Advancing Women’s Participation in Track II Peace Processes: Good and emerging practices

By Agathe Christien | February 2020

1. Introduction

Diplomacy and peace processes are multitracked. They happen at multiple levels, from official peace negotiations to informal peacebuilding initiatives. Meaningful participation of women across all tracks is essential to building sustainable peace. While women remain underrepresented in official Track I peace processes, Track II diplomacy has offered women a space to meaningfully participate in conflict-resolution efforts. From past peace processes in Liberia and Myanmar to ongoing efforts in Afghanistan and the Caucasus, Track II diplomacy is both common and especially important for women.

This policy brief is designed for an audience of conflict-resolution practitioners and policymakers and seeks to capture the most successful and promising practices, highlight how to overcome common constraints, and propose indicators to assess the success of women’s participation in these informal processes.

What is Track II diplomacy?

While Track I diplomacy refers to official governmental peace processes, Track II is the “variety of nongovernmental and unofficial forms of conflict resolution activities between the representatives of adversarial groups that aim at de-escalating conflict, improving communication and understanding between the parties, and developing new ideas to be used in the official peace processes.” Track II peace processes can support and complement, directly or indirectly, Track I peace negotiations, and they include groups that are otherwise excluded from the negotiation table. Track II initiatives and activities can include intergroup dialogues, training, interactive conflict resolution or problem-solving workshops, and public peace education.

Related research is available at giwps.georgetown.edu.

Meaningful participation of women across all tracks is essential to building sustainable peace.
Women's involvement in Track II peace processes

Women play major roles in Track II peace processes. Dayal and Christien (2020) find that 60 percent of peace processes between 1989 and 2017 had identifiable informal peace processes, of which 71 percent had clear evidence of involvement from identifiable women's groups.6

The nature of women's involvement in informal peace processes is diverse, ranging from engagement in local conflict resolution, to legitimating the formal negotiations, to advocacy for gender equality and inclusion in the Track I process and post-conflict governance.7 Women involved in Track II initiatives have been successful in legitimating the formal peace process and channeling expertise and critical information, both to local communities and to Track I negotiators, as in the cases of Liberia and Afghanistan.8 Women in Track II processes have also been successful in advocating for the inclusion of women in official Track I negotiations to complement their contributions in the informal process.

2. Elements of Successful Track II Peace Processes

While informal peace processes vary enormously, evidence suggests some common elements of more successful approaches. Based on recent empirical studies,9 we broadly define a successful informal peace process as:

• contributing to a more inclusive and durable peace,
• building trust and understanding among the parties,10 and
• influencing the Track I peace process.11

Success also depends on whether the objectives of the Track II process are achieved.12 Additionally, the ideas and outcomes generated during Track II (e.g. recommendations, draft proposals, ideas for implementation, and positive relationships)13 should be transferred to Track I (upward transfer), to other Track II processes (lateral transfer), and to broader societal constituencies (downward transfer).14

Esra Cuhadar and Thania Paffenholz's definition of transfer is “the transfer of outcomes (e.g., recommendations, proposals, positive relationships, ideas, and insights) generated in any inclusion modality to contribute to any stage (pre-negotiation, agreement phase, and implementation) of negotiations (i.e., upward transfer), as well as transfer of information from specific groups to the populace writ large (i.e., downward transfer).”15 The concept of transfer is further illustrated below.
Transfer of Track II Outcomes

Upward Transfer: Good practices on the relationship with the Track I process

The perspectives of women involved in Track II can be brought into Track I through an upward transfer of outcomes. There are several ways to do this.

Support Track II processes and women’s meaningful participation before, during, and after Track I negotiations. Women play important roles at all stages of peace processes: before the start of negotiations, during Track I, and after Track I negotiators reach a peace agreement. Therefore, Track II processes are more effective when they are conducted at all stages.
As Heidi Burgess and Guy Burgess note, “Track II does not stop...when Track I starts. It proceeds simultaneously as well, sometimes feeding ideas into the Track I process and sometimes supporting the Track I process by helping out with research, training, and other assigned or requested tasks. And Track II also can continue the work with mid-level leaders and the public to further engage the size of the grassroots peace constituency.”  

