and representative groups of women, especially those particularly underrepresented in formal peace processes, will make peace agreements more inclusive and may go some way to address the power dynamics that sometimes occur in these groups of women.

One interviewee, speaking about her experience on the **Syrian** Women's Advisory Board, described how the only requirement of the members of the group was to be a woman, but some members of the group had anti-rights views and were against the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. She said that advisory bodies such as these must actively seek out women who align with the ultimate goal of women's participation – which does require pro-women's rights politics. The interviewee flagged the need for a feminist and progressive agenda at the heart of any women's participation. With the

example of 'Alliance 1325' in **Colombia** mentioned earlier, the group was specifically formed with the agenda of improving women's participation and representing women's interests, and had success in achieving this goal: the Colombian Peace Agreement of 2016 explicitly contained considerations of Indigenous groups, Afro-Colombian people, LGBTQI+ people and women's civil society groups. Other interviewees also raised this important reminder: that when the international community supports women's networks and coalitions, they must consider intersectional approaches and analysis to ensure that different forms of inequalities (for example, class, gender identity, disability, ethnic minorities and marital status) are accounted for and addressed as much as possible. This could be through mapping communities with existing networks, specifically engaging networks of minority groups, and holding capacity-building workshops led by proximate feminists on engaging diverse communities of women.

vii.   Challenging gendered norms and stereotypes

"If you don't have peace, you have nothing" - Research participant

Multiple interviewees highlighted gender inequality itself as a limit to women's participation in peacebuilding, and the research found many examples of women striving to challenge the norms and stereotypes impacting their work. This is an interesting and important circular relationship as a lack of participation is a feature of and contributes to gender inequality, and gender inequality worsens the participation of women. Specifically, interviewees spoke of gendered violence that limits women and the gender stereotypes that limit the roles that women have been able to play in society.

Women who are able to participate in peacebuilding efforts also face heightened risks such as violence, rape and reprisals, as shared by several interviewees. Those who do not experience this harm directly receive threats of violence and also face harassment, community exclusion, defamation and threats targeting their families. Even in recent times, the UN Security Council has noted its concerns about the increase in violence towards women human rights defenders and women leaders in **Colombia**. This acts as a deterrent to women from choosing to engage in any peacebuilding initiatives. The protection pillar of the WPS agenda is often seen as a separate endeavour to the participation pillar,

Prioritising gender equality

Inviting women to the table is just one step in the process. As per one interviewee, support from the international community can look like providing financial resources for women peacebuilders, creating safe spaces, providing protection after participation in the case of reprisals, increasing numbers of women peacekeepers, and insisting on gender equality components of all bilateral aid for conflict affected contexts. **Improved gender equality will lead to improved women's participation in peace processes, and so while much more is also needed, this is a crucial step in successfully applying transformative approaches to peacebuilding that cannot be ignored.**

The limitations of these methods of support were also raised as one interviewee discussed how peacekeepers are sometimes the perpetrators of further violence and *"usually protect the buildings of the government, instead of women"*. This demonstrates again how the safety of women is deprioritised over state interests.

but these examples and existing literature demonstrate the links between the two and the need for 'enabling environments' for women's participation. This is another role that the international community must take seriously and factor into any work on improving participation, supporting both individual resilience and structural gendered responses.

One specific example of violence to women peacebuilders provided by an interviewee was the murder of Salwa Bugaighis in her own home in 2014. She was one of the founders of the **Libyan** Women's Platform for Peace and became a target after being a vocal advocate for peace and having met with groups on different sides of the conflict. The interviewee who shared this example raised other intersecting identities that have been used to make women targets – being an older woman, a widowed woman, a young woman, an unmarried woman, a woman with a disability or a queer woman, to name a few. UN Women and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) produced a programming guide on preventing violence against women in politics, which provides tangible actions and programmatic interventions and which should be considered in tackling violence against women peacebuilders.

Some examples of discriminatory attitudes raised by interviewees and the country-focused papers included women peacebuilders in **Tunisia** reporting that men would not make eye contact with them and how women in **Burundi** were not permitted to speak when men were talking. Women in **Myanmar** spoke about the gendered social norms they live with that include overprotectiveness and ensuing restrictions on their movement, which prevents them from organising and gathering freely. By tackling gender inequality and gendered norms, women's opportunities to participate in daily life and political spaces will be more accessible – suggesting that women's opportunities to participate in peace processes will also increase. Interviewees discussed the knock-on effect, where gendered dynamics in society were reflected in peacebuilding spaces, and the links between gender inequality and conflict appears to support this.

