GIWPS Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security

SASAKAWA PEACE FOUNDATION

REPORT

Building Women's Coalitions for Peace and Security:

Strategies, Tactics, and Lessons Learned

With Case Studies From the Philippines and Sudan

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Part I.
Women's Coalitions and Peace: An Urgent Agenda

Decades of research underscore the importance of women's contributions to lasting peace.[1] This work forms an essential throughline of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, which focuses on strengthening women's participation in public life, conflict prevention, protection and humanitarian response, and post-conflict recovery. Evidence across global contexts is clear: peace negotiations that fail to secure the meaningful participation of women are less likely to succeed and endure.[2] Negotiations can provide critical opportunities for excluded groups, including women, to secure protections and influence, marking important junctures for women's mobilization.[3] Yet women's meaningful inclusion remains too often elusive and chronically underfunded, frequently confined to symbolic or tokenistic gestures rather than the sustained, impactful participation necessary for durable peace.[4]

Scholarly examination of their roles in peace processes makes clear that these networks and collectives seeking to support and represent women's needs are critical for lasting peace.

Responding to this evidence, initiatives at national, regional, and international levels have expanded support for women's organizations and their meaningful engagement in peace processes and post-conflict transitions. These women's coalitions broadly include the collections of organizations and actors that work to advance the rights and interests of women, take on diverse forms, and influence peace negotiations and related political efforts through a variety of pathways. Scholarly examination of their roles in peace processes makes clear that these networks and collectives seeking to support and represent women's needs are critical for lasting peace.[5]

Although existing research points to the importance of women's coalitions for peace, it remains largely high-level, relying on cross-national quantitative metrics that demonstrate the importance of these coalitions while offering limited insight into how they operate. This study addresses that gap through qualitative analysis of the conditions, practices, and activities that most effectively strengthen women's coalitions and amplify their influence.

The need to better document how women's coalitions operate—and how they can be effectively supported—is urgent. While their work is vital for peace, women's coalitions face a variety of ongoing barriers, including some that are worsening.

One challenge relates to the persistent structural violence and exclusion that shape many conflict settings. The Women, Peace and Security Index shows that women's status in many countries is stagnating or declining, coinciding with an alarming 74 percent increase in the number of women living within 50 kilometers of armed conflict since 2010.[6] Systemic violence continues to threaten the safety of women who mobilize, often at great personal risk. Time and again, women are sidelined from crucial decision-making processes during and after conflict, and face obstacles to their meaningful influence even when they secure formalized representation in peace negotiations and government roles.

Another challenge concerns the strength of civil society and its ability to influence processes that shape peace outcomes, an issue that is increasingly salient as civic spaces are being constrained worldwide, with the number of autocracies now surpassing the number of democracies.[7] Yet another hurdle concerns the ability of civil society organizations and women's movements to bridge fragmentation that can naturally arise among groups, especially when aiming to build broad coalitions across ethnic, religious, demographic, economic, and other differences. Such fractures can blunt the collective power of women's voices.

> *"Some only realize they need this work when it becomes too late."- Key Informant Interview - Sudan (KII-S) 3*

With this context in mind, there is an urgent need to examine not only the obstacles women face but also the conditions and factors that enable them to strengthen their collective power and effectiveness.

This report responds directly to that need, offering new insights into how women's coalitions mobilizing in today's conflicts, and those seeking to support them, can maximize their impact.

Background on the Study

This report examines the influence of women's coalitions on peace outcomes by first reviewing the global evidence base on what supports women's coalitions in conflict-affected settings and then analyzing two peace processes in which women's engagement has been particularly significant: those related to conflict in Mindanao, Philippines and in Sudan..

In the Philippines, the analysis focuses on women's contributions to peace efforts amid decades of armed conflict between the government and multiple groups, including the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). In particular, we reflect on the role of women's coalitions in contributing to the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), as well as ongoing efforts to sustain and institutionalize elements of

that peace in Mindanao. In Sudan, the report examines women's efforts to advance peace and democracy through coalition activity following the outbreak of armed conflict between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), including a women's delegation to peace talks in 2024.

In the Philippines, women's visible leadership and participation in negotiations leading up to the 2014 peace agreement have been heralded as consequential in the WPS field. While the Philippines case has seen the cessation of more active conflict, implementation of the peace process is ongoing, with continued low-level contestation and sporadic violent outbreaks. The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), established in 2019, remains in a transitional phase, still led by parliamentarians appointed to the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA). Though a vote has yet to be held after repeated delays, the first elections in the BARMM will mark a pivotal milestone, enabling citizens to choose their leaders and providing the Bangsamoro Parliament with its first direct democratic mandate.

In Sudan, an active and worsening war at the time of writing has led to continued devastation in the country and intensified an already severe humanitarian crisis. Internationally facilitated peace talks in 2024 sought to include a group of women to participate in Track 1.5 negotiations that engaged civil society representatives alongside the formal (Track I) peace negotiation efforts in Geneva, following women's limited participation in 2019 peace talks in Juba.[8]

The two cases examine communities experiencing different stages of conflict, yet both illustrate how women have mobilized for peace through tireless activism and creative organizing. By presenting the cases together and identifying patterns of strategic engagement, this research identifies a variety of lessons applicable to other contexts. Participants in the study consistently emphasized that coalitions cannot be understood only through isolated moments of negotiation or crisis. What comes before and what follows these moments, the years of relationship-building, including disagreement, fragmentation, adaptation, and re-formation, are central to how coalitions function and how they are able to respond when political openings or emergencies arise. These insights led us to expand the analytical aperture of the study, moving beyond the specific peace processes to capture broader detail about what led to these moments and what followed them.

> *"We need to do the groundwork…[which requires] time to develop our network and have the dialogue on our differences " - KII-S 2*
>
> *"It's very important that you have a strong base of organized women who understand gender and peace…[remainder of quote if additional space: you can always rely on an organized, strong women's group to push government.] " - Key Informant Interview-Philippines (KII-P) 7*

This expanded lens provides a fuller understanding of the fundamentally nonlinear and complex nature of women's coalitions—they form, dissolve, reconfigure, and overlap across political moments, institutional spaces, and social movements. The trajectories of coalitions are shaped not only by external political conditions but also by internal negotiations over leadership, inclusion, strategy, and survival.

Accordingly, this report focuses on tracing how women's coalitions emerged and maneuvered in response to certain opportunities or challenges to shape peace, with particular attention to the strategies and tactics they employed. The report does not offer a comprehensive historical account of the conflict or of women's organizing in either country. Instead, it presents a curated, focused set of reflections identified by participants as most significant for understanding how coalitions navigate highly constrained and shifting political terrains.

Research Questions

Our inquiry was guided by the following questions:

- How did women's coalitions form in relation to these conflicts? What did their trajectories look like before, during, and after formal peace negotiations?
- What challenges did women's coalitions face in these settings, such as sidelining and fragmentation, and how were they addressed?
- What worked to facilitate collective voice, vision, and action?
- What forms of support were most helpful for their formation and for sustaining and maximizing their influence?
- What lessons from these experiences can be drawn for women's coalitions facing violent conflicts today?

Study Methods

To investigate these questions, we conducted in-depth qualitative research with more than 50 participants, including diverse representatives from women's coalitions and those who have supported them in the Philippines and Sudan. The interviews—27 focused on the Philippines and 24 on Sudan—elicited participants' reflections on the strategies, tactics, and support that have most shaped their efforts, strengthening the evidence base on how coalitions drive meaningful impact.

Interviewees were selected using a snowball methodology drawing on contacts from the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS) and its partners, with interviews held both in-person and remotely. Interviews were primarily conducted remotely with Sudanese participants due to the esclating war conditions during the time of writing. Two independent consultants, one from the Philippines and one from Sudan, with expertise in peace and conflict, also collaborated on the research and helped identify additional participants. The research aimed to capture a cross-section of views and experiences, and included a variety of women leaders, organizers, and members of women's coalitions operating across peace, governance, and civic spaces.

Across both cases, interviews and consultations followed a semi-structured format to allow flexibility for the conversations to follow the issues most salient to the interviewees, and they were complemented by additional informal consultations and feedback sessions. While research focused on historical experiences of coalition-building and organizing in specific settings, due to the live nature of some of the dynamics in each case, interviews also included individuals' perceptions and experiences of ongoing developments at the time of writing.

Cross-Cutting Insights: Five Critical Findings

Drawing on comparative analysis of coalition dynamics in the Philippines and Sudan, this section distills five inductively derived principles for understanding the impact of women's coalitions on peace. Spotlights featured in Part V of the report present coalition activities and experiences in further detail, with specific insights participants shared.

1. **Coalitions are more effective when they are organic.**
   Coalitions are strongest when they grow from existing, organic organizing and are rooted in context and cultural relevance rather than external design.

2. **Enabling space for flexibility and loose organizing maximizes participation.**
   Durable coalitions tolerate difference, informality, and messy processes. Sustained effort to center on minimum areas of consensus among fragmented or diverging groups can be vital.

3. **Bridging domains, sectors, and geographies requires trust-building.** Purposeful action to connect civil society and government, to support leaders who traverse these spaces to build trust, and to enable cross-sector engagement is essential for influence.

4. **Grassroots leadership, power, and capacity are the heartbeat of coalitions.**
   Bottom-up organizing remains the foundation of legitimacy and resilience, but requires proactive investment to enable meaningful participation and avoid elite capture of political process and tokenism in consultation. This work reflects the gendered and cultural aspects of organizing among women, across class, and between men and women.

5. **Coalitions require long-term investment and nurturing.**
   Coalitions endure when resources and leadership renewal are prioritized, including across generations, building the muscle to persist and activate when needed. Organizing also adapts and shifts depending on phases, such as during conflict, around negotiations, and in post-agreement transitions. Too often, support is reactive rather than proactive and short-term, arriving too late to enable meaningful difference and not lasting long enough to support the vital work of coalitions in the aftermath of an acute crisis.

Part II.
Women's Coalitions in Global Literature: What do we Know?

Why do Coalitions Matter?

Women's coalitions are the subject of a small but growing body of research in international development and security studies, developing from the demonstrated links between their activities and peace outcomes. Large, cross-national, quantitative studies identify that the involvement of women's coalitions in peace negotiations—including as negotiators, as technical advisers, and on delegation teams—has strengthened peace prospects in a variety of contexts.[9] The presence of coalitions that facilitate local women's participation in Track I (formal) and Track II (informal or back channel) processes is also significant, given emerging findings that their participation increases women's political representation after conflict.[10]

Women's civil society organizing is vital as it is linked to improved likelihood of collective impact on formal changes, such as the content of peace agreements and legal reform.[11] The presence of coalitions of women's civic groups is correlated with the adoption of gender quotas and with increased participation of women in political life.[12] Research also finds that women's mobilization can increase during conflict periods, which is associated with gender-inclusive peace outcomes.[13]

Many coalitions benefited from strategic and trusted alliances—such as with global networks of women's civil society organizations and international organizations—and reported that additional support in the form of training and capacity-building could have further increased their influence.