In Liberia, women led Track II initiatives prior to Track I negotiations by meeting with the warring parties. They then continued their peace efforts during the formal talks, urging the parties to reach an agreement, and met after the talks concluded to discuss the implementation of each provision of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The continuity of their engagement was critical in bringing the parties to the negotiating table, reaching the peace agreement, and ensuring the implementation of its provisions—for example, by raising awareness about the agreement and assisting in the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration process and the electoral preparations.

However, women tend to face more barriers to participation in peace processes after the peace agreement is signed. Even in countries that have been hailed as examples of women’s meaningful inclusion in the peace process, such as Colombia, women’s participation in the implementation has been limited.

Strengthen the relationship with women involved in Track I. Women mediators and participants in the Track I process can be effective advocates of women’s Track II voices. Jana Krause, Werner Krause, and Piia Bränfors show that “linkages between women civil society groups and female signatories positively impact accord content and implementation.” Women involved in Track II processes can seek to build strong relationships, such as formal consultations or informal ties, with women involved in Track I, in order to connect the tracks and bring issues discussed in Track II to the Track I negotiating table.

In Guatemala, Luz Mendez, one of the two women who were part of the formal negotiating teams, voiced the concerns of women’s civil society groups. Regular dialogue channels between women involved in Track I and Track II contributed to the inclusion of gender provisions in the peace agreement—for example, ensuring women’s equal access to land, health care, and education.

The South Sudan Women’s Coalition offered a formal consultative mechanism connecting various grassroots women’s groups and women at the formal table. The coalition helped women involved in Track I by preparing them beforehand and giving feedback after each session of the peace negotiations.

Formalize the linkage with Track I. The formalization of the relationship between Track I and Track II peace processes can promote a more successful connection between them, as well as the transfer of outcomes to the Track I process.
For instance, Liberian women were able to shift the relationship between informal and formal by meeting with warring parties and the official mediation team. Their Mass Action for Peace campaign also helped them obtain observer status in the formal negotiations.  

Lateral Transfer: Coordination with other Track II processes

The informal nature of some Track II initiatives can lead to duplication and a lack of coordination. Efforts to exchange information and resources, consult, and coordinate with women involved in related initiatives—supported by regional and international networks—can enhance effectiveness.

Exchange information, consult, and coordinate with women involved in other Track II initiatives. Successful informal peace processes involving women have strong coordination among Track II initiatives. The U.S. Institute of Peace's Peacemaker's Toolkit stresses the need for coordination with other Track II actors in strategic planning to share information, conflict analyses, and resources and to work together on joint peace interventions. This can prevent the duplication of initiatives and the fragmentation of peacebuilding efforts. Track II initiatives should clearly communicate their objectives and strategy with women involved in other Track II processes.

In Liberia, the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) and the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) played complementary roles: WIPNET adopted an “outsider” strategy, while MARWOPNET chose the “insider” position. WIPNET focused on grassroots activism and peace advocacy, and met informally with the mediation team and warring parties to pressure armed actors to attend the peace talks. MARWOPNET, on the other hand, had observer status to the formal peace talks. Although the two groups only slowly started to consult each other when the negotiations started, MARWOPNET members briefed WIPNET about the status and process of the formal peace talks, and WIPNET then pressured the parties from the outside. The groups also cooperated to reflect on the talks during the Women's Forum and developed a joint declaration about the demands of women's organizations and how to address gender-based discrimination.