This paper notes that gender discrimination occurs in all countries and contexts, and is expressed in different ways. Women's political participation rarely reaches gender parity across the world. For example, in OECD countries women make up just 33.8 per cent of parliamentarians and hold 35.7 per cent of cabinet positions, with a disproportionate number of roles focusing on social and cultural policies. This shows that the issues around women's participation and representation do not occur solely in conflict-affected states. The international community must not project superiority from the Global North with false assertions of how much gender inequality remains in society or make assumptions about the ways that this discrimination happens in other countries. Instead they should listen to feminists and women's rights organisations from that context to understand the specific relevant dynamics. The discourse on the decolonisation of peacebuilding is live and ongoing, yet has not been as deeply explored within the WPS sector. Consideration of this is crucial to any policymaking and programming on women's participation led by Global North actors, including by the authors of this paper and the LEAP4Peace Consortium lead.

viii. Persisting barriers stopping women from achieving their potential in participation

This section explores further under-recognised barriers to women's meaningful participation and inclusion in internationally led peacebuilding and peace processes, as mentioned by numerous interviewees. The women interviewed discussed barriers including perceived political legitimacy, financial independence as a prerequisite for participation, and access to technology and resources.

Perceived legitimacy that is granted or withheld by Global North actors was discussed as a major barrier that impacts women's access to global spaces and consultations with Global North states. The example of women from **Afghanistan** was used by one research interviewee to highlight how a woman's position and ability to influence can change in different situations. For example, the international community would invite women human rights defenders to consult on issues related to women's rights and gender equality in **Afghanistan,** but once some of these women were forced to flee the country and became refugees in Global North countries, they were not considered a full member of their community – either the one they left or the one they were living in – and were ignored and dismissed. They were not seen as having important perspectives to confer, despite having many of the same experiences and holding the same relationships as groups within the country.

It is crucial to also note the financial independence required for genuine participation. Women peacebuilders in **Burundi** noted that it was very expensive to engage in peacebuilding and mobilisations; when someone's financial situation may already be difficult, dedicating time to work on voluntary and unpaid activities – however important – can be severely limited. Examples from **Burundi** show how programmes on financial independence and income-generating activities have enabled women to participate in community mediation and hill councils. Saving and credit associations in Burundi were cited as an enabling factor for women to be able to engage in peacebuilding actions. This demonstrates a key point: that financial autonomy is a condition for women's improved participation in peacebuilding.
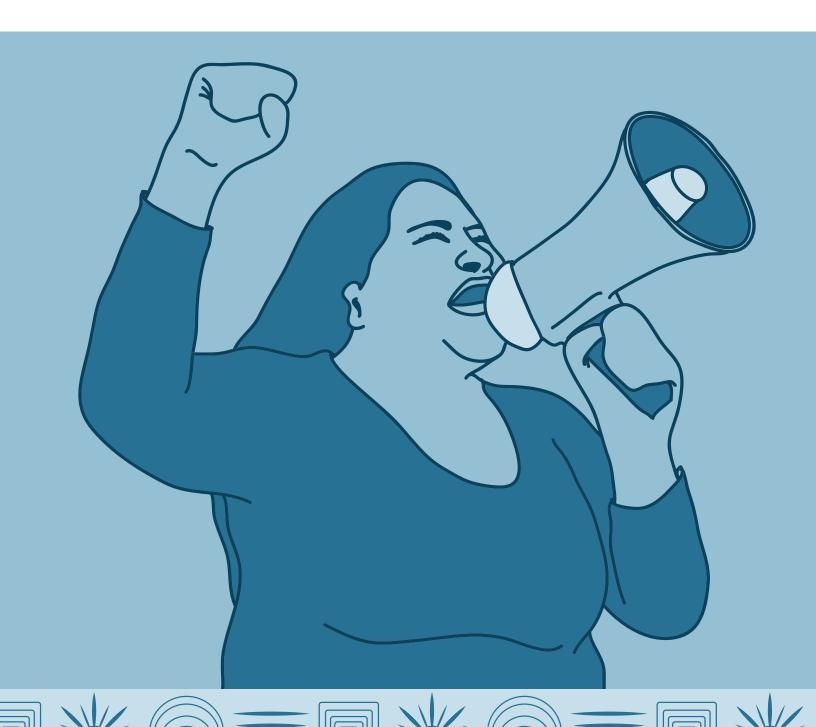
In addition to finance, access to resources is important. In particular, access to technology was noted as a condition for women's ability to fully engage in peacebuilding, especially in **Myanmar** where connectivity is a major problem (particularly in rural areas). In the interviews, women peacebuilders reported that limited access to the internet, targeted surveillance from the military and a lack of peacebuilding literature in Burmese all create obstacles to information and to the ability of women to fully engage in peacebuilding. Losing access to websites and organisations that have had to shut down due to the military has resulted in a loss of institutional knowledge, especially in Burmese and local languages.

> **Recommendation:** Donors must tailor their funding offers to specific contexts through research and consultation of proximate women peacebuilders, women's rights organisations and civil society networks, to create programming around specific needs; for example, savings and credit associations in **Burundi** or internet connectivity in **Myanmar**.

Addressing access to technology and reliable internet was found to be beneficial in several other contexts discussed by interviewees including in **Zimbabwe**, where marginalised women were able to access media and join campaigns, although as seen in many contexts women involved with politics became subject to online abuse. In **Zimbabwe**, the Cyber and Data Protection Act was passed in 2021 to respond to this form of gender-based violence, but the implementation of the reporting process in practice has been criticised for being limited and arduous.