Since the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000, women's coalitions have played increasingly prominent roles in advancing agendas to support women's participation in peace processes and post-conflict reconstruction. The participation of women's civil society organizations in peace negotiations has almost doubled, increasing from 37 percent in 2000 to 63 percent in 2020.[14] Yet inclusion does not always translate into formal influence. Over the same period, women's direct participation as official negotiators only slightly improved from 25 percent to 29 percent, and women have faced persistent challenges in forming cohesive coalitions that maximize their influence on both formal and informal peace processes.[15]

Past research from GIWPS on the influence of women's coalitions on peace in the Philippines, Northern Ireland, Guatemala, and Kenya identified several

key features: formal and informal channels both mattered, as did preexisting and newly formed organizations and networks, which helped women's groups develop and communicate their vision and influence political processes.[16] Many coalitions benefited from strategic and trusted alliances—such as with global networks of women's civil society organizations and international organizations—and reported that additional support in the form of training and capacity-building could have further increased their influence.

In working to amplify women's coalitions influence on formal peace processes, studies highlight how power and positional authority matter more than presence alone, and that opportunities for impact continue to be shaped by the political and civic contexts in which women operate.[17] Beyond the importance of individual leaders, feminist mobilization and the participation of civil society delegations can serve as important complements to high-level negotiations and official policy roles (see box 1).[18]

Box 1. Global experiences: Illustrative examples from WPS coalition literature

Liberia: The Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) mobilized Christian and Muslim women across class and regional lines, using coordinated mass action, nonviolent protest, and cross-faith solidarity to pressure political elites toward negotiations. Their collective mobilization was instrumental in advancing the 2003 Accra peace talks and shifting public and international attention toward women's roles in conflict resolution.[19]

Northern Ireland: The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) strategically united women from Protestant and Catholic communities to gain formal political representation during the Good Friday Agreement negotiations. By framing shared concerns around social inclusion, equality, and human rights, the NIWC translated cross-community women's organizing into an institutional political platform, demonstrating how coalition-building can convert grassroots legitimacy into negotiation influence.[20]

Colombia: The negotiation of the 2016 peace agreement involved the eventual inclusion of women representatives following sustained mobilization by diverse women's groups across ethnic, Indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and socioeconomic lines. These coalitions organized around common gender-related experiences of conflict, ensuring that issues such as sexual violence, displacement, and political participation were incorporated into the formal process. The Colombian case illustrates how distinct elite and non-elite entry points can converge to insert gender perspectives into an otherwise elite-driven peace bargain. At the same time, differences among grassroots and elite women's organizations, as well as between Indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and urban groups, sometimes complicated unified advocacy and revealed persistent tensions over representation and priorities.[21]

What are Women's Coalitions?

While a growing body of literature identifies the importance of women's coalitions and their influence on peace, disciplines lack full consensus on how to define these bodies. Although there is no one definition of the term, women's coalitions broadly constitute strategic alliances that bridge identity, class, ideological, or geographic differences to advance common goals related to gender equality, peace, and justice.[22] Some scholars also define women's coalitions as "decision-oriented" collaborations involving the joint use of resources by social units, in which participants share in the benefits generated through collective action.[23]

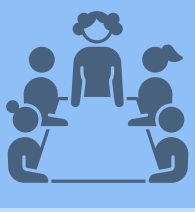
In practice, these alliances sometimes include informal collectives of individuals, groups of formalized organizations, or both (figure 1). They are often deeply interconnected, with overlapping membership across a constellation of organizations that tend to offer mutual support but sometimes also refocus and divide collectives of women who have different priorities and goals. They can be formal networks, grassroots or informal movements, or cross-sectoral partnerships involving state, civil society, and international actors.

Figure 1. Examples of women's coalitions

Parliamentary women's caucuses or **other caucuses for women in formal policy settings**

Formal civil society organizations focused on women's issues

WPS- or **women-focused groups within broader civic organizations**



Women-led cooperatives providing support or services within communities

Informal networks and collectives of WPS- or women-focused civic organizations and/or individuals, often organized through digital platforms or loose affiliations

Networks of women participants or **negotiators** engaged in political negotiations or peace talks

Project-based organizations or **networks** formed around specific WPS or women-related initiatives and activities

What Works to Advance Coalition Impact?

Studies generally identify several common factors that contribute to the success of women's coalitions in influencing peace outcomes. These findings emphasize consensus building and intersectional engagement to broaden support and maximize effectiveness (see table 1).

Table 1: Common factors identified in studies about the influence of women's coalitions on peace outcomes

Factor	Evidence base
Shared goals	Unified messaging around a set of shared goals (e.g., ending conflict-related sexual violence, increasing women's political participation) can build legitimacy and coherence. Strategic framing on a limited set of core issues helps avoid fragmentation and builds consensus even amid ideological differences.[24]
Institutional access	Access to formal peace processes or consultative mechanisms can strengthen the impact of coalitions on peace outcomes.[25] The strategic placement of qualified leaders in these formal processes can be vital, signifying the importance of quality and not simply quantity of women's access to formal processes.[26]
Capacity and resource mobilization	Coalitions that have access to financial, technical, and organizational support are better able to endure and exert influence.[27]
Inclusive organizing	Coalitions that acknowledge and navigate differences across ethnicity, class, religion, sexuality, and age tend to be more resilient and impactful, though they can be more difficult to form.[28]

On reviewing existing literature, it is clear that women's coalitions are important drivers and facilitators of women's influence on peace, but less is known about how to maximize efforts to build, sustain, and grow these coalitions. More work is needed to document what these dynamics look like in practice and how they manifest in different demographic, political, economic, and social contexts. Specifically, how can different actors—including donors, governments, international organizations, and sectoral groups—draw from global experience to most effectively support these efforts? How can individuals and organizations draw from global experiences to refine their strategies and maximize their potential for building strong and impactful coalitions?

The sections that follow examine these questions further based on reflections from participants in women's coalitions from the Philippines and Sudan and those that support them.

Part III.
Context on the Cases: Conflict Backdrop

Women's experiences of coalition-building unfolded against distinct and dynamic conflict backdrops. The opportunities and challenges they faced were shaped by the contexts in which they found themselves. In both settings, decades of upheaval created difficult conditions for women, while also generating openings that galvanized collective organizing for change.

Mindanao, Philippines

Mindanao, one of several regions in the Philippines affected by conflict and instability, has been the site of a decades-long struggle between the Philippine state and predominantly Muslim Moro populations seeking self-governance. Armed rebellion emerged in the late 1960s under what became the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), leading to sustained clashes with the state. In 1977, internal divisions produced a splinter movement, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which became the dominant armed actor in subsequent decades.[29]

Repeated negotiation efforts punctuated periods of violence, beginning with the 1976 Tripoli Agreement between the government and the MNLF and culminating in the 1996 "Final Peace Agreement." The latter delivered limited autonomy but failed to resolve core grievances or prevent fragmentation, contributing to renewed conflict.

Following years of stalled negotiations, the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP)[30] was established in 1993 to centralize and strengthen the Philippine government's approach to resolving the country's long-running internal conflicts, including separatist conflict in Mindanao, through negotiations rather than military interventions.[31] Formal peace talks began between OPAPP, on behalf of the Government of the Philippines, and the MILF in 1997 but were repeatedly disrupted by new episodes of fighting.[32]

Women's coalitions played a sustained and increasingly visible role in high-level peace negotiations in Mindanao, with women assuming senior negotiating positions over time. Their organizing capacity was sharply constrained under the repressive rule of President Ferdinand Marcos (1965–1986), particularly following the imposition of martial law in 1972.[33] As civic space reopened in the 1990s, rapid growth of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the rise of issue-based women's movements significantly strengthened women's coalitional power and influence in peace processes.[34] This period saw, for example, the establishment

of the Mindanao Commission on Women in 1992, a regional organization focused on expanding women's political participation and on development and peacebuilding.

When peace talks were reinitiated following renewed fighting in 1997, several women were present on the government side of negotiations, including Emily Marohombsar, a Moro woman negotiator for the government of the Philippines from 1998 to 2004, but women were absent from the MILF side.[35] During the early to mid-2000s, including under Malaysian facilitation—Malaysia serving as the key third-party negotiator from 2001 onward—women's engagement on both sides expanded and included efforts to maintain pressure in cycles of escalation. Their work reflected the bibingka strategy (named after a traditional Filipino rice cake cooked with heat from both below and above, symbolizing simultaneous bottom-up and top-down pressure for change), combining pressure and legitimacy from grassroots mobilization with engagement at elite policy levels.[36]

In 2003, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's appointment of Secretary Teresita "Ging" Quintos-Deles, who had roots in civil society, as the first woman to head OPAPP provided an additional opportunity for women's coalitions to leverage influence at the highest levels of peace negotiations. Three years later, in 2006, civil society contributed to the first Mindanao Women's Peace Summit, which aimed to bring together community consultations among Moro and Indigenous women in conflict-affected areas in Mindanao and strengthen the role of women in the peace processes.[37] At the same time, an all-women civilian protection contingent was launched as part of the Government of the Philippines–MILF efforts to implement security agreements during the negotiations.[38]

During this period, women remained active on both sides of the formal peace process. This included the participation of Yasmin Busran-Lao, a Moro woman leader and influential member of Mëranaw civil society, in the 2011 peace talks.[39] On the government side, several highly visible women also played central roles, including Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, who—at the urging of OPAPP Secretary Quintos-Deles—was appointed by President Benigno S. Aquino III in 2012 as the first woman chief negotiator of the Government of the Philippines. Also in 2012, the MILF included two women in their technical staff, including Raissa Jajurie, a Moro human-rights lawyer. Jajurie represented multiple interest groups, including an informal coalition comprised of other influential women advocates and experts who were part of the network Nisa Ul-Haqq fi Bangsamoro (Women for Truth and Justice in the Bangsamoro), such as Laisa Alamia and Bai Abubakar.[40]

These talks culminated in the 2014 CAB and marked a global first: Coronel-Ferrer became the first woman chief negotiator to sign a major peace agreement. This was followed by the 2018 passage of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) (built from the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) in 2014), which established the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

Filipinos celebrate outside the presidential palace after the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, March 27, 2014, Manila, Philippines. (Photo: Dondi Tawatao/Getty Images)

The BTA was established in 2019 as the interim governing body of the BARMM following the ratification of the BOL.[41] Consisting of members appointed by President Rodrigo Duterte, the BTA includes representatives from the MILF and other stakeholders, and was given the mandate to govern during the transition period, pass priority legislation, and lay the institutional foundations for the region's fully elected parliament. The CAB includes multiple gender provisions, including mandates for women's representation in the political governance of the BARMM.[42] Passed in 2023, this code legally mandates a process for elections, which have yet to be held, including a minimum 30 percent quota for women nominees on political party lists.

