

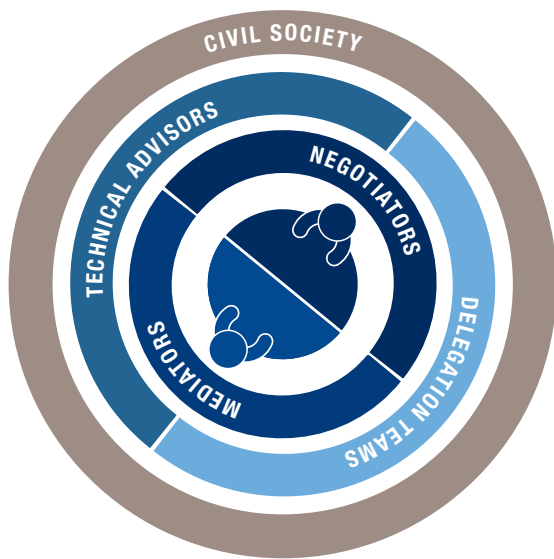


Women From Civil Society Leading Peace

Women make important contributions to the attainment of peace, but they remain grossly underrepresented in official peacemaking processes. This study demonstrates how women from civil society in the Philippines, Northern Ireland, Guatemala, and Kenya accessed and shaped peace processes in their countries. It illustrates that women from civil society have greatest impact on peace agreements—making them more comprehensive and durable—if they are involved in official roles during the peace process.

How Women From Civil Society Influence the Peace Process

- Including women from civil society in official roles—such as negotiators, technical advisors, or on delegation teams—is critical to the creation of a sustainable peace.
- In official roles, women help move parties closer to a peace agreement. When women from civil society are at the peace table, they serve as “honest brokers” who speak to all parties involved (N. Ireland) and their “meticulousness” in drafting language brings opposing sides to consensus, leaving little room for ambiguity that could later contribute to the dissolution of a fragile agreement (Philippines).
- Although less effective, women from civil society can also influence a peace agreement when they are not at the peace table, but instead have formal direct avenues to access the negotiations. These mechanisms, such as official consultative bodies, enable women to impart an agenda into the peace negotiations through a systematized process (Guatemala).
- Ad hoc mechanisms are an even less effective way for women from civil society to “pressure” those at the peace table on key issues from the outside (Kenya).
- Women from civil society help craft more comprehensive agreements, as their goals support both ending war and building peace.
- Building capacity for women in civil society is an important investment for sustainable peace. Within the context of negotiations, women facilitate consensus-building discussions and champion issues that help rebuild society. When peace processes begin, women must be ready to effectively formulate forward-thinking policy proposals and strategically navigate an arena that has historically locked them out.



Women in civil society tend to prioritize larger social issues beyond the cessation of hostilities, including:



HUMAN RIGHTS



DEMOCRACY



GENDER EQUALITY



EDUCATION



JUSTICE



DEVELOPMENT



RECONCILIATION

“When women are involved in the peace process... their presence influences the deliberations as well as the output of the negotiations.”

—Mohager Iqbal, Chair, MILF Negotiation Panel, the Philippines

THE PHILIPPINES

CONTEXT

The 2001–2014 peace negotiations between the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) addressed the separatist struggle of the Moro people.

ACCESS

⊕ Women from civil society were involved at every level: as negotiators, delegation team members, and issue advocates (via official although indirect mechanisms, such as facilitated dialogues).

OUTCOME

⊕ Women’s “meticulousness” facilitated the drafting of a detailed agreement, leaving little room for ambiguity that could later contribute to the agreement’s dissolution.

⊕ Explicit gender provisions were included throughout the power-sharing agreement, such as references to women’s meaningful political participation and the designation of funds set aside for women’s programs.

- ⊕ Positive access or outcome
- ⊖ Negative access or outcome

NORTHERN IRELAND

CONTEXT

The 1996–1998 peace process ended the 30-year sectarian conflict between Protestant and Catholic communities known as “the Troubles.”

ACCESS

⊕ Protestant and Catholic women from civil society created a political party, the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition (NIWC), to gain official representation at the peace table. NIWC members served as negotiators and delegation team members in the peace process.

⊕ The NIWC solicited input from their broader civil society networks.

OUTCOME

⊕ The NIWC were trusted intermediaries who brokered discussions between opposing parties.

⊕ The agreement reflected the NIWC’s agenda on critical issues, such as the creation of a Civic Forum, victims’ rights, reconciliation, mixed housing, integrated education, and women’s political participation.

GUATEMALA

CONTEXT

The 1991–1996 peace process between the Government of Guatemala and the *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (URNG) ended the 36-year civil war.

ACCESS

⊖ Although women from civil society were largely absent from the peace table, ⊕ women formed the Women’s Sector and accessed peace talks indirectly through the official parallel civil society consultative mechanism, the *Asamblea de la Sociedad Civil* (ASC).

OUTCOME

⊕ The agreement reflected key priorities of women from civil society, such as land access, development assistance, ending discrimination against indigenous women, and support for women’s rights at home and work.

⊖ However, because women were not directly engaged, the final agreement language was a watered-down version of the original language they had proposed.

KENYA

CONTEXT

The mediation process following Kenya’s 2007/08 post-election violence led to the National Accord and Reconciliation Act.

ACCESS

⊕ Although women from civil society were not at the peace table and did not have an official mechanism to access the mediation, a female mediator, Graça Machel, reached out to civil society groups.

⊕ Women from civil society formed coalitions, unified messaging across coalitions, then relied on ad hoc strategies—such as informal parallel consultations and proxies—to influence the parties to the mediation.

OUTCOME

⊖ The agreement did not explicitly reference women or gender, perhaps because women from civil society were involved on an ad hoc and indirect basis.

⊕ Many issues for which women from civil society lobbied made it into the agreement, but distilling influence is difficult as many CSOs had similar messages.

“[The NIWC] played a hugely disproportionate role—disproportionate to their vote and to their numbers at the table—in the outcome.”

—George Mitchell, chief mediator, Northern Ireland