These barriers and challenges are all key considerations when it comes to exploring innovative approaches to peacebuilding by grassroots women peacebuilders. However determined and creative women peacebuilders are, their work can be impacted by these types of issues and anyone designing programming or supporting women peacebuilders must fully investigate the barriers in this and similar contexts in order to attempt to mitigate them.

The Cost of Neutrality: Women's Rights Activism within Northern Ireland's Peacebuilding Landscape

Several interviewees who participated in this research discussed the example of **Northern Ireland** with regards to women's participation in peace processes, and some had specific experience and background knowledge of this context. The impact of donors imposing a 'mediation' or 'peacebuilding' framework on the existing women's sector in **Northern Ireland** has shaped the sector, making many proximate actors less political and less able to push for their policies, including more progressive and heterodox positions.

> **"We need to make space for the angry women"** - Research participant

A key theme that was raised multiple times by interviewees was the imposition of traditional pathways and mechanisms within peacebuilding onto women's rights activists and women human rights defenders. One interviewee shared that these formal structures do not necessarily reflect the reality of how women's organisations work, and they have had to shift and adapt their approaches and politics to fit into the spaces created by decision makers. To be truly inclusive and to enable genuine participation, donors and the international community must not dictate how women's organisations act but widen their perceptions of who and what is a legitimate actor.

While the work of women peacebuilders in **Northern Ireland** has been celebrated as a success story to be replicated in other contexts, one interviewee who worked in the context highlighted the example of **Northern Ireland**'s women's sector as demonstrating the ways that donors have shaped the priorities and approaches of women who are pushing for better participation, sometimes negatively. The **Northern Irish** interviewee noted that in the **Northern Ireland** context there was one route to participating in peace negotiations: women had to fit into certain spaces in order to receive funding, access and respect, and therefore the women's sector had shifted considerably over the last few decades. The women's sector was very politically active and put pressure on decision makers to make change, but in order for women to be involved in the peace process they had to call themselves peacebuilders and take a more apolitical and 'neutral' approach. The interviewee stated the importance of different roles and of how they complement each other, but stressed that they should not be conflated.

The interviewee summarised the impact that this has had in **Northern Ireland**: *"And so the women's sector gradually has to sort of shape themselves into this less contentious, less political, less activist role to be able to secure funding from organisations if they speak out too loudly against governments or against, you know, people who are involved in violence, they lose their funding, they lose their access, they're dismissed as just like irrational females. And so they learn how to adapt to this context."* This detracts from the value of women's rights activists participating in the process and the purpose of representation and participation.
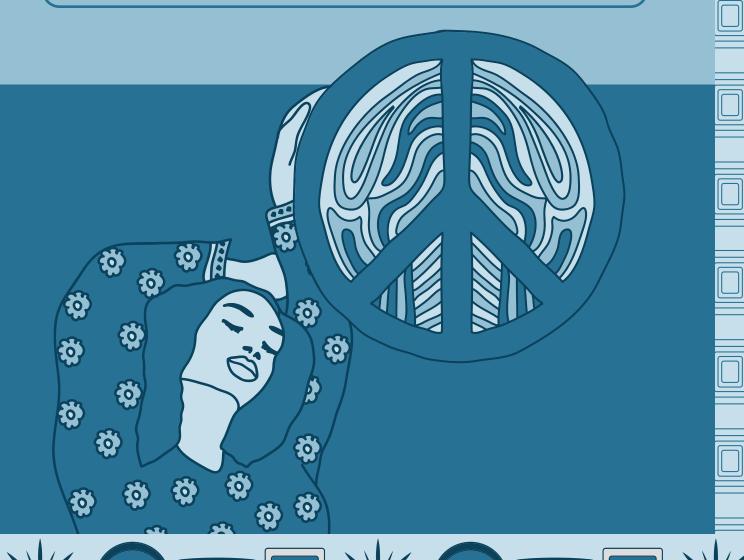
The same interviewee asked succinctly: *"So if we say that the only way for women's organisations to be involved in these spaces or to be successfully funded or resourced in these spaces is that they have*

to mimic peacebuilding…where is the space for the angry women? Who makes a change?" Donors and governments in particular must understand and appreciate the difference between the roles that women's rights activists play and those of more traditional actors like mediators, including women mediators.

This was further backed up by an interviewee working within the multilateral system, who flagged that the UN often works with the same organisations and women leaders: these contacts are usually approached via government officials and as they are constrained by political security dynamics and are more likely to be aligned to governments, the organisations that get the chance to collaborate with the international community are therefore more established and 'palatable' organisations. The interviewee flagged that this can be positive as these established organisations have strong expertise and more years of experience of their context, but they also therefore hold more power – and this blocks out space for younger and more diverse organisations, especially those whose politics and objectives do not align with traditional actors and their governments.

Recommendation: Donors and the international community must not dictate what language and frameworks proximate civil society should use within a conflict-affected context, to allow for political and non-neutral women's rights organisations to engage in peacebuilding efforts.

IV. Findings: How can the international community support this work?

i. Overview

The work of women peacebuilders outlined in the previous section is important and powerful, and – as discussed – it requires many external and contextual conditions for sustainable success. This research found that international support was a crucial component to all peacebuilding work. The contributions from the interviewees and the country papers flagged many ways that the international community impacts grassroots and proximate women peacebuilders who are striving to improve women's participation in peacebuilding. This section shares the findings from the research, and explores the benefits and challenges from interacting with the international community and how this can help to create an enabling environment for the innovative approaches discussed in the previous section.