> *"What the comprehensive peace agreement is now is because of civil society." – KII-P 14*

The CAB is often heralded in the WPS field as an example of women's critical contributions to formal peace agreements and to related gender-sensitive policies and implementation.[43] Since its signing, women's civil society coalitions have played a sustained role in efforts to implement the agreement and advance related legislation and policies, including shaping and updating the WPS National Action Plan (NAP) and a regional WPS action plan for the BARMM.[44] They have also contributed to gender-responsive public budgeting through the Gender and Development (GAD) Code, which mandates five percent of public spending for gender and development, and supported grassroots organizing around demobilization, electoral reform, and women's participation across sectors.[45] Notably, women's coalitions have drawn on multiple, sometimes parallel, frameworks for women's empowerment rooted in Islamic feminism as well as global WPS frameworks.[46]

> *"Key women leaders, purposefully bringing in qualified women, that brought us to where the CAB is" – KII-P 9*

Despite peace gains since the CAB and the governance processes established through the BTA, low-level conflict in the region persists today. Intra-Moro politics, residual armed groups, and persistent socioeconomic inequalities continue to shape a fragile and unfinished peace. In the decade since the signing of the CAB, Mindanao has experienced continued intermittent fighting, including clan violence (rido or pagbanta). Full implementation of the CAB has yet to be realized, given the repeated delay of elections in the BARMM and stalling decommissioning of MILF fighters.[47]

To date, estimates suggest that more than 120,000 people have been killed in the decades of conflict in Mindanao.[48] Nearly 150,000 people are internally displaced in the region, with natural disasters and ongoing land disputes compounding conflict-related displacement.[49] Protracted conflict has resulted in widespread insecurity, repeated displacement, and economic instability—conditions that have had specific and disproportionate impacts on women and girls. Especially at the height of the violence, women often bore the responsibility of providing for their families as men fought and died, despite structural barriers to their participation in the formal labor sector.[50] Clan and family violence that often targeted men left women to undertake new roles and responsibilities, such as going to markets or working when it was not safe for men to do so, and in turn, facing risks of gender-based violence.[51] Limited economic and social opportunities have been both drivers and outcomes of years of intermittent fighting, disrupting access to education, healthcare, and social support systems. In this context, women's coalitions today are driving efforts to support community mediation, the decommissioning of fighters, and ongoing work to advance implementation of the CAB amid prolonged political uncertainty and delayed elections.

Sudan

Sudan has been shaped by successive cycles of armed conflict and political upheaval, including prolonged civil wars between the north and south (1955–1972, 1983–2005), large-scale violence in Darfur beginning in 2003, and the secession of South Sudan in 2011.[52] Since 2023, following an attempted democratic revolution in 2018-2019 that led to the ouster of President Omar al-Bashir, the country has fallen yet again into a devastating war.

Beginning in the 1990s, Sudanese women's organizing increasingly took coalition-based forms that sought to bridge political divides, even under authoritarian constraints. Their efforts have been rooted in a long tradition of locally grounded activism, sometimes evoked through the figure of the Kandaka, a title given to queens in the African kingdom of Kush and used in contemporary times to describe Sudanese women leaders and activists.[53]

During the early 2000s, umbrella platforms and cross-regional networks emerged to coordinate advocacy and solidarity between women in the northern part of the country and what would become South Sudan.[54] This helped bridge political divides and support women's participation in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement process in 2005 that aimed to end the Sudanese civil war and set out a path for independence for South Sudan.[55]

Despite these important gains, the period following this agreement saw the entrenchment of authoritarian rule under al-Bashir. In 2018-2019, women played an active role in Sudan's revolution that overthrew the regime, opening a fragile political transition.[56] Women's groups were signatories in January 2019 to the constitutional declaration by the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC), a coalition of political parties and civil society groups that called for al-Bashir's removal and a civilian-led transition to democratic rule. Peace talks in Juba (2019–2020) following the removal of al-Bashir brought together the transitional government and multiple armed movements to negotiate power-sharing and security arrangements, culminating in the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement.[57] Although women participated actively in Track II diplomatic dialogues and related advocacy, they reported largely tokenistic inclusion in formal negotiations. In the resultant power-sharing plan, women were also sidelined. However, there were some gains in women's representation in formal political roles in the initial post-

Sudanese women gather as displaced people return to Wad Madani, Jazira State, on February 6, 2025, after the city was retaken by the Sudanese army from RSF paramilitaries. (Photo: AFP via Getty Images).

revolution transition,[58] although this period was marked by heightened abuses against women, including honor killings and gendered political violence.[59]

Women's coalitions expanded and diversified during and immediately following the revolution, helping embed women's presence in public spaces, build networks beyond Khartoum, and support women's access to new resources, including feminist hubs and digital platforms for women in different states.[60] These networks also played a role in the drafting of the country's WPS NAP (2020–2022).[61] At the same time, the coalitions suffered from fragmentation, in part reflecting the challenges of largely decentralized networks and the ongoing need to balance elite and national networks with local grassroots movements.[62]

The transition unraveled after a military coup in 2021 and the outbreak of full-scale war in April 2023 between rival forces, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), plunging Sudan into a severe humanitarian crisis and sharply constraining civic space.[63] Internationally mediated peace talks held in Geneva in August 2024 sought to secure humanitarian access and a ceasefire but ultimately collapsed due to the absence of a delegation from the SAF. Although the talks did not result in an agreement, there was notable engagement of Sudanese women from various networks who traveled to Geneva to participate in Track 1.5 negotiations and worked to deliver a collective platform focused on shared priorities for a ceasefire and humanitarian aid.

In the face of devastating violence, women in Sudan have consistently acted as key providers of essential services and humanitarian assistance, particularly for women and girls who have been subject to widespread sexual and gender-based violence.[64] At the time of writing, the war remains ongoing after more than a thousand days, with at least 150,000[65] people estimated to have been killed and a staggering 12 million displaced due to fighting.[66] Women and children make up the majority of those displaced, and millions more are in need of humanitarian aid.

> *"Immediately after the talks we pushed for the humanitarian aid, we saw this as the most important part" - KII-S 3*

War in Sudan since 2023 has decimated critical infrastructure across the country, disrupting access to basic services, including healthcare, psychosocial support, and education.[67] More than half of the population suffers from acute food insecurity, including two-thirds of female-headed households, with pregnant women and new mothers particularly vulnerable to starvation and malnutrition.[68] The country has also witnessed backlash against women's rights, including rising cases of female genital mutilation/cutting, child marriage, intimate partner violence and killings, and lower educational and employment rates for girls and women.[69] These gendered harms, in addition to broader insecurity and the proliferation of weapons, serve as an increasing threat to women's presence in the public sphere.

Layered Organizing: Mapping Women's Coalitions as Ecosystems

In these dynamic settings, including environments of ongoing contestation and conflict, women's coalitions have organized across multiple levels of political and civic life, creating distinct but interconnected ecosystems of actors. In the Philippines, coalition organizing is more closely intertwined with formal peace processes and institutional governance spaces. The emergence of semi-autonomous governance in the BARMM alongside national government frameworks shapes how women's coalitions organize, creating distinct regional and national governance structures.[70] In Sudan, the approach is more rooted in decentralized, subnational, and diaspora-linked networks that mobilize in response to urgent community needs. Women's coalition organizing reflects the country's federated political system, which is structured around 18 states (wilayat) and two regions—Darfur and the Blue Nile—each with subnational authorities responsible for key aspects of administrative governance.[71]

Women's mobilization within these ecosystems reflects overlapping normative frameworks: global WPS efforts that stress individual rights and institutional reform operating alongside more locally grounded Islamic feminist approaches[72] that emphasize religious legitimacy, collective responsibility, and alliance-building. These coexisting frames shape the diversity of coalition strategies and constituencies across levels of organizing. Based on the interviews, the project mapped some of the relevant coalitions related to conflict in Mindanao, Philippines and Sudan (see table 2). While not exhaustive, the mapping illustrates a variety of salient levels around which coalitions have organized related to conflict in each setting.

Table 2. Ecosystems of women's coalitions in The Philippines and Sudan: Illustrative examples

Philippines	Sudan
• National civil society, e.g., WEAct 1325, WAGI/GZO Peace Institute • National government, e.g., high-level women engaged in OPAPP/OPAPRU • BARMM government, e.g., BARMM women parliamentarians caucuses and taskforces • Revolutionary groups: women's coalitions within the MILF, MNLF, e.g., BIWAB • BARMM civil society, e.g., WOMB collective • Mindanao civil society (beyond BARMM), e.g., Mindanao Commission on Women	• Nationwide/diaspora coalitions, e.g., wider/regional SIHA Network, NalaFem Sudan Taskforce, MANSAM, No to Women's Oppression, Midanik Feminist Movement, Platform for Peace; and legacy/historical groups, e.g., Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace in Sudan (SuWEP) • Groups formed around negotiating moments, e.g. women's delegation present at 2024 Geneva Peace Talks (formal engagement) and 2018-2019 revolution and Juba peace talks (parallel/side-door influence) • State and regional organizing including: – Blue Nile, e.g. Mothers of Sudan – Darfur, e.g. Darfur Women Forum – Gazira, e.g. Pioneers for Feminist Change – South Kordofan, e.g. Women Peacebuilders Platform – Kassala, e.g. Peace Bodies Kassala and Gender Equality Network - Kassala – Sennar, e.g. Pioneer Women – Northern state, e.g. Durrat El Nile Organization

Part IV.
Women's Coalitions and Strategies for Peace

To better understand the ways women's coalitions maneuver, we developed a framework to analyze study participants' accounts of what supported the effectiveness of their work.

The framework was developed inductively and identifies the strategies women's coalitions deploy to achieve their aims. It then examines the tactics they engage to operationalize these efforts (see table 3). Where possible, the analysis also sheds light on the conditions under which these strategies and tactics emerge and offers illustrative examples drawn from the case studies that follow. While participants did not always use these terms to describe their actions, their reflections revealed consistent patterns in the techniques employed and the terrain women navigated as they sought to exert influence and promote peace.

Together, these elements provide a practical roadmap for how women's coalitions translate long-term goals into action within complex political environments. Across contexts, women often organize at great personal cost, risking their physical, social, economic, and emotional well-being.[73] We offer this framework as a consolidated resource for women's coalitions and their allies, distilling shared lessons across two distinct contexts and moments to support future organizing, adaptation, and coalition-building.

While the strategies and tactics identified through this research highlight important cross-cutting patterns, they ultimately reflect experiences that are deeply contextual and shaped by the distinct circumstances facing different groups of women at particular moments in conflicts that are often extremely dynamic. In practice, the formation of these coalitions is often messy, with groups deploying multiple strategies and tactics under varying conditions to achieve impact.

Although clear parallels emerge across cases, there is no formulaic model for success; rather, effective action for women's coalitions in conflict contexts requires adaptation, flexibility, and multidimensional engagement.