Explore synergies to develop a common women's platform. In Liberia, Kenya, and South Africa, cooperation among women's Track II initiatives led to the development of a shared women's platform, which increased the likelihood of transfer to the Track I process or broader constituencies. In Kenya,
women’s groups developed a joint memorandum, which was largely incorporated into the 2008 agreement.30 Similarly, South African women gathered through the Women’s National Coalition to develop the Women’s Charter for Effective Equality, which influenced the content of the constitution.31

**Use regional and international mediator networks for better coordination and dialogue.**

International and regional women’s networks have the potential to help organizations that conduct Track II processes with resources, funding, tools, and lessons learned from other processes.32 Regional women’s mediator networks—[FemWise-Africa](https://www.femwiseafrica.org), the [Arab Women Mediators Network](https://www.mediations-arabwomen.org), the [Mediterranean Women Mediators Network](https://www.wmn.org), the [Nordic Women Mediators](https://www.nordicmediators.org), and the [Women Mediators across the Commonwealth](https://www.womenmediators.org)—have been developed to “a) get access into a specific [peace] process, b) create links and share experiences, and c) make women’s competence more visible and strengthen their role as mediators.”33 In September 2019, these networks created a [Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks](https://www.globalallianceofregionalwomenmediatornetworks.org) to strengthen cooperation among networks, amplify common goals, and support women’s participation in peace processes.34 This initiative builds on the complementarity of the groups’ expertise and offers a platform to coordinate Track II activities and share lessons learned across regions. The Global Alliance aims to enable women to build strategic partnerships with key stakeholders and connect the tracks. While it is too early to demonstrate the impact of these new networks, they promise to enhance women’s meaningful participation in peace processes.

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**Downward Transfer: Fostering local buy-in and ownership for peace**

A key element of a more inclusive and durable peace is local buy-in for and ownership of the peace process and agreement. This happens by engaging broader constituencies at various levels.

The [U.S Institute of Peace’s Peacemaker’s Toolkit](https://www.usip.org) emphasizes that “although many Track II processes have ground rules that call for keeping discussions confidential...a mechanism must be available to allow representatives to inform their constituents about the progress of the Track II endeavor and to solicit their responses and input.”35

In the Philippines, women led consultations with various local stakeholders—such as farmers, fisherfolk, and churchgoers—to get their concerns and perspectives about the peace and develop “a governance framework in designing programs, budget and infrastructure on peace for the provincial government.”36

In Burundi, women maintained an “open and transparent communications strategy” with the wider population by keeping local communities informed about the dynamics and process of negotiations.37 Local communities then supported women’s participation in negotiations to represent their interests and channel their voices.38 Women also played a major role in local conflict-resolution efforts as mediators in the Women Network for Peace and Dialogue, where they addressed conflict between youth and security forces across 129 municipalities.39
3. Overcoming Common Constraints

While women are frequently involved in Track II diplomacy, they still face common constraints, including lack of legitimacy in the eyes of powerful decision-makers and lack of resources. Ways in which those constraints can be addressed include the following.

Leverage women’s position as “outsiders” and their proximity to communities. Women involved in Track II processes may be considered “less threatening” than men to some warring parties and rebel groups, both because they are women and because they are in the unofficial and more flexible Track II process.

In Liberia, WIPNET opted to stay outside the Track I process in order to put more pressure on Track I negotiators. In the Philippines, Mindanao women used their position as outsiders to serve as mediators and organize reconciliation gatherings. Women’s authority is derived from their closeness to their communities, rather than their official position in the Track I negotiations. This may make them successful in negotiating with warring parties. For example, Afghan women met with local Taliban groups to discuss women’s rights using narratives of shared Islamic values and successfully negotiated with the Taliban about the release of hostages.

Use the Track II space to network, build legitimacy, and gain skills to access Track I. “There are less gatekeepers against women’s participation in Track II than women’s participation in Track I,” notes Randa Slim, director of the conflict resolution and Track II dialogues program at the Middle East Institute. Male Track I negotiators tend to marginalize women by arguing that they are not qualified to take part in the formal negotiations. A survey from the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders found that women themselves think that they lack knowledge “about the peace process, language and terminology used in the formal peace process.” Skills-building include “networking, leadership, negotiation and analytical skills.” Women can use their participation in Track II processes to build legitimacy as peace negotiators and mediators, gain skills and experience, and network with various stakeholders to leverage their peace efforts and access the Track I process.