Interviewees from international networks, government and multilateral organisations reported that the success stories shared were often a result of individuals pushing hard within their organisations – for example, Special Envoys or gender champions – rather than stemming from any specific structural approaches. One interviewee remarked that since gender champions and gender experts were embedded in government departments, other colleagues are now more gender literate and even pre-empt the interventions from gender champions – meaning that gender is mainstreamed in practice. This demonstrates a key learning that enthusiastic and well-resourced staff at the global level can make an outsized impact on women's participation and gender equality, and investing in gender champions can shift dynamics even in unsympathetic or hostile spaces. Pinning all this progress on one or a few staff members is not sustainable given high staff turnover levels, especially in civil service and government roles, so this underscores the need for institutionalisation of this work.

Recommendation: States and multilateral organisations must recruit and embed gender experts and gender champions within their staff, across all departments and remits including teams working on peace processes and conflict resolution. These gender experts must be appropriately resourced and supported to push for better women's participation across their work.

This section groups further reflections from interviewees and the country papers into four categories of government, the UN, civil society networks and donors – with the understanding that these groups overlap and are interconnected. The findings show how all these members of the international community can leverage their power and experience to provide support and complement the work of women peacebuilders. Funding in particular is highlighted as a crucial tool that fundamentally shapes this work and women's movements.

ii. International governments

States can provide bilateral resources, support and guidance, drawing on the lessons they have learnt in order to speak 'peer-to-peer' with other governments. One example raised was the **UK's** and **the Netherlands'** work with Colombia, where experts within the **UK** government on women's participation in peace processes accompanied a delegation to the **Colombian** peace talks. These experts provided guidance on what inclusion looks like in practice and how to make a peace process inclusive. They spoke directly to the **Colombia** government delegates and opposition groups, providing a 'neutral' yet respected voice in favour of improved gender inclusion in their advocacy, which led to more progressive and gender-sensitive peace negotiations.

One interviewee shared their experience of how the **UK** also provided support to civic dialogue processes led by the **Sudanese** Coordination of Civil Democratic Forces (also known as Taqaddum), which led to women comprising 40 per cent of participants in the dialogue process. While the full outcome will demonstrate whether this was an overall success, the **UK** was able to work together with women's rights organisations to promote a better understanding of gender within the process and increase women's involvement and engagement.

The interviewees who shared these examples both stressed the importance of states collaborating closely with proximate organisations, and that the work can only be successful with a level of detail that cannot be held in the Global North or any international state: *"Women's rights organisations are really crucial, They have the presence and the access that we [the international government] just don't have, and we can't go into a context and tell people what to do without understanding it. Those local organisations are really, really vital to bring that understanding of the complexities and the issues."* These processes must be iterative; new important civil society partners may arise, and an iterative process will ensure that all communities will be represented. Close partnership with diverse civil society will prevent tokenistic or isolated engagement.

However, in other cases raised by interviewees, while women peacebuilders have been able to engage with international governments, their policy recommendations were at times welcomed but rarely taken up. For example, interviewees complained of the lack of coherence from governments who profile themselves as feminist and support grassroots peace processes, but usually for projects of only three to five years: a period of time shorter than most peace processes. This means that improvements to women's participation are short-lived and lack the sustainable support needed to make structural changes.

Furthermore, the **UK, the Netherlands** and other states have not been leveraging their diplomatic relationships to promote women's participation when it comes to the example of **Afghanistan** and the Doha meetings. This is important for all parties. **Afghan** women and women's civil society must be actively invited, welcomed and taken seriously by government. Governments also need to set an example themselves and ensure their own delegations include women, which did not happen once the de-facto Taliban government took over in 2021. This is vital in order to ensure that women who are participation in peace processes can contribute their expertise to cover all issues, rather than just focusing on women's issues.

These examples give some guidance on how international governments can support grassroots women peacebuilders and women's rights organisations, by prioritising civil society and aiming to be inclusive of the whole population in all their activities.

iii. UN bodies

The UN can also play a key advocacy role in providing advice and supporting the convening of women peacebuilders. The example of the work of the UN in **Colombia** was discussed in both the Colombia country-focused paper and the interviews conducted for this paper, including how the UN financially and logistically supported the platform of women's organisations who worked for decades on the peace process and the promotion of peace more broadly. UN Women also advocated directly with the negotiating groups, at first focusing on convincing the opposing groups to include just one woman on each side, and using overlapping policy areas related to gender for the women on different sides to find consensus – initially on sexual violence response – before slowly opening up to wider policy areas.

As discussed in the introductory section, women's participation in formal UN-led peace processes has in fact decreased over recent years despite positive efforts and progress on other metrics, so the question remains over why this has not been a success story. Multiple interviewees referred to challenges in knowing who to engage with on peacebuilding in UN bodies, as well as duplicative processes by different international actors causing confusion and difficulties for women peacebuilders who are working to carve out space for themselves.