Table 3. Coalition strategies, tactics, and supportive conditions: A framework

Core Strategy	Associated Tactics	Supportive Conditions	Illustrative Insights from the Cases
Build coalitions before high-stakes moments	Long-term convening, ongoing trust-building, shared agenda setting	Openness of civic space and predictable opportunities for convening before crises or negotiations	In the Philippines, decades of sustained organizing underpinned women's influence in the 2014 peace agreement. In Sudan, limited early investment constrained coalition-building during the 2024 talks, although women drew on legacies of organizing from earlier moments, including their pivotal role in the 2018-2019 revolution.
Anchor influence in grassroots legitimacy	Community dialogues, local organizing, federated models, inclusive consultation	Capacity-building and support for local grassroots leadership	Coalitions in the Philippines drew legitimacy from grassroots organizing, leveraging the concept of bibingka ("heat from the top and heat from the bottom"). Sudanese women benefited from federated institutions that allowed autonomous organizing at the state level.
Bridge formal and informal power	Deliberate movement between grassroots and elite spaces; women leaders operating across civil society and government	Women leaders leveraging positions of authority to expand networks and access for other women, institutional openness to input from civil society and formal channels for consultations	Women leaders in the Philippines translated coalition demands into formal peace provisions while navigating internal disagreement. Sudanese women struggled for access to formal politics and resisted confinement to separate "women's spaces."
Prioritize minimum consensus over full agreement	Processes to identify a limited set of shared priorities	Tolerance for internal difference and contestation, formal policy windows (e.g., WPS National Action Plans (NAPs), legislative or parliamentary processes) that incentivize coordination and alignment	In the Philippines, sectoral groups aligned core priorities ahead of policy processes to amplify collective voice. Sudanese women focused on two priorities in the Geneva peace talks—humanitarian access and gender-based violence accountability—to maintain cohesion amid difference.
Use flexible, adaptive organizing models	Loose networks, federated coalitions, informal coordination mechanisms	Structures and practices that enable affiliation when collective power is strategic but preserve autonomy and flexibility to adopt localized approaches	Both cases show rigid structures can fracture coalitions, while flexibility enables participation across diverse identities and contexts.
Leverage identity and symbolism	Creative advocacy, cultural and gendered forms of mobilization	Concrete openings for public visibility of symbolic actions through digital platforms (e.g., online campaigns) or in politically strategic physical spaces	From symbolism related to women's hair and dress in the Philippines deployed by the WOMB collective and student activists, to Kandaka identity and the use of kitchen tools during protest in Sudan, women used visibility and symbolism to claim political space.
Sustain coalitions beyond high-stakes moments	Pivoting activities and leveraging existing relationships to address emerging needs or opportunities	Coalition trust, cohesion, and credibility that can channel momentum and partnership from critical events into adapted action	In the Philippines, women's coalitions have remained active post–peace agreement, adapting as needs evolve. In Sudan, women pivoted from sit-in activities during the revolution to providing lifesaving humanitarian and protection work amid war.

Part V.
Diving Deeper: The Philippines and Sudan

Many efforts to assess how specific actors and groups influence peace processes rely on quantitative indicators that seek to measure linear progress. By contrast, many women's groups describe their organizing and impact as far more complex, often informed by long-term processes even when their activation becomes more visible in short-term moments. This section, therefore, centers women's lived experiences of engaging in this work, highlighting examples of local-level and smaller-scale interventions, including efforts that are under-documented or difficult to capture through traditional metrics.

The spotlights in this section bring to life examples of how women employ creative strategies and tactics to advance peace. While not exhaustive, these illustrative cases from diverse contexts and multiple levels of society highlight varied forms of organizing that build and leverage collective influence.

A Note on the Participants

Participants in this study generously entrusted us with their time, sharing personal reflections on what motivates them, obstacles that have proven most challenging, and their proudest accomplishments. This vibrant and inspiring group spanned sectors, age, class, ethnicity, migration status, nationality, race, and more.

Many of the women interviewed were living the daily realities of conflict or post-conflict societies. They included respected community elders who hold or previously held senior national or regional government roles, lawyers, doctors, dentists, development and security practitioners, academics, and civil society leaders, as well as local activists, volunteers, and community organizers. Several participants proudly identified as feminists and women activists; others described their work primarily as that of peacebuilders or humanitarians.

The interviews mirrored this diversity. Some conversations followed a structured, chronological path through history, with participants at times sharing deeply personal stories. Others focused closely on key moments or processes most salient to their journeys and experience building coalitions. Participants described varied pathways into this work: some came from prominent political families and sought to expand women's representation in the spaces they inhabited. Others emerged from civil society—often as students coming of age during divisive

political moments, or as civic actors committed to protecting and expanding civic life. Still others were drawn to this work through painful personal experience, including conflict-related loss or violence affecting themselves, their families, or their communities.

Although interviewees reflected on the past, the present weighed heavily. Participants from the Philippines celebrated hard-won gains but voiced concern about the peace agreement's future and women's declining visibility, hopeful yet uncertain that these advances will endure. Some conversations were filled with solidarity and celebration; others were somber, as women recounted firsthand losses, sexual violence, and other wartime harms. Participants from Sudan spoke with us amid ongoing conflict, with some actively leading humanitarian responses and others displaced or separated from their families.

These contexts shaped conversations, which were held in various formats. Interviews were conducted in conference rooms, government offices, and hotel lobbies, as well as through virtual platforms, recorded voice notes, and digital messages—reflecting the diverse realities in which participants are working.

It is beyond the scope of this report to fully convey the depth of each woman's experience. Yet every woman's passion, courage, creativity, and steadfast commitment to advancing peace and security underpin all of the stories that follow.

Women's Coalitions for Peace: Stories from Mindanao, Philippines

National Civic Organizing: WEAct 1325

Background

WEAct 1325 (Women Engaged in Action on UNSCR 1325) emerged in the Philippines as a strategic civil society coalition rooted in consultative development of the country's first WPS NAP in 2010 and later influenced negotiations around the CAB. Formed by women's rights advocates, peacebuilders, and grassroots leaders—many of whom had been engaged in this work for decades—WEAct 1325 began as a loose network and expanded organically across national, regional, and local levels. The network has functioned both as an advocacy coalition and as a strategic platform for aligning national policy with community priorities, including women's meaningful participation in peace processes.

Operating Conditions

The participation of WEAct 1325 in developing and implementing the Philippines' first WPS NAP—also the first in Asia—occurred in a complex peace and security landscape that often restricted women's inclusion and empowerment. The impact of conflict on women varied greatly across regions and contexts, and the lengthy drafting process of the WPS NAP sought to account for diverse needs. Ensuring that policy reflected the local priorities of women most impacted by conflict required sustained consultation, feedback mechanisms, and coordination. For WEAct 1325, advancing women's participation and WPS implementation was marked by struggles to embed inclusive approaches in national and local-level peace and security policies and frameworks. These challenges persist in the present day, as some participants expressed concerns about the network's effective representation and grassroots-level input beyond the capital city of Manila.

Strategies and Tactics

WEAct 1325 members shared that they employed a deliberate, multi-level strategy that prioritized building sustained collaboration between civil society and members of local and national government. The leadership of Secretary Teresita "Ging" Quintos-Deles, the first woman to head OPAPP from 2003-2005 and again from 2010-2016, was critical. Secretary Quintos-Deles had roots in civil society and recognized the essential role of women's groups. Under her leadership, OPAPP helped facilitate open communication channels between grassroots women and those in formal decision-making spaces and strengthened buy-in for WPS priorities across state institutions.

> *"Ging [Quintos-Deles] may have seen the value of the NAP WPS for strengthening the support for the peace process. It was not just with the MILF—preparing the ground for advocates and champions, especially among the women, was a very good strategy." – KII-P 10*

During the development of the WPS NAP, WEAct 1325 placed particular emphasis on practical, measurable policy frameworks developed through a consultative process with input from a wide range of stakeholders.

> *"We asked agencies to choose three priorities, and to make sure they could measure them and that agencies all had targets. We had to be very direct." – KII-P 3*

The network took a similar consultative approach during the 2014 peace talks and negotiations around the CAB by facilitating large-scale community dialogues that centered the perspectives of conflict-affected and marginalized women. It generated evidence-based recommendations and informed advocacy efforts, including the development of comprehensive position papers that outlined key priorities and demands emerging from the community consultations. These inputs, along with the efforts of other organizations and individuals, contributed to the inclusion of gender provisions and participation mechanisms in the final text of the agreement.

A key feature of WEAct 1325's organizing strategy has been to draw on existing relationships within a dynamic civil society ecosystem to build a strong, diverse coalition of members that coordinate advocacy, capacity-building, and monitoring efforts while also engaging directly with peace negotiators, legislators, and implementing bodies. This approach has allowed the group to build credibility with state actors while empowering civil society participants with a shared policy foundation and sense of ownership over policy documents, including the WPS NAP and the CAB.

Miriam College in Manila hosts a "Bangs for the Bangsamoro" haircut campaign on campus to promote women's meaningful political participation in the Bangsamoro, advertised with a poster campaign. (Photo: Miriam College / WEAct 1325)

> *"What the comprehensive peace agreement is now is because of civil society." – KII-P 14*

In relation to the BOL, WEAct 1325 leveraged its national reach to expand advocacy efforts beyond the BARMM, understanding the need to engage other government representatives across the Philippines who would be voting on the law. Recognizing that "peace is everyone's problem," the network supported women from the BARMM to travel across the Philippines, joining WEAct 1325 members from other constituencies in meeting with their local representatives to lobby for the passage of the BOL.

> *"We were there to amplify their voice, not to be their voice." – KII-P 23*

As part of their advocacy, the group partnered with academic institutions such as Miriam College in strategic campaigns that leveraged feminine identity, including the "Bangs for Bangsamoro" campaign, where women cut bangs in their hair as a symbol of support for the passage of the BOL and the "HER.SHE" campaign, which used chocolate bars as an advocacy tool to push for women's participation in the Bangsamoro and included support for a proposed quota for women's representation in the electoral code.[74]

Since WEAct 1325's initial efforts, the Philippines has developed several subsequent WPS NAPs as well as a regional WPS Action Plan for the BARMM for 2023 to 2028. Along with other grassroots organizations and locally led initiatives, WEAct 1325 continues to be active in implementing the WPS Agenda through strategic partnerships across government and civil society, reflecting continued strategies to bridge formal and informal power as new priorities and opportunities emerge.

Negotiation Participation: Women's Roles in the CAB

Background

Over decades of conflict in Mindanao, successive peace negotiations generated opportunities for women's participation, with civil society networks helping propel women leaders into prominent positions.

By 2012, women held influential roles in the peace process. Coronel-Ferrer chaired the government panel, serving as chief negotiator, with support from the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, Secretary Quintos-Deles, and panel member Yasmin Busran-Lao. On the MILF side, women participated as technical advisers, substantively informing negotiations.[75]

During this period, additional Moro women, some appointed by factions in official roles, independently mobilized to advocate for women's interests and engage civil society. They meaningfully shaped the negotiations between the Government of the Philippines and the MILF after 2010 by pressing for the inclusion of gender provisions in peace documents. When the CAB was signed on March 27, 2014, the resulting agreement contained a number of gender provisions committed to women's meaningful participation in politics and peace; human rights protections, including economic rights; and recognition of women's role in the transitional process.

Operating Conditions

The simultaneous pressure of prominent Moro women and national-level women supporting the peace process helped elevate women leaders into political spaces that had long excluded them, although some of these spaces have become more male-dominated over time. They worked in concert with men who also championed women's participation and were involved in efforts to address women's priorities.

