Increasing women’s participation in peace processes is an important goal for the international community, and evidence suggests that more inclusive peace processes involving meaningful contributions by women are more likely to help achieve sustainable peace.¹ Today, women remain largely excluded from formal Track I peace processes, even as they play a major role in informal Track II peace processes.²

This brief offers a systematic review of women’s extensive, varied involvement in informal peace processes. It finds that women advocate for peace in a variety of different ways, even when formal negotiations are closed to them, including meaningful advocacy for a more gender-just post-conflict society. Supporting women in their informal efforts to shape the peace is as important of a goal as advocating for more women at the formal negotiating table. Women who are excluded from formal negotiations have voices that deserve amplification, alternative visions of the peace that warrant consideration, and roles to play in helping societies confront the complex legacies of conflict. Better incorporating women’s Track II initiatives into formal peace processes would offer a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to peacebuilding, fostering local ownership and buy-in for negotiations while elevating the concerns and expertise of those excluded from elite negotiations between warring parties.³
Key Findings

Women are important actors in informal peace processes and their involvement spans a range of activities, yet this engagement goes largely unrecognized and undocumented in formal negotiation spaces and literature. Seventy-one percent of informal peace processes we surveyed show clear evidence of involvement from identifiable women’s groups.

Women’s roles in Track II peace processes are critical to inclusive peacebuilding and range from advocating for their own inclusion in the formal peace talks to pushing for democracy and gender equality. Women also organize for peace and advise those formally involved in negotiations. In every case we studied, women advocated for gender equality in a post-conflict society.

Women’s Participation in Informal Peace Processes

Formal or Track I processes are official negotiations between warring parties, while Track II diplomacy encompasses unofficial dialogues involving civil society actors. Drawing on existing scholarship, we define informal or Track II processes as diplomatic or consultative processes between or among groups who may not be principal parties to the conflict, and who are concerned with contributing to war-ending negotiations. While many studies investigate women’s participation in formal peace processes and the multiple modalities of women’s inclusion in peace talks, we undertook the first systematic effort to catalogue women’s involvement in informal peace processes.

Women are largely excluded from Track I peace processes—2012 UN Women data indicates that only 2.5 percent of chief mediators and 9 percent of mediators in peace processes are women—but our research reveals that they play major roles in Track II peace processes. In contrast to formal peace talks, informal negotiations are a vibrant sphere for women’s advocacy for peace.

We conducted a three-stage research project to determine the nature of women’s involvement in Track II processes, first assessing all peace processes resulting in peace agreements, then mapping cases according to the level of international involvement in the process and the kind of links between Tracks I and II, and finally examining nine cases for the roles that women played in advocating for peace within informal peace processes.

We found informal peace processes in more than half of all the processes we surveyed and, of those, have clear evidence of women’s involvement in almost three-fourths. Out of the 63 formal peace processes we surveyed, we found 38 cases with parallel informal peace processes (60 percent), where civil society groups and other advocates pushed for peace alongside the formal processes. In 71 percent of these informal peace processes (27 of 38), we found clear evidence of involvement from identifiable women’s groups.
The majority of informal peace processes therefore include concerted advocacy for peace by women, reinforcing what we know from the vibrant world of women's civil society organizations. Women may be excluded from the halls of power when combatants broker war-ending deals, but they are not passive bystanders while others forge peace. Instead, we find that women adopt at least eight different roles advocating for peace alongside formal peace processes:

1. Advocate for their own inclusion in the formal peace talks
2. Legitimate the negotiations and organize for peace through public protests and advocacy campaigns
3. Serve as advocates for one side in the conflict
4. Engage in local-level conflict resolution initiatives
5. Provide information and expert advice to negotiators involved in Track I
6. Advocate for inclusion in post-conflict government
7. Advocate for gender equality
8. Engage in pro-democracy efforts

Policymakers and analysts often focus on increasing the number of women in formal peace processes. While this is an important goal, inclusion at formal talks is only one way women advocate for or advance peace on the ground. The table below summarizes the roles we found across the nine cases we examined in depth. We organized these roles according to type of activity, beginning with advocacy for inclusion in talks. Roles 2 through 5 capture women's activities during peace processes and conflict, while roles 6 through 8 describe women's advocacy for the post-conflict period.