> **Recommendation:** Multilateral organisations must map out who is working on women's participation in peacebuilding at high levels and in decision-making spaces, and share this widely so that women peacebuilders have access to this information – leading to high-level processes becoming less opaque and more coordinated.

As noted by several interviewees who were involved in international and multilateral spaces, there remains a resistance to bringing in a gendered lens to peacebuilding. In **Yemen**, the Special Envoy for the Secretary-General for Yemen encouraged a quota of at least 30 per cent of women in delegations, but parties to the conflict continued to push back and reject this advocacy. Interviewees from the **Colombia** country paper shared that local authorities tend to be more conservative and do not have the political will to improve women's participation or end gender inequality, much less the resources to implement any progressive policies.

While women's participation is cited as a priority by key figures such as the UN Secretary-General and agencies including UN Women, in practice interviewees found that international security spaces were hostile to linking gender inequality to the WPS agenda, and decision makers often only consider actions credible if they are amenable to their perspective. One interviewee from a member state government summed the deprioritisation of gender by stating that: *"The burden of proof seems to be higher when it comes to everything gender and women's rights, than when it's about shoring up budgets for defence."*

Our research highlights the challenges that UN Women itself faces and how gender dynamics play out at all levels, with one interviewee sharing that UN Women is itself often marginalised within the UN system, and how UN Women staff are seen as *"difficult women"* and have been told that they hold a *"boutique mandate".* This demonstrates how gender stereotypes and deprioritisation of gender issues are upheld at all levels and emphasises the challenges that even women who are able to participate at multilateral levels face. This paper's recommendation to fund and resource gender experts and gender champions is one approach to address this but must be accompanied by strong political leadership in support of ending gender inequalities.

Recommendation: States and multilateral organisations must train all staff on issues around women's participation and gender equality, so that they understand the gendered impacts of conflict and how to better support women peacebuilders, and staff can be supported to include gender in all their work.

UN bodies such as UN Women also faced criticism from some interviewees for working with the same small set of organisations, which are already part of the establishment; this perpetuates existing power imbalances.

The case study of the **Syrian** Women's Advisory Board, discussed in this paper, gives further examples of how the UN and UN Women's management of women's participation led to harm, and the UN was criticised by **Syrian** feminists for manipulating the group that was most closely consulted with in the peace process.

These are some examples of the ways that UN bodies and multilateral agencies can support grassroots women peacebuilders and engage in conflict-affected contexts with women peacebuilders and women's participation as a priority. This shows the potential for positively impacting women's participation when the specific role of multilaterals is considered and leveraged.

iv.   Civil society networks

Intermediary groups, such as international civil society networks, were also noted by interviewees to have a crucial role in supporting women's rights organisations to liaise with governments and multilaterals. One interviewee cited the difficulties of communication between governments and grassroots organisations: governments often want consultations to deliver a high-level political strategy, which grassroots groups may not want – or have time – to focus their energies on. Intermediary groups from the international community can support with translating stories into strategies and languages that decision makers respond to, without detracting from the time and capacity spent on peacebuilding within fragile contexts. This role requires trust from both sides and management of relationships by intermediaries, which also requires a lot of skill and experience.

The responsibility and expectation to understand the internal political complexities and nuances of multiple donor states should not have to sit with women's rights organisations from conflict-affected contexts, whose time and capacity is already stretched. Therefore, intermediary groups, including civil society organisations and international networks, can and must play this role to help alleviate

the burden. [LEAP4Peace Consortium partner GAPS engages directly with the **UK** government, assessing its work on delivering the National Action Plan through annual 'shadow reports'](), which pull together evidence and calls to action from proximate women's rights organisations from conflict-affected contexts, utilising existing relationships with these target decision makers.

The role of these networks, as well as national civil society networks, was mentioned by several interviewees as a solution to poor consultation. One interviewee said that governments consulting with local civil society and women's rights organisations often approach the same few people. This issue is highlighted through this paper, including in the case study on the **Syrian** Women's Advisory Board, and can lead to elitism and replicate harmful and exclusive power structures. It can also lead to over-consultation of already stretched women peacebuilders. By their nature, civil society networks have an overview of actors and a broader scope of contacts that is regularly expanding, and by tapping into this, governments and multilaterals can widen their own networks and ensure they are not just speaking with like-minded groups or allies.

> **Recommendation:** The international community must strive to consult and collaborate with different groups of women in conflict-affected contexts and not work with the same group of actors, through their own efforts and through working with civil society networks.

Multiple interviewees commended this ability of civil society networks to foster knowledge exchange and facilitate new relationships. These networks can connect organisations in conflict-affected contexts, linking up relevant ministries with the ministries of other countries, enabling cross-learning and strengthening their work. An example was provided of the work of a **Dutch** civil society network focused on gender equality, WO=MEN, which has connected women peacebuilders in **Ukraine** with women peacebuilders in **Colombia** who have experience engaging in peace negotiations. The interviewee shared how government departments and civil servants responsible for women's participation can also be introduced so that they can share experiences and best practice directly. This type of international support does not conflate contexts, but instead allows practitioners to find parallels and transferable lessons.