During this period, some noted an important opening in the environment for civic support, including from men, for this cause—an opening they warned has since hardened with political changes in the country that have impacted civic life. While women and their allies were instrumental in securing gender provisions in the peace agreement, the full realization of women's rights and inclusion in the BARMM remains contested and an unfinished struggle.[76]

Strategies and Tactics

Women involved in shaping negotiations identified strategies that both expanded women's leadership and advisory roles and helped secure the inclusion of gender provisions in the 2014 peace agreement.

One important dynamic was the combination of pressure from the grassroots ("heat from the bottom") and from women in formal positions of power ("heat from the top"). Tacit agreement and solidarity between these actors enabled women to have greater influence through a more unified approach. While the visibility of high-level women participants on negotiation panels signaled potential for deeper attention to WPS issues, community-level organizing was critical to their credibility.

> *"The peace process started with community-based organizations in Mindanao. [There were] peace groups already on the ground when the formal process with the MILF started . . ." – KII-P 4*

Women involved in the negotiations reflected that having women represented at the peace table was essential, yet not sufficient on their own, without supportive mechanisms and feedback loops.

> *"You need those champions, but the champions on their own are not enough…We created an informal group, former officials of government, like ministers of social welfare. The point was: we cannot let the peace process fail. So, whatever we can do to help, then we will do this."*
> *– KII-P 4*

Interviewees also shared that women participants in the peace process benefited from strategic engagement with male counterparts. They described how they would leverage their feminine identity to build rapport and strengthen their influence.

> *"During negotiation days in Kuala Lumpur on Valentine's Day, the women bought chocolate hearts and gifted them to the males in the MILF. This caught them off guard. These small, creative gestures helped us." – KII-P 3*

Working to identify areas of minimum consensus required time and persistence, but was essential to success. For example, women identified broad agreement around a priority for the CAB to include language about women's "meaningful" participation in public life. Coronel-Ferrer strongly advocated for this priority, with her authority reinforced by her respected role on the panel and strengthened through ties to wider women's networks and coalitions. Convincing the MILF of the important distinction that the word "meaningful" implies took time and effort, but they ultimately secured language on the "right of women to meaningful political participation" in the agreement—an essential condition for women's longer-term influence.[77]

> *"The MILF did not want 'meaningful,' but Miriam [Coronel-Ferrer] fought hard and stayed on it." – KII-P 3*

Women later showed similar persistence in debates over the quota in the Bangsamoro Electoral Code, which built on the CAB's commitment to the meaningful participation of women by requiring political parties to ensure that at least 30 percent of nominees are women. Arriving at consensus involved debates over what threshold should be set, which still persist today: some argued for 50 percent to ensure parity and warned that 30 percent could become a ceiling, while others cautioned that a higher threshold risked backlash. While the quota remains contested and women's coalitions must continue to monitor its implementation, advocates' success in securing agreement on a specific percentage illustrates the effectiveness of strategies that prioritize identifying minimum areas of consensus to advance concrete policy changes within formal negotiations.

Revolutionary Women's Coalitions: BIWAB and SWCs

Background

Women played key formal and informal roles within the MNLF and, later, the MILF revolutionary groups in Mindanao. The organization of women's coalitions within these structures was significant long before peace agreements were signed, reflecting women's diverse roles in public and political life alongside their positions in family life in a grassroots revolutionary movement, operating "...where clandestine meetings were often held in the safety of homes" (KII-P 25).

These women's revolutionary networks had representatives across provincial structures, organized into local committees across the southern Philippines. Both the MNLF and MILF formed social welfare committees (SWCs) that provided a formal route for women to engage. Prominent women who took up leadership positions, including in the SWCs, include Bainon Karon for the MNLF, Aida Silongan, and the late Guiamia "Babo Mia" Hussain for the MILF, influential women in the BARMM who have also played roles in other policymaking and civic bodies.

Women were involved in the military structures of the MILF, for example, as the Bangsamoro Islamic Women Auxiliary Brigade (BIWAB) and as community facilitators and volunteers in the MILF's socioeconomic development arm, the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA), whose founders were the doctors, nurses, and field medics on the front lines from the 1980s to the early 2000s.

Operating Conditions

Women's participation within these revolutionary movements expanded as women were increasingly recognized within revolutionary group operations. However, significant barriers to their influence and acceptance among male peers continued to persist. The emergence of the BIWAB enabled women to participate within military ranks under a women's body, while women's positions as leaders within the SWCs provided a strategic opportunity for women to gain access to formal political decision-making spaces via guaranteed seats for women, offering an opening for those women to push back against "male-dominated leadership structures" (KII-P 26). However, while the placement of women in these roles was significant, it did not always guarantee their meaningful influence in political outcomes.

Strategies and Tactics

For both civilian networks and the BIWAB, a common strategy to expand their collective impact was the creation of legal front organizations such as cooperatives and NGOs to support livelihoods, administer funds, and sustain operations. Eventually, these became platforms for key women leaders to assume government posts and hold often-concurrent roles in the peace process architecture.

> *"For both institutions and individuals, these professional and kinship-based relationships and functions morphed throughout the negotiations and the protracted post-agreement implementation phase, and form the backbone of WPS in the region." – KII-P 25*

The importance of feedback loops between women's coalitions within revolutionary groups and NGO activism was evident in the careers of prominent women who moved between revolutionary movements, civil society, and formal politics. Strategically positioning respected women leaders from groups such as the MNLF and MILF in NGO leadership roles helped strengthen ties between civil society and revolutionary parties, with women often serving as key bridges across these formal and informal spaces.

For example, MNLF leader Bainon Karon led a major Bangsamoro women's cooperative before later serving in senior Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and BARMM posts, while MILF's Aida Silongan held leadership roles in women's organizations and development bodies before becoming a BARMM minister. These trajectories illustrate how trusted leaders can move across civic and political arenas, anchoring their influence in grassroots legitimacy and channeling priorities into formal institutions while also challenging norms that cast politics as a male domain.

> *"Women's roles within these revolutionary structures were important … challenging the long-held assumptions that women could not lead." – KII-P 25*

As the MILF's revolutionary structures transition to unarmed civilian life, these women's networks remain tightly linked to several generations of Bangsamoro professional networks, which include lawyers, development workers, and civil servants. The work of women in BIWAB and SWCs demonstrates the importance of strategies that bridge formal and informal power, maintain connectivity at the grassroots, and sustain coalitions beyond official negotiations.

Parliamentary Women's Networks: BARMM Informal Women's Parliamentary Caucus

Background

When the BTA was established in 2019, several women were appointed as members of parliament (MPs). Women's representation has fluctuated from an initial 16 seats to a current low of 10, although women still retain other key roles as deputy speakers, committee heads and members, a handful of heads of ministries, or concurrent heads of the peace mechanisms. In 2020, Bangsamoro women MPs proposed the creation of an informal parliamentary caucus in the midst of the region's ongoing transitional period, sharing knowledge and lending

support to one another. This coalition of women MPs drafted legislation to set up a caucus and is seeking formal standing and financing, although this measure has not yet been passed into law.[78]

Operating Conditions

Women MPs in the BARMM have an opportunity, through the formation of the caucus, to develop formal mechanisms for coordination and solidarity that amplify their collective voices. At the same time, they must navigate the challenge of building consensus on shared goals and strategies amid the parliament's diverse political, ethnolinguistic, and ideological perspectives.

Strategies and Tactics

While the proposed legislation to form the caucus remains under consideration, women MPs are forging informal alliances and bridging formal and informal spaces to coordinate their efforts. Though some come from established political dynasties, most MPs belong to a technocratic cohort of women operating within their parties' institutional frameworks. A shared commitment to getting work done despite political turbulence has helped these MPs identify common ground. To support efforts to maintain the BTA's smooth operations, women MPs are working together to address issues of polarization and mistrust, starting with practical case-by-case problem-solving on specific policy issues.

Women MPs have also made creative use of informal social meeting spaces to connect and identify common ground, highlighting the strategy of engaging networks outside of formal institutionalized mechanisms for collaboration.

> *"Informal meeting spaces such as the MPs' coffee lounge or social functions such as dinners and weddings facilitated safe spaces to meet and discuss issues behind the scenes." – KII-P 25*

As the Bangsamoro works to further develop its parliamentary system, women have begun to fill roles with legislative and executive functions. The Bangsamoro Women Commission (BWC) is tasked with monitoring GAD and WPS initiatives as part of the BARMM's Bangsamoro Gender and Development Committee, which is a special committee under the Bangsamoro Economic and Development Council.

> *"Implementing the BARMM's regional WPS plan has required close coordination between the BWC and the parliament, particularly in ensuring meaningful gender-responsive legislation beyond rubber-stamping and 'gender-washing.'" – KII-P 25*

The nascent parliament has navigated a range of political crises, including unexpected resignations and controversies. Several women MPs described

finding strength and comfort in one another during these periods, reflecting on how, despite political differences, they could relate not only as professionals but as mothers, daughters, and wives. Their experiences underscore the strategic value of bridging formal and informal power and identifying minimum areas of consensus to amplify their collective influence amid political differences.

Women's Mediator Networks: WIM-RAMP

Background

The Women Insider Mediators - Rapid Action and Mobilization Platform (WIM-RAMP) is one of many efforts in the BARMM to support women's leadership in community-based mediation.[79] This group of women mediators from Moro and Indigenous communities in the BARMM formed in 2020 and later expanded to include women from Christian groups and other communities. With support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), this capacity-building initiative trained members of the MILF, BIWAB, social welfare committees, and others, seeking to reach members from across the civil society ecosystem in the BARMM.

Operating Conditions

Amid slow CAB implementation, capacity-building for women and women's organizations created an opening to advance WPS by increasing women's visibility and leveraging their community mediation skills.[80] Amid a diverse civil society ecosystem that included multiple organizations focused on community mediation, WIM-RAMP sought to engage women in strategic implementation and advocacy around common goals related to peace, security, and humanitarian response.[81] Because the conflict is highly localized, generating community-level buy-in and credibility is essential yet often difficult for donor-driven initiatives, and participants noted that mediation efforts still struggle to earn local trust and traction.

Strategies and Tactics

WIM-RAMP worked to equip local community leaders with technical skills to serve as conflict mediators and to run mediation programs in their communities. Using a consultative approach, the initiative developed capacity-building activities tailored to the priorities of women and communities. In particular, the members identified common goals aimed at shifting underlying attitudes that fuel conflict, preventing violence, and promoting opportunities for women's leadership in peacebuilding.

> *"The goal is to build a movement that can help transcend political and ethnic fault lines and to work at the community level." – KII-P 21*

Central to WIM-RAMP's efforts has been intentionally facilitating safe spaces that foster a network of women community leaders from multiple civil society organizations. Through capacity-building, technical training, and open dialogue, WIM-RAMP has helped strengthen, amplify, and connect existing efforts to implement peace. In particular, members of WIM-RAMP have strategically leveraged their feminine identity, recognizing that women are often perceived as "less controversial" than men, which can be an advantage in community mediation efforts.[82]

> *"Membership is per province. We had to ask, who are the women who are active in dialogue and mediation? Inviting them through the training accompaniment process and developing shared work plans requires grounding the agenda in their realities." – KII-P 21*

In addition to showing the importance of supporting grassroots-level organizing, WIM-RAMP's work to promote women's leadership in local mediation efforts demonstrates that broad coalitions and community-led programming are central to implementing lasting peace and must be sustained beyond the signing of agreements.