Women can also use the platforms created through Track II to call for women’s inclusion in Track I. For example, in Colombia, civil society women involved in Track II processes “strongly advocated for women’s representation in the negotiating teams [during the negotiation with the FARC], submitted proposals to the principal negotiators, and continue to monitor the implementation of the peace agreement.”

In the Philippines, Mindanao women used their position as outsiders to serve as mediators and organize reconciliation gatherings.
Provide resources for women to meaningfully participate. Women's representation in some Track II peace processes remains low because they lack the resources to participate. Covering the costs of travel, transportation, and communications can facilitate women's participation. Providing childcare and security during and after participation in Track II dialogues are also other major measures that could address this challenge.

4. How to Assess Success?

While women's involvement in informal peace processes does not substitute for their direct and meaningful participation in Track I negotiations, Track II processes can channel information to Track I and to local communities, raising the voices of the excluded, such as minority groups. Track II diplomacy may enable women who are left out of the formal process to build legitimacy, as well as gain skills and knowledge and expand their networks. Track II initiatives have also proven successful in building relationships and trust between warring parties when the Track I process was in stalemate.

Evaluating the success of such processes is a challenge

Academics and practitioners alike agree on the difficulty of measuring and evaluating the impact of Track II peace processes. This is in part due to their informal and often secret nature. For instance, some women who lead local conflict resolution in Afghanistan or Rwanda prefer to stay invisible, to be able to cross borders and appear unaffiliated with any warring parties. This invisibility makes their peace effort more effective and respected at the local level. However, it can underpin a lack of recognition at the level of the official peace process.

It is also difficult to track how informal processes directly or indirectly influence the Track I negotiations, as well as broader constituencies. In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, Kristen Carson notes that it is “difficult to map the journey that outcomes take once they have been shared by the participants to their respective constituencies.”

Proposing indicators to assess success

A set of indicators to assess success and measure the impact of Track II processes involving women can usefully draw on the Women, Peace, and Security indicators about women's participation in formal peace processes and on the concept of transfer in the Track II literature. Table 1 proposes ten such indicators, organized along four dimensions:

- women's involvement in Track II peace processes,
- upward transfer from Track II to Track I,
- lateral transfer to other Track II initiatives, and
- downward transfer to broader constituencies.
Table 1: Ten Indicators to Assess the Success of Women’s Participation in Track II Peace Processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women’s involvement in Track II</td>
<td>Number and percentage of women participants in the Track II process. Number and percentage of women mediators or conveners of the Track II process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upward transfer from Track II to Track I</td>
<td>Number and percentage of women involved in Track II peace process who access the Track I process (relative to the number of women involved in the Track II process). Number and nature of linkage (formal consultative mechanism or informal relationship) between women involved in Track II and women involved in Track I. Outcomes of Track II are transferred (e.g., publicized, shared, incorporated, and/or translated) to the Track I process, disaggregated by type of outcomes (recommendations, proposals, ideas, agenda items, language for accords, and insights). Specific provisions in the peace agreement to improve the security and status of women and girls that were advocated by women involved in Track II processes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lateral transfer to other Track II initiatives</td>
<td>Number and nature of linkage (formal consultative mechanism, resource sharing, or coordination of activities) among Track II initiatives involving women. Outcomes of Track II are transferred (e.g., publicized, shared, incorporated, and/or translated) to other Track II processes, disaggregated by type of outcomes (recommendations, proposals, ideas, agenda items, language for accords, and insights).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downward transfer to broader constituencies</td>
<td>Number and nature of linkage (formal consultative mechanism or informal relationship) among Track II initiatives and broader constituencies. Outcomes of Track II are transferred (e.g., publicized, shared, incorporated, and/or translated) to broader constituencies, disaggregated by type of outcomes (recommendations, proposals, ideas, agenda items, language for accords, and insights) and constituencies (civil society groups, local population, and local officials).</td>
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These indicators are just a start, and it could be useful to offer a broader menu of alternate indicators, given that different ones might be more useful for stakeholders. Nevertheless, these indicators could be collected by practitioners who convene Track II initiatives, women’s groups, mediator networks, and other organizations interested in assessing women’s participation in informal peace processes. The results could help in assessing progress, comparing cases, and learning from experience. The findings could also demonstrate the impacts of informal processes to potential donors.
5. Conclusions and Looking Ahead