Civil society networks, and their important yet under-recognised role in supporting proximate women peacebuilders, should be considered key partners by other members of the international community.

v. Funding partners

"Funding is a political decision"

Funding partners shape the sector at large by deciding who to fund and engage with. The entry points to international decision-making spaces start at the government and donor level. Funding partners create programmes that fund women's organisations; these organisations are then invited

by other funding partners and governments to join multilateral spaces as they are therefore seen as credible organisations that can fulfil funding partner requirements. However, there is little actual agency as the invited organisations are already funded and trusted, as they meet the funding partner's requirements and have proven amenable. These funding partners include trusts and foundations, national governments and multilateral agencies.

Therefore, funding partners have a significant responsibility in deciding which women's rights organisations and peacebuilding organisations to engage with, as who they engage with become legitimised in the international community. Women in the diaspora who are given priority for consultations by the Global North are often those who already had a network that they were part of, which one interviewee highlighted as a pattern seen in the **Afghanistan** context. It helped them to be taken more seriously as a spokesperson, but this does not take into account the reasons for why a particular woman peacebuilder was previously engaged in formal networks. Class, religion, ethnicity, being part of a marginalised group, education and geographical location can all be barriers to being part of these networks.

An interviewee working within the **UK** government shared how the **UK** insists that all its programmes have gender equality as a primary or secondary objective and has recently intentionally moved to being even stricter on what it means by gender inclusion and has become willing to deprioritise funding organisations and networks that do not have a gender-transformative lens to their work. This will influence who receives funding and how organisations looking for funding prioritise mainstreaming gender inclusion within their work. This has some positive outcomes, although the knock-on effect of funding partners shaping civil society may reflect a patriarchal and colonial approach which removes agency and self-determination from local civil society – who are the experts in their context. It can also risk fuelling anti-gender backlash from those that see gender equality as a 'Western' ideology, rather than a universal call from progressives within all societies. Nonetheless, this approach was welcomed by most interviewees.

> One interviewee shared that the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) has tried to take a different approach, as it mostly funds organisations that are first-time recipients of UN funds, which tend to be younger and more diverse organisations and are more likely to be outside of the capital city. These groups also tend to be more progressive and politically active. This has become a route for government funding partners to discreetly financially support women's rights organisations, opposition groups and those opposing military rule, despite the political situation and diplomatic relations. By funding these types of organisations, the WPHF is supporting them to be seen as more established and reputable in the eyes of the international community and other funding partners, which may enable them to get more funding and access to decision-making spaces.

Recommendation: Donors must prioritise gender equality programming in all bilateral aid and multilateral programming, with flexible funding models and the explicit objective for this to improve gender equality and increase women's participation in peace processes.

The need for more flexible funding that takes the lead from proximate women peacebuilders was discussed in the section on *Adapting and working holistically,* which demonstrates the challenges

that women peacebuilders experience when navigating the traditional funding partner landscape. Funding partners should recognise the vital role of women's rights organisations and women peacebuilders in their community, and adjust their funding practices to be conflict sensitive, reflecting the holistic nature of women's rights organisations that are delivering peacebuilding work in practice. For example, funding partners may require national registration, but in **Myanmar** this effectively requires women's rights organisations and women peacebuilders to register with the military junta, which puts them and their constituents at risk of violence and repression, and discourages organisations from even applying for funding. This recommendation has been made by women's rights organisations for many years but funding partners have not altered their funding practices in response. The reason for the lack of substantial shifts in practice is not clear and could be investigated further in future research.

This outsized responsibility and impact of funding partner actions and decisions is key to enabling women peacebuilders to successfully undertake transformative approaches and shift the gendered and elitist dynamics within proximate civil society.

Establishing consultation mechanisms: The influence of the international community on the Syrian Women's Advisory Board

"Who are they representing? Are they actually representing the Syrian women?"
- Research participant

The **Syrian** Women's Advisory Board (SWAB) was founded in 2016 with the support of UN Women and the UN Department of Political Affairs. This was welcomed as a great opportunity to consider the perspectives of women in peace negotiations in **Syria**, following advocacy from **Syrian** feminists and women's rights activists, but over time the group has received criticism for becoming de-politicised.

Some interviewees held the group up as an example of best practice to be replicated in other contexts, and indeed the intentions behind the establishment of the group were strong and the way that the group was consulted and integrated into the mainstream peace processes have been applauded. One interviewee who was closely involved with the Board described the original group as comprising well-known feminist activists within **Syria**, who had credibility within their community even though they did not always share the same views and perspectives.

However, interviewees also shared criticism that although the group was initially very well-funded and supported, SWAB was eventually disempowered by UN (over)intervention, purportedly on behalf of the **Syrian** regime. They influenced and limited the autonomy of the Board's leader and stopped the Board members from implementing their plans, such as holding briefings with the community in order to communicate the outcomes of the group.