Grassroots Organizing: WOMB in the BARMM

Background

The Women's Organizations Movement of the Bangsamoro (WOMB) emerged as an informal yet highly strategic network during the 16th and 17th Philippine Congresses (2013–2019), mobilizing women across Mindanao to advocate for the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), and—after the BBL failed to pass—the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL). As a loose coalition of 32 women's organizations, WOMB illustrates how women's networks leverage grassroots connections, broad alliances, and creative mobilizing strategies to exert political influence and contribute to peace processes.

Operating Conditions

WOMB formed in response to an urgent political moment, as a broad coalition united in their advocacy for the passage of the BBL and then the BOL. It drew on preexisting relationships and networks of women and activists across the region—most of whom had no prior experience lobbying at a national level. The group operated in an environment marked by persistent barriers to women's political participation, including limited access to funding and exclusion from formal decision-making spaces. Despite entrenched challenges, WOMB capitalized on a political moment of opportunity to unite diverse stakeholders around a shared advocacy goal, enabling the development of strategic alliances beyond traditional women's groups and partners.

Strategies and Tactics

A defining feature of WOMB's work was its broad-based, multi-level organizing strategy and alliance-building. Following the failed passage of the BBL in 2016, women leaders recognized the need for a unified platform that could engage decision-makers at multiple levels.

> *"The non-passage of the BBL at the 16th Congress was a blessing in disguise; it forced the groups to realize that working in isolation wasn't successful." – KII-P 6*

WOMB strategically framed its advocacy around protecting the gains of the peace process, an approach that enabled women to engage in national and local political debates while advancing outcomes that would benefit women and communities in the BARMM.

> *"We define a clear purpose. Establish a shared vision and objectives that unite the group." – KII-P 16*

Support from partners such as the Asia Foundation enabled national-level advocacy and facilitated capacity-building activities, including training on thinking and working politically. The flexibility of funds was critical to WOMB's success, allowing the network to respond to the needs of its members, including coverage for basic costs such as travel to the capital to participate in advocacy campaigns.

These resources, paired with large-scale mobilization of WOMB members, enabled the network to engage in public hearings, direct lobbying in the Senate and House of Representatives, and observe the bicameral conference committee. In addition to engaging women senators and women's organizations, WOMB deliberately built alliances with men's groups and peace advocates across sectors. Rather than viewing their work as explicitly feminist, they saw their core purpose as advocating for the BOL and promoting peace.

> *"Our men were very supportive of us; they were happy to have us beside them working together towards peace." – KII-P 16*

WOMB mobilized nearly 50,000 women to participate in political dialogues related to the BOL, fostering local ownership and ensuring that women representatives served as official speakers in every public hearing. A core strategy was the development and submission of position papers that clearly articulated the needs and priorities of the network, along with statements of support from diverse groups and alliances. The network also developed consistent branding and messaging across the region to maximize the visibility and impact of their campaign. During key congressional hearings held near election periods, WOMB

members wore traditional attire to visibly assert their identities as women from Mindanao, ensuring lawmakers registered the presence of their constituencies.

> *"We have to be faithful to our values, fearless in the services, and never forget that even the smallest act with sincerity can ripple into a lasting peace and can strengthen and unite one another." – KII-P 16*

Amid persistent challenges to organizing and advocacy—such as lack of funding, exclusion of women from decision-making spaces, and political tensions—WOMB demonstrated how values-driven, adaptive, and strategic mobilizing can have transformative social and political impact. Although the network is less active today, members emphasize that its foundations endure and that reactivation remains possible should another urgent need or clear opportunity arise.

Women's Coalitions for Peace: Stories from Sudan

Negotiation Participation: Women at the Geneva Talks

Background

As conflict engulfed Sudan following the outbreak of war in 2023, efforts to incorporate women's voices into peace negotiations led to initiatives that engaged women civil society delegates in talks held in Geneva in August 2024.[83] International facilitators, including U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues Geeta Rao Gupta, played a role in advocating for the participation of a delegation of 14 Sudanese women, who engaged in Track 1.5-style negotiations. The 14 women—though not fully representative of the entirety of Sudan's vast civil society ecosystem—illustrated the regional and sectoral diversity of women-led organizing across the country. The delegation sought to maximize the impact of their participation by building consensus among themselves and leveraging the reach of their respective networks to elevate the voices, concerns, and perspectives of women related to peace and security.

Although the talks ultimately faltered when the SAF failed to send an official counterpart to negotiate with the RSF delegation, the engagement of the women's delegation amplified the unique needs and priorities of Sudanese women and girls related to peace, security, and humanitarian assistance.

Operating Conditions

The talks in Geneva occurred against a backdrop of escalating war, mass displacement, and acute humanitarian need in the country. Historically, Sudanese women have been largely excluded from formal decision-making spaces and the participation of this delegation offered a rare opportunity for the perspectives and needs of women and girls to be explicitly voiced during negotiations. However, some participants reflected that their participation felt rushed and structurally constrained by a contentious political process. They also acknowledged that their ability to build consensus as a group would have been better supported through more intentional, consultative, and anticipatory planning.

Even after arriving in Geneva, the delegation had to fight to speak for themselves. The 14 women were originally invited to participate only on the periphery of the talks, with the assumption that they would work through intermediaries to communicate their input to the official talks. Once in Geneva, the delegation reached an understanding that being on the sidelines was not enough; they demanded to be in the room where negotiations were happening, otherwise they would leave Geneva altogether.

> *"From the beginning, we said we would not agree to be siloed. We first had plans to be placed in a separate 'woman' room, but this would not do. We needed to be a full part of the process. Slowly, we were able to get access to technical committees; we had credibility from the grassroots." – KII-S 3*

Strategies and Tactics

The Sudanese women who were invited to Geneva identified a range of strategies that helped strengthen their influence, despite the fact that they had little time to prepare for the talks. Interviewees agreed that a meaningful consultative process was vital for enabling the group to build consensus and identify advocacy priorities.

Recognizing the moment of opportunity at hand, the coalition of Sudanese women present in Geneva understood that despite differences stemming from their varied backgrounds and experiences, it was crucial to coalesce around a small number of key "common priorities" to maximize their influence. Beyond simply managing their differences, women delegates emphasized that the diversity of the group proved to be an asset.

> *"Taking two weeks to be together in that process, working day and night, and staying in the same hotel, helped a lot in building consensus. We came with different priorities, including geographic state identity and generational differences. But we knew we needed to combine priorities around three topics, and we tried our best to consistently go back to our constituencies and consult." – KII-S 3*

Interviewees remarked that prior opportunities for capacity-building provided an essential foundation upon which to leverage influence during the negotiations. For example, some had been involved in a longstanding initiative that brought women from Sudan and other conflict-affected countries to the Harvard University campus in the United States on multiple occasions for training and network activities. Sudanese women who participated in these workshops shared that the opportunity to network over many years and to develop skills around advocacy and mediation directly translated into their preparedness to participate in negotiations in Geneva.

While the talks ultimately failed to produce an agreement, the 14 Sudanese women leveraged their moment of influence to push for humanitarian aid and draw international attention to their concerns and demand for peace. Further, the delegation collectively created a code of conduct for the warring parties with respect to gender-based violence. Though not respected, the code of conduct collated a shared vision for accountability for women's human rights, informed by women's priorities.

> *"Even if [the agreement] was not respected, we showed that women are able to produce necessary accountability standards. We showed we can do this." – KII-S 3*

Despite dedicated efforts to build consensus for the negotiations, the delegates faced criticism from women who felt the group did not represent them or their communities. This was exacerbated by the fact that the delegates were selected in part by actors outside Sudan, who privileged more visible Sudanese organizations, some of which were affiliated with political coalitions. An interviewee shared that she understood this challenge and that ensuring legitimate, meaningful representation in externally mediated talks was vital.

> *"After Geneva, hundreds of women convened on Zoom and criticized us; they questioned our legitimacy. We knew we needed more work to become legitimate, but at least the voices of women and their priorities were present. But legitimacy and credibility require time and hard work. We can't do all of this work in a short time." – KII-S 3*

These testimonies stress the importance of early preparation and sustained support for the hard work of consultative processes. Following the window of opportunity in Geneva in 2024, multiple efforts have been made to bring together Sudanese women's coalitions, including an internationally funded set of consultations supported by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, seeking to help Sudanese women form a common agenda amid the war. Given increasing polarization across ethnic and regional lines, as well as in the context of varying armed-group and political affiliations, these efforts are difficult.

> *"Unfortunately, we are not united at this moment. There is polarization and division; we are in a very difficult time. But this is the work that has to be done. To come together as a women's movement to discuss is what we urgently need." – KII-S 10*

Even amid constraints, the experience of the delegation of Sudanese women in Geneva illustrates how women's coalitions can leverage limited openings by building a minimum consensus, drawing on grassroots legitimacy, and insisting on direct participation in formal political spaces. Their experiences underscore a lesson that remains central to the efforts of women's coalitions in Sudan: when networks can mobilize around existing relationships and coalesce around shared priorities, they can shape agendas and advance accountability even when formal negotiations falter.

National Civic Organizing: MANSAM

Background

Women of Sudanese Civic and Political Groups (MANSAM) formed in 2018 as a broad coalition of women's organizations, civic groups, feminist associations, youth networks, and individual activists for women's organizing.[84] They came together largely in response to the need for a coordinated but adaptive mechanism to amplify the collective impact of women's organizations. MANSAM played a critical role in mobilizing women during the 2018–2019 revolution in Sudan and was one of the signatories of the FFC declaration. During this period, they actively advocated for women's representation in transitional politics, rejecting historical exclusion from formal negotiations and pressing for women to hold at least 50 percent of leadership roles in the post-al-Bashir transitional government. While less active today, the organization offers important insights into the strategies by which broad coalitions leverage and navigate diverse memberships to achieve collective impact.

Operating Conditions

MANSAM strategically mobilized during the 2018-2019 revolution and remained active following the outbreak of war in 2023, but has been impacted by entrenched political, social, and economic challenges plaguing Sudan as a result of the conflict. Although MANSAM derives its strength from sustaining a broad, diverse coalition, it has also experienced fragmentation among its members—including the exit of the largest coalition inside MANSAM, the Women from the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF), in April 2022.[85]

Resource loss has posed another significant challenge for the group. Before the war, MANSAM benefited from a base of middle-class, urban, educated women who could financially sustain their own activism to participate in the coalition. The war erased much of that foundation: members lost homes, cars, and assets, forcing them to "start from zero" (KII-S 14) and focus on rebuilding their own lives. MANSAM's continued existence despite these challenges stands in contrast to many donor-driven women's organizations that collapse entirely when funding is lost, and is a testament to locally rooted, organic network-building.

As war has ravaged and polarized the country, political allegiances continue to prove difficult for MANSAM, but the group forges ahead on its mission to provide a safe convening space for women and women's groups to come together.

Strategies and Tactics

MANSAM intentionally developed a flexible structure to maximize the broad inclusion of women within the coalition. Through a collaborative process, members developed a shared strategy centered on four thematic pillars—peace and transitional justice, socioeconomic rights, legal reform and democratic transformation, and political participation.