In nearly every case we surveyed, women advocate for their inclusion in formal talks—and for gender equality in a post-conflict society. When faced with the opportunity to remake the state after war, women overwhelmingly seek a more gender-just world.
### Women’s Roles in Informal Peace Processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peace Process</th>
<th>1 Inclusion in Formal Peace Talks</th>
<th>2 Legitimating Negotiation/Organizing for Peace</th>
<th>3 Affiliation with Warring Parties</th>
<th>4 Engaging in Local Conflict Resolution</th>
<th>5 Providing Information to Track I Mediators/Negotiators</th>
<th>6 Advocating for Inclusion in Post-Conflict Government</th>
<th>7 Advocating for Gender Equality</th>
<th>8 Advocating for Pro-Democracy Systems</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mali, National Pact, 1992 (Formal relationship, high involvement)</td>
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<td>Darfur, Darfur Peace Agreement or Abuja Peace Agreement, 2006 (Formal relationship, high involvement)</td>
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<td>Papua New Guinea, Bougainville Peace Agreement, 2001 (Mixed informal and formal relationships, medium involvement)</td>
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<td>Ivory Coast, Ouagadougou Political Agreement, 2007 (No relationship, high involvement)</td>
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<td>Liberia, Accra Agreement, 2003 (Mixed informal and formal relationships, high involvement)</td>
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<td>The Philippines, Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, 2014 (Formal relationship, high involvement)</td>
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<td>Yemen, National Dialogue Conference, 2014 (Formal relationship, high involvement)</td>
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<td>Myanmar, Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, 2015 (Mixed relationship, medium involvement)</td>
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<td>Colombia, Colombian Peace Agreement, 2016 (Formal relationship, medium involvement)</td>
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Case Studies: Women’s Involvement in Track II Peace Processes in Liberia and the Philippines

Our study mapped nine cases. Here, we spotlight two—peace processes in Liberia and the Philippines—to illustrate the critical roles that women play in informal peace processes. The cases highlight an important implication of our research: that mediators to formal peace processes can integrate and amplify the ideas, concerns, and solutions that women in informal peace processes advocate for, sometimes by integrating the women themselves into the formal process.

Liberia: The Impact of Women on the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA)

The Track II peace processes in Liberia demonstrate how women can play diverse roles in the peace effort, including legitimating formal negotiations by organizing meetings and consultations with warring parties and negotiators and advocating for peace through mass campaigns and sit-ins. For example, two weeks before the signing of the CPA, women’s groups met with President Charles Taylor to urge him to join the formal negotiations.50 Warring parties perceived women as “peaceful” and “nonthreatening,” which enabled them to access government officials and rebel groups.51

The conflict had regional dimensions, and women’s groups, such as the Mano River Women’s Peace Network (MARWOPNET) and the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET), also organized regional consultations with similar groups in Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire.52 During these regional consultations, Liberian refugees and Ghanaian women barricaded the venue of the peace talks to ensure that the parties remained inside until they reached an agreement, literally drawing on their positions outside the room to compel peacemaking.53 The 2003 Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace campaign was also critical to establishing WIPNET and MARWOPNET as major actors for peace and contributed to the formalization of the Track I-Track II relationship. This campaign led to consultations with the formal mediation team and the obtention of observer status to witness the 2003 formal negotiations that led to the CPA.54 While WIPNET declined the observer status, a delegation of eight women represented MARWOPNET as observers of the Track I negotiations.55

Refrraming Women’s Roles in Peace Processes: Beyond the Negotiating Table
This Track II process was successful in clearly defining its goals and strategy while ensuring maximum coordination between various groups and networks of women. For instance, they organized a one-day meeting before the formal peace talks to produce the Golden Tulip Declaration, a common platform of women's goals and demands, which called for meaningful participation of women in Track I and gender equality with 50 percent representation of women in the transitional leadership. The women engaged in informal diplomacy also demanded greater women's involvement in post-conflict institutions, including “all components of the current and in-coming Liberian Government...and within all structures to lead the post-conflict peace building process.”

Women involved in Track II diplomacy shaped the 2014 CAB by maintaining a formal relationship with women involved in the Track I peace process, who represented one-quarter of the total signatories to the CAB and pushed for broader inclusion of women. The extensive involvement of women in the Track I peace talks helped women involved in Track II by channeling their voices at the formal negotiation table. As Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, chairperson of the peace negotiation and CAB signatory, noted, “[We] were backed up by a strong and active contingent of women outside of the formal table. From them, we got the strength and fortitude to see the process through, a delightful dynamic of women inspiring fellow women.”