A second round of advisers was then appointed. One interviewee shared her analysis that these new advisers were mostly young activists who did not hold the same extent of experience and community integration as the initial group, and were selected by UN Women rather than being recommended by the community. SWAB came to be seen as an elite group of women and the attention of decision makers then focused on that group, to the detriment of the constituencies that the women were supposed to represent. One interviewee asked the questions: *"So who are they representing? Are they actually representing the Syrian women and, you know, do the Syrian women locally know what this group is actually doing and seeing and advocating for?".*

The uneven connection between the communities affected by the conflict and this group of women advocating on their behalf did not deliver the representation that was promised. A key learning to take away is that once an advisory board is convened, the job is not done – the group needs to continuously consult with diverse demographics of women and other marginalised groups and ensure that their voices and asks are raised in all decision-making spaces. One interviewee concluded that a "woman's board" will not work, and that any advisory body should be feminist and gender sensitive in its inception: women who are against human rights and its treaties such as the UN Declaration of Human Rights and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination

Against Women must not be included. There should not be an assumption that women are neutral towards the concept of women's participation and gender equality.

Multilaterals and the international community need to widen their reach to organisations beyond the normal points of contact, which are usually organisations that are already in positions of power and which are seen as acceptable by those in leadership. By expanding the invite list, the international community not only provides access to women who previously could not participate in peacebuilding but also provides legitimacy and experience to these organisations, which enables them to improve their participation. The international community must ask themselves what the purpose of improving representation is. Rather than pushing for representation for representation's sake and tokenising women, we must strive for a positive impact which truly furthers women's perspectives in peacebuilding.

Another concern regarding SWAB was the separation of women from decision-making spaces and how these women were sidelined from the real negotiations. A separate structure like SWAB is useful for various reasons and allows women involved to build networks and share advocacy approaches, but women's participation cannot stop there and must also be mainstreamed into the official and formal structures of peacebuilding and negotiations.

This contrasts with the **Syrian** Women's Political Movement, set up in 2017 by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). The movement aimed to reach 30 per cent participation during the **Syrian** peace process, coordinating women and men from all regions of **Syria**, including diaspora groups and grassroots activists. Interviewees involved in the **Syrian** women's movements reflected that this group was mostly independent from the international community's control and therefore was more transparent and positive.

> **Recommendation:** Women delegations and advisory boards for peace processes must be comprised of the constituencies that they are representing, with a broad range of diverse backgrounds, and they must regularly consult with and be accountable to the communities most impacted by conflict. Participants must also share alignment with core human rights and gender equality agendas.

V. Concluding insights

The research undertaken for this report series proves once again the importance of investing in and supporting grassroots women peacebuilders and identifies the necessary conditions for their success. All interviewees and the findings from each country-focused paper emphasised the impact of amplifying the voices of women from other countries, and using the access stakeholders have to international decision-making spaces to invite activists from the Global South. This has the benefit of more meaningful participation from women directly affected by conflict but it also creates a route to further success, as these women gain access to high-level spaces, have that experience, and can even leverage their positions to invite other women's rights activists to these spaces. This positive cycle of participation is crucial to so many success stories.

Throughout the paper, key recommendations with tangible calls to action have been highlighted and collated.

The recommendations in this paper complement each other and all depend on a strong and evidenced understanding of the specific dynamics and contexts that they will be implemented in, accompanied by a gendered lens based on meaningful collaboration with proximate women peacebuilders.

> **The three summary recommendations:**
>
> 1. Advocate for the inclusion of women representatives on all sides and at every stage of a peace process, enable them to leverage diplomatic relationships to insist on gender representation
> 2. Recruit and embed gender experts within their staff working on peace processes and conflict resolution, as these champions are key for pushing change
> 3. Support and fund alliances and networks of women peacebuilders and women's rights organisations to amplify and accelerate improvement in women's meaningful participation

i. Recommendations for multilateral organisations and bilateral states

- Multilateral organisations must **map out who is working on women's participation** in peacebuilding at high levels and in decision-making spaces, and share this widely so that women peacebuilders have access to this information and high-level processes are less opaque and more coordinated.

- States and multilateral organisations must advocate for the **inclusion of women representatives on all sides and at every stage of a peace process**, from consultations and civic dialogue to the negotiations and final peace agreements. This can include accompanying delegations, providing technical expertise, sharing lessons learnt and leveraging diplomatic relationships to insist on gender representation.

- States and multilateral organisations must recruit and **embed gender experts and gender champions within their staff** across all departments and remits, including teams working on peace processes and conflict resolution. These gender experts must be appropriately resourced and supported to push for better women's participation across their work.

- States and multilateral organisations must train all staff on issues around women's participation and gender equality, so that they **understand the gendered impacts of conflict and how to better support women peacebuilders**.

- The international community must strive to consult and **collaborate with different groups of women in conflict-affected contexts and not work with the same group of actors**, through their own efforts and through working with civil society networks.

- Women delegations and advisory boards for peace processes must **be comprised of the constituencies that they are representing, with a broad range of diverse backgrounds**, and they must regularly consult with and be accountable to the communities most impacted by conflict. Participants must also share alignment with central human rights and gender equality agendas.

ii. Recommendations for funding partners

- Donors must prioritise gender equality programming in all bilateral aid and multilateral programming, with the **explicit objective of improving gender equality and increasing women's participation** in peace processes.