> *"We had a strategy we wrote during our general assembly. We agreed we wanted to work for the women of Sudan, and we had four main areas we wanted to work on. All the members were in working groups. . ." – KII-S 6*

Members of MANSAM emphasized that the coalition "did a lot of lobbying and advocacy work for women's participation" (KII-S 6), positioning women not only as beneficiaries of political change but as legitimate political actors in Sudan's transition. This included a member of MANSAM who served on the Central Council of the FFC, which oversaw the nominations for critical government posts, including some women.

The group's advocacy was reinforced by deliberate efforts to bridge social divides. MANSAM consistently worked with women in the informal sector, including Sudan's largest cooperative—the Women's Multi-Purpose Cooperative Union. When a government raid confiscated women's tools, MANSAM mobilized resources to replace them so women could continue their livelihoods, illustrating how feminist political activism was closely tied to everyday economic survival.

Yet members were clear that coalition politics have not always been harmonious, marked by frequent internal disagreements. The war further deepened these strains, which at times included tensions related to perceptions of political affiliation that could stymie social trust and communication. Accusations and exclusions emerged in an atmosphere of fear and mistrust, where "people don't really want to deal with the real and difficult conversations, they just want to label" (KII-S 6).

> *"It was a big coalition; people sometimes fought. People who would leave and there would be a press conference. But this is the reality! We cannot pretend our differences don't exist." – KII-S 14*

The coalition also prioritized intergenerational dialogue and mentorship, seeking to cultivate alliances rather than competition among women leaders and activists and to rectify generational differences. A particular point of contention surrounded the concept of feminism, which some older generations view as aligned with Western-imposed frameworks and norms, and related to political affiliation.[86] As one member explained, mentorship was essential so that younger and older women could see each other as allies rather than rivals.

> *"We also did intergenerational dialogues. . .We wanted to make sure there was some kind of mentorship, so that they are allies and you're not looking at one another as competitors." – KII-S 6*

MANSAM's reach extends beyond Sudan through a growing diaspora network, including in Brazil, Canada, Qatar, and the United States. These external wings evolved into semiautonomous platforms that provided financial and material

support, demonstrating how transnational solidarity strengthened domestic organizing capacity. At the same time, the coalition has maintained a flexible institutional structure. Although MANSAM itself is not formally registered, it has worked through member organizations to manage donor funds from partners such as UN Women and UNDP, with internal financial coordination led by a finance secretary.

> *"Most of the women's bodies and organizations that come out of workshops stop existing once funds dry up, because they are not organic. They are completely tied to the donor. This is why MANSAM is still there. It started out organic and then was able to raise funds." – KII-S 14*

Taken together, these experiences highlight MANSAM's core strategies: grounding political advocacy in loose networks and solidarity, building inclusive and intergenerational coalition structures, and leveraging diaspora networks. At the same time, they underscore common vulnerabilities, including limited resources, differences in priorities, and divisions exacerbated by the ravages of war.

Humanitarian Response Networks: Emergency Response Rooms and Community Kitchens

Background

Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs) are grassroots initiatives that emerged amid the rising devastation of war and serve as the backbone of Sudan's humanitarian response, providing basic services amid the destruction of much of the country's essential infrastructure.[87] Since the outbreak of war in 2023, they have expanded across all 18 states in Sudan, growing out of neighborhood-level organizing that was a feature of the 2018-2019 revolution. Women play central roles in many of the ERR initiatives, building community-based mutual-aid infrastructure in response to identified needs, including community kitchens, basic education, and healthcare services.[88]

The remarkable work of ERRs in Sudan has generated international recognition, including consideration for the 2024 and 2025 Nobel Peace Prize.[89] Women have served in a range of important roles, including managing kitchens and leading emergency rooms, and in broader volunteer positions, creatively leveraging preexisting small businesses, women's networks, and infrastructure to continue providing services. In some places, women have established Women's Emergency Rooms (WERs) or Feminist Emergency Rooms (FERs) that offer safe spaces for women and girls, including survivors of sexual violence. These initiatives are particularly crucial in areas where many households are headed by women because of the large number of husbands and fathers who have been killed during the war.

Operating Conditions

The destruction of Sudan's health system as a result of conflict has heightened risks for women and girls, especially pregnant women and new mothers. In response, women have organized to meet community needs. Community-led ERRs provide essential, often life-saving services, despite operating in an insecure and resource-constrained environment. Many are unregistered with the state, and the informal status can pose additional barriers to receiving funding and make it difficult to scale these responses. While grassroots work has been a lifeline, some participants worried that women's contributions have not received adequate recognition.

> *"People talk about the work of the emergency support rooms . . . But nobody talks about the grassroots women and the significant role they play in saving communities." – KII-S 2*

Women engaging in these grassroots emergency response initiatives frequently shoulder a dual burden: responding to urgent humanitarian needs in their communities while also striving to sustain the networks and coalitions that support broader women's issues. In this context, securing resources for longer-term or non-emergency priorities can be particularly difficult.

> *"Groups are under a lot of pressure to just deliver humanitarian aid when most funding is going towards aid. [There was a] feminist fund that used to do training and support for women's organizations, but they have pivoted to humanitarian aid. A lot of organizations who want to work on women's issues are forced to do aid in order to access funding." – KII-S 4*

Strategies and Tactics

The decentralized, volunteer-driven model of ERRs builds community trust and has proved resilient in the face of resource scarcity. In the absence of formal institutional support, many ERRs rely on creative financing and partnership arrangements to sustain their operations. Some ERRs have secured donations from the Sudanese diaspora to support emergency operations.[90] Others have developed relationships with intermediary partner organizations that serve as fiscal sponsors and can administer grants since the ERRs lack their own formal registration. For example, one interviewee noted that MANSAM has served this role to channel funds for ERRs.

Most ERRs across Sudan have been established and sustained at the grassroots level—including by women seeking to address critical needs in their communities. These local initiatives are particularly important for enabling access to resources for populations such as women and girls, the disabled, and those who have been internally displaced. Many ERRs provide access to food amid widespread food insecurity, while others offer essential medical care in the absence of formal

healthcare infrastructure. Given the nature of the conflict and the scale of need, these initiatives have required flexibility and adaptation.

> *"We are everywhere responding to whatever needs are in the community" -KII-S 10*

In response to staggering need, these grassroots initiatives utilize the resources on hand, largely young and willing volunteers seeking to help sustain their communities.

> *"We train some young women and girls for first aid, so they can go from door to door." – KII-S 10*

Social stigma and widespread displacement pose additional barriers to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence who need medical attention and psychosocial support, and women-led ERRs are critical in filling this gap.

> *"At times where nobody wants to touch victims of sexual violence... it was the grassroots women who administered massive support for women victims of sexual violence and their families. It was the grassroots women who escort victims at a time when the system is collapsing into medical services, they will alert about mental health, they will fight for resources, with that work typically not being seen or acknowledged." – KII-S 2*

Participants stress the value of flexible, adaptive organizing as a feature of women's organizing in Sudan. The efforts leverage past networks, build them further, and help advance women's priorities grounded in locally urgent needs.

Federated Women's Networks: Midanik Feminist Movement

Background

Midanik Feminist Movement (Midanik), a loose, collective young feminist network in Sudan, developed around the sit-ins during Sudan's revolution in 2018-2019. The group initially emerged as an informal volunteer body supporting protesters through in-person mobilization and feminist digital advocacy. Over time, Midanik institutionalized its structure and now operates at the national level across a range of advocacy areas focused on women's political inclusion and protection.

Operating Conditions

Midanik faced challenges developing a responsive approach to meet demand from women on the ground for support to advance gender equality. They sought to remain adaptive and responsive to women's changing needs, while also

developing a formal structure. Members reflected that it was difficult to decide whether to register as a formal organization or to remain as a loose coalition. Those advocating for registration emphasized that it would help the group access funds and resources, while those opposed worried that formalizing might hinder the flexible, grassroots nature. Ultimately, the group decided to register, enabling more direct access to funds and closer engagement with municipal authorities.

Strategies and Tactics

Initially, Midanik's operations were primarily focused on being responsive to protesters' needs around the 2018-2019 revolution. For example, the group built a database of volunteers and developed a supply chain structure to provide resources to the protesters.

Midanik also played a role in organizing protests and encouraging women to mobilize in the streets. When a mural by Sudanese artist Alaa Satir reading "A woman's place is in the resistance," was defaced and altered to say "A woman's place is in the kitchen," women brought kitchen tools to protests. In doing so, they reclaimed the narrative, strategically invoked feminine identity, and underscored the interconnectedness of women's roles in the home and in public life.

> *"Bringing kitchen tools to the protests sent a message. It meant we can do this labor and we can also participate in this sit in with you. This put our lives in danger. But it also helped change people's perceptions of feminism." – KII-S 16*

In the period leading up to the signing of the Juba Peace Agreement in 2020, Midanik built a strategic campaign called All Our Rights that advocated for a 40 percent women's political participation quota to be included in the agreement.

Since the subsequent outbreak of war in 2023, the group has continued to adjust its strategy in response to local needs. Facing constraints from the onslaught of violence and related challenges, such as internet blackouts, they switched from focusing on digital advocacy to working directly with more targeted communities, such as women tea vendors who faced sexual violence. They also sought to support women's participation in locally organized resistance committees.

> *"To survive, we learned to adapt quickly." – KII-S 16*

In the years of war since, the group has continued to shift its strategy in response to emerging needs and perceived moments of opportunity, including a focus on sexual and reproductive health given the prevalence of conflict-related sexual violence. Interviewees raised that many members have experienced burnout and that the decision to formally register with the government was difficult, but ultimately helped improve their ability to engage with decision-makers.

> *"The biggest change was the decision to register as part of a legal body. [Before then] we had [primarily] looked at our work as organic." – KII-S 16*

Midanik's work illustrates how flexible, youth-led networks are well positioned to adapt their strategies as conflict conditions evolve. By grounding their work in grassroots needs, leveraging symbolic forms of feminist mobilization, and balancing informal activism with engagement with formal institutions, the group has sustained its influence across protest movements, political advocacy, and humanitarian response. These efforts underscore how adaptive organizing and strong community ties can enable women's coalitions to remain relevant and effective across rapidly shifting political and conflict contexts.

Grassroots Organizing: Kassala Gender Equality Network

Background

Across Sudan, a number of gender equality networks emerged since the revolution, seeking to help organize women to respond to gender-specific issues in states including Kassala, North Kordofan, Sennar, Gedaref, Blue Nile, Khartoum, Darfur, and South Kordofan. Each is focused on women's rights and gender equality with a regional dimension, aiming to address the unique needs and priorities of different states and their policy contexts. The Kassala Gender Equality Network initially formed in 2021 as a loose collective of organizations and associations working on women's rights, and it has aimed to respond to the needs of women, including through recent efforts to address the devastation from massacres in El-Fasher in North Darfur and to show a sense of solidarity. It engages across a wide variety of thematic areas, including health and economic activities, and has also contributed to the ERRs supporting sexual violence survivors.