Women's groups successfully organized for peace and legitimated the formal negotiations. Coronel-Ferrer also stressed the important contribution of WE ACT 1325, a group of activists who pushed for gender provisions in the negotiated settlement. Women's groups also played a critical role in providing information and expertise to Track I negotiators by consulting on negotiation and cease-fire monitoring. For instance, the 2006 Mindanao Women's Peace Summit formulated...
recommendations for both parties in the peace talks based on grassroots consultations in the six regions of Mindanao. The Sulong CARHRIHL network also provided guidance on United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and facilitated the drafting of the national action plan, which was adopted by the Philippines government in 2010. Women also advocated for more gender-just post-conflict institutions, such as the institutionalization of UNSCR 1325 and the establishment of a Civilian Protection Component with 70 percent female membership. This unit monitored the cease-fire and worked to protect civilian communities and deepen the local buy-in for the peace process.

The Track II peace process, and its strong relationship with women negotiators in Track I, was a success: the CAB and its annexes mentioned provisions on women's meaningful participation in decision- and policy-making through reserved seats for women in parliament and “at least one woman appointed in the Bangsamoro Cabinet.” The new Bangsamoro Agreement also seeks to ensure women's rights and protection from sexual violence and establish mechanisms for consultations with women and participation in the Bangsamoro Transition Authority.

Conclusion: Why Does This Matter?

The study we summarize in this brief provides the first systematic survey of women's roles in informal peace processes. This in and of itself is significant, but there are clear policy implications that follow from our findings as well. Major international efforts to increase women's participation in peace processes, including UNSCR 1325, have focused on integrating more women into Track I. Inclusion in formal peace processes is an important goal, but, as we approach 1325's 20th anniversary, parity in formal processes remains distant, even while women have been active advocates for peace in multiple other ways.

Policymakers and analysts need to reframe the discourse around women's involvement in peace processes. Beyond emphasizing their absence at the formal negotiating table, women must be recognized for the diverse roles they play in forging peace.

Acknowledging the roles that women do play in service of the peace enables us to democratize peace processes in a variety of ways beyond representation in formal peace processes. Women are proactive, important participants in conflict resolution—actively excluded but not absent. Both mediators and parties to formal negotiations benefit when they leverage, incorporate, and address the grassroots work of women involved in Track II peace processes.
Women bring unique issues to the conversations about peace and justice in post-conflict societies. These issues warrant more attention.

We need to understand women’s involvement in Track II and how the important concerns they raise complement the concerns of participants in Track I. Without this critical knowledge, we cannot make peace agreements and post-conflict states more representative of a broad range of interests and needs. Amplifying and centering women in informal peace processes as they strive for equality and inclusion is a key strategy for building an inclusive, transformative, and durable peace.

Women involved in Track II processes play a major role in local conflict resolution. Regional mediation networks should coordinate with local peacebuilders and leverage that engagement to help them secure more resources for their work and reach larger audiences.

Connecting women involved in Track II peace processes with regional or international networks could increase visibility and access to resources. Working with regional mediator networks—such as the Nordic Women Mediators, FemWise-Africa, the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, and the Commonwealth Women’s Network—could help build local mediators’ platforms, amplify Track II voices, and increase coordination among diverse women’s groups.

End Notes

4 Academics and practitioners lack consensus on the definition of Track II peace processes. Practitioners refrain from establishing a specific definition to allow for more flexibility, while academics argue that the lack of clear definition is one of the multitrack approach’s weaknesses (Peter Jones, Track Two Diplomacy in Theory and Practice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press: 2015), 2). The effectiveness of Track II processes is also difficult to measure. Challenges include a lack of data access (Peter Dixon and Mark Simmons, “The Role of Track Two Initiatives in Sudanese Peace Processes,” Accord 18 (2006): 60) and whether they influence Track I processes or not (Nathaniel Allen and Travis Sharp, “Peace Process: A New Evaluation Framework for Track II Diplomacy,” International Negotiation (2017), 22(1): 99).
7 Chang et al., Patty, Women Leading Peace, 22.
8 First, we established a comprehensive list of Track II peace processes in civil conflicts, based on peace agreements since the end of the Cold War, that captures the involvement of women’s civil society groups. Next, we developed a typology based on the level of international involvement (none, low, medium, high) and the nature of the relationship between Track I and Track II processes (none, informal, formal, mixed) to narrow the number of cases. At a later stage, we chose nine diverse cases that maximized variation on the above two variables to map women’s roles in informal peace processes. For a full discussion of our methods, see Dayal and Christien, “Women’s Participation.”
10 Ben Messaoud, “Le mouvement.”
12 Wing, Démocratie malienne, 101, 226.
14 Women’s Participation in Peace Negotiations.
15 Women’s Participation in Peace Negotiations, 3.