- Donors must support and **fund alliances and networks of women peacebuilders, women's rights organisations and national civil society networks**, which provide spaces for solidarity, knowledge exchange, training and relationship forming.

- Donors and the international community must not dictate what language and frameworks the proximate civil society use within a conflict-affected context, to **allow for political and non-neutral women's rights organisations to engage in peacebuilding efforts**.

- Donors must fund peace education and sensitisation programmes, where women peacebuilders, women's rights organisations and national civil society networks can provide training and education to women from diverse backgrounds and regions about peacebuilding and the connection between peace processes and their lives.

- Donors must radically shift their funding approach for women peacebuilders, women's rights organisations and national civil society networks working on peace to **long-term, core and flexible funding** in recognition of the expertise held by these groups, the complexities of working in conflict-affected settings and the need for adaptable activities and objectives.

- Donors must tailor their funding offers to specific contexts through **research and consultation of proximate women peacebuilders, women's rights organisations and civil society networks**, to create programming around specific needs; for example, savings and credit associations in Burundi or internet connectivity in Myanmar.

VI. LEAP4Peace Consortium partners and project funder

Burundi Leadership Training Program

The Burundi Leadership Training Program (BLTP) is a non-profit organisation registered in Burundi. Its overall goal is to build leadership capacity in Burundi, aimed at both women and men. The BLTP assists politicians and political parties, as well as future political and civil leaders, in acquiring tools and techniques for non-violent communication, negotiation and conflict management. NIMD's collaboration with the BLTP began in 2008, and since then they have carried out multiple programmes dealing with party capacity support, dialogue between political actors and schools of politics. Gender considerations are always integral to the BLTP's work, and specific projects have been aimed at women leadership at the community level, as well as women within political parties, encouraging them to develop priority agendas and ways to advocate those agendas.

Gender Action for Peace and Security

Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) is a UK-based network of development, human rights, humanitarian and peacebuilding NGOs that lobby on key issues relating to UNSCR 1325. Hosted by Saferworld, it supports international advocacy on WPS. GAPS supports the international knowledge, lobbying and advocacy programming for the LEAP4Peace Consortium, in partnership with NIMD, and connects this to the work taking place on advocacy in the programme countries.

Gender Equality Network Myanmar

Gender Equality Network (GEN) Myanmar is a diverse and inclusive network of over 100 civil society organisations and national and international NGOs, all working to bring about gender equality and the fulfilment of women's rights in Myanmar. The organisation was formed in 2008 in response to Cyclone Nargis, under the name of the Women's Protection Technical Working Group. Since then, GEN has evolved to become the leading network organisation addressing the transformation of norms, systems, structures and practices in order to enable gender equality and gender justice in Myanmar.

Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy

The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) is an international NGO based in The Hague, the Netherlands, and also serves as the head office of the NIMD global network. Since 2000, NIMD has worked on democratisation, inclusion and dialogue programmes in over 30 countries around the world. NIMD has experience in implementing large multiannual, multi-country programmes aimed at capacity building for civil society organisations, facilitating dialogue between political actors, and supporting women's political participation. It is important to stress that NIMD always works with all political parties using a non-partisan approach. For

instance, NIMD mobilises political actors to assess and identify their own organisations' internal barriers to women's participation, and to design and implement regulations for overcoming these barriers. Notably, between 2014 and 2017 NIMD implemented the 'Respect for Women's Political Rights (WPR) programme' under the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Human Rights Fund, and considers the inclusion and participation of women in politics as a key priority in the Multi-Annual Strategy for 2021–2025.

Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (Colombia)

NIMD Colombia was established in 2014 as a country office of NIMD. Previously, NIMD had worked closely with partners such as the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, UNDP and Cordaid to implement its programmes. Over the years, the Colombia office has grown to become an important actor in the democracy support landscape in Colombia, implementing several projects focused on peacebuilding, democracy education, and women's political participation and dialogue. All programmes are aimed at strengthening Colombian democracy and at increasing the levels of representation, promotion, inclusion and political participation of underrepresented groups in society. In recognition of this role, NIMD was named as the international verification organisation for overseeing the application of the Agreement on Political Participation of the Peace Agreement (2016).

Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (Myanmar)

Established in 2014, NIMD Myanmar has facilitated multiparty dialogue and democracy education across six states and regions, engaging over 300 attendees from diverse ethnic and political backgrounds. Despite disruptions from the coup, NIMD continues to support Myanmar's democratic aspirations through innovative solutions. Key achievements include training over 600 politicians, with 41 elected to office in 2020 – a third of whom were women. Post-coup, NIMD has re-launched democracy school trainings for youth, women and ethnic leaders, and organised networking events for women political leaders. The MyDemocracy School app, launched in 2022, provides comprehensive democracy education accessible both online and offline. All programmes aim to create a conducive environment for women's full inclusion in political decision-making, recognising their crucial role in peacebuilding and community cohesion. NIMD remains committed to empowering youth, women and ethnic leaders to play vital roles in Myanmar's future democratic processes.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

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Further information about the LEAP4Peace Consortium can be found at https://nimd.org/programmes/the-leap4peace-consortium/