There is a growing body of literature about women in Track II processes, ranging from practical toolkits to more theoretical and empirical academic contributions (see Annex 1). The contribution of this policy brief is to highlight the successful and promising practices for women’s engagement in Track II diplomacy and to explore how to overcome challenges that women face when participating in these informal peace processes. We also proposed a set of indicators to assess the impact of women’s participation in Track II processes on Track I, on other Track II initiatives, and on broader constituencies.

Looking ahead, more research is needed in the space of Track II and inclusive peace processes to help us better understand several key aspects.

- **How to better connect the tracks.** There is still a need to analyze how to connect the tracks during each conflict phase and to best leverage the outputs from Track II efforts. It is also important to consider the nature of upward transfer to Track I processes and downward transfer to broader constituencies.

- **The roles of women’s mediator networks.** To date, there is no systematic study of women’s mediator networks across regions and the roles they play in connecting the tracks and enhancing women’s involvement in informal peace processes.

- **What happens to Track II peace processes during the implementation phase of agreements.** A recent survey from the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders found that “women’s participation in the implementation of peace agreements is generally poorer than their participation in peace negotiations. Lack of political will, and insufficient support from governments, donors and the international community more broadly were identified as key challenges.” For instance, half of the 130 gender-related provisions of the Colombian 2016 peace agreement have not been initiated. Analyzing how informal peace processes operate during the implementation of the peace agreement and post-conflict phase could help identify implementation gaps and areas for progress.

Acknowledgments

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Annex 1: Additional resources on women’s participation in informal peace processes


End Notes


2 Ibid., 5.


5 Burgess and Burgess, Conducting Track II Peacemaking, 29.


7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.


10 Chigas, “Track II (Citizen) Diplomacy.”

11 Carson, “Track Two Diplomacy Transfer in the Middle East Peace Process,” 19.

12 Interview with Randa Slim, director of the conflict resolution and Track II program at the Middle East Institute, October 2019.

13 Cuhadar, E. and Paffenholz, T. (2019), 4


16 Esra Cuhadar, “Assessing Transfer from Track Two Diplomacy.”

17 Burgess and Burgess, Conducting Track II Peacemaking, 74.


22 Ibid., 1003.

23 Ibid., 1003.


26 Burgess and Burgess, Conducting Track II Peacemaking, 26.


28 Ibid., 9.

29 Ibid., 9.


31 Ibid., 56.


35 Burgess and Burgess, Conducting Track II Peacemaking, 43.

36 Fal Dutra Santos, Building and Sustaining Peace from the Ground Up, 46.


38 Ibid., 19.


41 O’Reilly, Ø Suliéabshähn, and Paffenholz, Reimagining Peacemaking, 20.


43 Interview with Slim, October 2019.

44 Fal Dutra Santos, Building and Sustaining Peace from the Ground Up, 37.

45 Ibid., 38.

46 Interview with Randa Slim, October 2019.

47 Fal Dutra Santos, Building and Sustaining Peace from the Ground Up, 36.

48 Ibid., 38.

49 O’Reilly, Ø Suliéabshähn, and Paffenholz, Reimagining Peacemaking, 30.

50 Chigas, “Track II (Citizen) Diplomacy.”

51 Carson, “Track Two Diplomacy Transfer in the Middle East Peace Process,” 52.

52 Expert panel discussion on women’s participation in post-conflict reconstruction, October 2019.

53 Cuhadar and Paffenholz, “Transfer 2.0,” 2.

54 Carson, “Track Two Diplomacy Transfer in the Middle East Peace Process,” 50.


56 Adapted from outcomes defined in Cuhadar and Paffenholz, “Transfer 2.0,” 10-11.

57 Fal Dutra Santos, Building and Sustaining Peace from the Ground Up, 13.