Operating Conditions

Women members who formed the network in Kassala saw an opportunity to develop state-level organizing that could be more responsive to Kassala's local, specific needs than existing international and national forms of organizing and service provision. Like many coalitions in Sudan, the Kassala Gender Equality Network has grappled with whether to formally register with the government. Another core challenge has been funding, compounded by the devastation of the ongoing war. Some organizations supporting the network previously received U.S. Agency for International Development funding for women's health initiatives, which enabled outreach to remote areas of Kassala State. However, sharp international aid funding cuts in 2025 have left critical gaps just as needs have intensified amid escalating conflict.

Strategies and Tactics

The Kassala Gender Equality Network has adopted an organic feminist approach to organizing, working with the networks that existed in Kassala before the formation of the new coalition. This strategy enabled the group to grow by building on trusted networks and leaders with credibility in the community.

The group's members stressed that connecting peace and security issues to local contexts has been critical for generating community buy-in and ensuring they gain access to do their work. Livelihood support is a fundamental need in these communities and therefore a central focus for the Kassala network, which works to provide opportunities for economic empowerment. These initiatives have also been valuable entry points for the group's efforts to support women's security, especially where disputes over resources are shaping violence in their communities.

The group's work illustrates a tactic that has helped connect their efforts to local contexts: using issue-focused advocacy and programming, alongside strategic partnerships to support the community in other areas. This approach has involved framing the group's work in response to restrictive social norms that are antagonistic to "women's rights" or "feminist" organizing.

Women's health awareness-raising with female vegetable sellers, October 2025.
Photo shared by Kassala Gender Equality Network

> *"Kassala State is very conservative . . . this made it difficult for us to work, and this supported the formation of the network because by coming together, we were able to work on women's rights and peace. The network allowed us to work on gender equality in an intersectional way as we were all working on different themes." – KII-S 18*

For example, interviewees shared that, in addition to working on economic empowerment, a women's health campaign in 2024 focused on breast cancer awareness. This campaign, called The Whole Year is Pink, enabled the Kassala network to gain permits to travel to other locations and organize events without facing backlash, because the work was seen as apolitical. They view this tactic as a valuable entry point for engaging diverse groups of women while remaining anchored in grassroots legitimacy, strengthening networks, and fostering relationships and dialogue, with impacts that extend well beyond the group's initial focus on women's health.

Grassroots Organizing: Mothers of Sudan, Blue Nile

Background

Mothers of Sudan is a grassroots peace organization operating in the Blue Nile State. The group formed around an anti-war protest in Khartoum held in April 2023, and brought together women from four localities in the region (al-Damazin, Rosairs, Wad el-mahi, and Gissan) to produce a joint statement. Today, Mothers of Sudan has more than 200 members and engages in a range of activities, including facilitating community dialogues, promoting legal awareness, and empowering women's leadership across the region.

Operating Conditions

Mothers of Sudan operates in an environment defined by brutal violence, widespread displacement, and pervasive impunity. In addition to navigating challenges posed by persistent insecurity and damage to critical infrastructure, the group must contend with deep political polarization and tribal tensions, which have been intensified by nearly three years of war. These dynamics can erode trust among civil society organizations, complicating coordination and collective action. Against this backdrop, Mothers of Sudan plays a critical role in promoting peace through community dialogue, documenting the harms of conflict, amplifying local voices, and connecting grassroots initiatives with aligned efforts and organizing across the country.

Strategies and Tactics

Central to the group's strategy has been the development of locally grounded initiatives, first rooted in the Blue Nile and then expanded outward to other

regions of Sudan. This "periphery-to-center" approach stands in contrast to more conventional models that project efforts from elite circles in Khartoum to the rest of the country—a "center-to-periphery" logic.

> *"We are the mothers of Sudan, leading advocacy to stop the war, end the violence, and achieve peace in Sudan, through the effective participation of inclusive women's leadership." – Mothers of Sudan mission statement*

Mothers of Sudan operates in a horizontal structure, leveraging local action while avoiding top-down leadership. This approach includes close coordination with local community leaders as well as engaging with families to encourage peaceful mediation and prevent community members' recruitment into armed groups.

A key aspect of building community trust is door-to-door outreach, prioritizing in-person connections and facilitating safe spaces for discussing the impacts of militarization. This strategy is particularly crucial amid war-related internet blackouts that cut off communications and limit access to information. The door-to-door approach has proved successful for the Mothers of Sudan, which persuaded a number of combatants in Blue Nile State to surrender their weapons during the early phase of the war.

In addition to the success of its local, community-led approach to peace and disarmament, the group has also benefited from effective partnerships with other women's civil society organizations, including Al-Harissat Organization in Uganda that supports Sudanese refugees, the Women's Peace Network, SIHA network, and Women Against Injustice.

Mothers of Sudan's strategic partnerships with other organizations have built a network of solidarity among groups with similar mandates of peace. Their work illustrates the power of coordinated action in responding to crises, meeting urgent needs, and sharing tactics and best practices. Building on the model of loose and informal engagement, the group continues to operate today and is expanding its coordination with women activists in other areas, including Darfur, Kordofan, Sennar, Gezira, and Khartoum.

Part VI.
Implications

Across both cases, women's coalitions emerge not as peripheral actors, but as foundational political infrastructure. Their work helps societies withstand violence, seize openings for negotiation, and maintain pressure for implementation and localization of policy response. The examples of women's coalition-building explored in the Philippines illustrate how women created and sustained influence over decades through layered organizing, trusted bridge-builders who moved between civil society and government institutions, and creative, culturally resonant advocacy around salient issues for communities, sometimes in harmony and sometimes reflecting differences in groups' priorities. Sudan underscores this lesson under far more volatile conditions: when formal talks falter and the humanitarian system collapses, women's networks continue to produce collective agendas, set accountability standards, and deliver lifesaving aid.

For the field of WPS research, these findings offer new insights into forms of women's organizing essential to peace outcomes that are not captured in conventional metrics. Prominent quantitative analyses of women's coalitions often measure their presence through highly-visible indicators of participation, such as representation of civil society coalitions in formal peace negotiations. While these metrics offer important insights, they miss the coalition activity that underpins these forms of engagement, including grassroots organizing that delivers humanitarian assistance, advances legal and policy reform, and cultivates women leaders who later enter formal political processes. By widening the aperture to examine these less visible forms of organizing and the strategic linkages between civic action and formal participation, the study contributes a more holistic understanding of how women's coalitions generate influence, build legitimacy, and shape peace and security outcomes over time.

In both the Philippines and Sudan, diverse women's coalitions emphasized the importance of periods of transnational activism during the 1990s and early 2000s, when cross-border women's solidarity and mobilization around the 1995 Beijing Declaration and UNSCR 1325 helped galvanize international action. The networks and knowledge forged during this period continue to shape women's organizing in these conflict settings, even decades later. In the absence of comparable global momentum at the international and multilateral level today, a critical question remains: how will future generations deepen and sustain the work of coalition-building in the absence of similar forms of robust international solidarity?

Taken together, the cases reinforce that coalition strength is less about perfect unity than about durable coordination that is rooted in organic organizing, flexible enough to tolerate difference, and aided by long-term support for mobilization and coordination that endures through moments of crisis. Coalitions form and re-form across time, sectors, and geographies; their effectiveness depends on the enabling conditions in which they operate, including civic space, accessible resourcing that avoids elite capture, and the patient work of consultation that builds credibility with constituencies and leverage with decision-makers. The implications for the WPS field are therefore practical as well as political: actors seeking durable peace must treat coalition-building as essential, supporting the relationships, capacities, and cross-domain pathways that allow women's coalitions to activate rapidly when windows open and to endure when war and exclusion threaten to constrain their vital work.

There is no single, formulaic approach to ensure success; coalitions are living, breathing organisms that require recognition, nurturing, and flexibility. However, several key recommendations for advancing and sustaining women's coalitions emerge from this study. Despite being at the heart of conflict mediation, humanitarian relief, and advocacy, these actors remain under-recognized. This gap underscores an urgent responsibility for those in positions of power and influence, including governments, funders, and development partners, to better acknowledge, elevate, and support the mobilization, advocacy, and crisis response led by women in their communities. This requires drawing lessons from contemporary crises and engaging the challenges and achievements articulated by women leaders, ensuring that the longstanding activism and organizing efforts of earlier generations inform future practice.

The study identifies five cross-cutting findings about what enables effective work to form and grow the impact of women's coalitions.

1. Coalitions are more effective when they are organic.
2. Enabling space for flexibility and loose organizing maximizes participation.
3. Bridging domains, sectors, and geographies requires trust-building.
4. Grassroots leadership, power, and capacity are the heartbeat of coalitions.
5. Coalitions require long-term investment and nurturing.

Despite their differences, both cases highlight the importance of flexible and organic forms of organizing and the need to better align financial and technical support with the long-term needs of these groups.

Recommendations

Building on these core findings, this study identifies a number of recommendations for funders, civil society actors, and practitioners seeking to strengthen women's coalitions as a core pillar of peace and security.

Funders

- **Support organic organizing:** Meet women's movements where they are by investing in locally driven approaches to building and sustaining networks, rather than imposing externally defined coalitions and donor-driven priorities.
- **Enable flexible and informal structures:** Use adaptive funding modalities that can reach unregistered groups, groups with diffuse leadership and membership, groups with limited digital access, issue-based social movements, and those operating outside capital cities.
- **Fund work to identify shared priorities:** Support coalitions in organizing around a small number of shared, high-impact priorities rather than requiring comprehensive consensus platforms.
- **Recognize temporary coalitions:** Value short-term or issue-specific coalitions as legitimate and strategic, alongside longer-term network-building.
- **Bridge sectors and levels:** Fund cross-sectoral convenings (e.g., spanning peace, humanitarian work, development, governance) and leaders who can operate across national and grassroots spaces.
- **Rethink success metrics:** Measure impact not only through policy outcomes but also through sustained relationships, trust-building, and coalition-formation processes.
- **Invest beyond crisis moments:** Maximize coalition effectiveness by committing to sustained resources before, during, and after conflict, including support for coalition-building in low-conflict settings, regular convening, and intergenerational knowledge transfer.
- **Support documentation and memory:** Fund efforts to document coalition histories and lessons in local languages, including the role of diaspora networks in moments of crisis.

Civil Society Organizations and Women's Coalitions

- **Build from what already exists:** Anchor coalition-building in trusted networks, including those not explicitly labeled as "WPS" or "feminist" but engaged in peace- and security-relevant work.

- **Leverage informal coordination:** Use flexible mechanisms—such as secure digital chat groups, rotating leadership, or community-based meeting spaces—to sustain engagement beyond capital cities and in safe environments (e.g., women-only spaces when preferred by members).
- **Balance formality and autonomy:** Weigh the benefits of formal registration (access, recognition, funding) against risks of political exposure, constraint, or co-optation.
- **Make space for difference:** Acknowledge diversity among women's groups, including differences in political views and goals, and prioritize alignment on specific shared priorities rather than full agreement across all issues.
- **Strengthen grassroots feedback loops:** Use federated or networked models that ensure local priorities meaningfully inform collective positions and decisions.
- **Engage across sectors:** Organize through multiple entry points—including health, livelihoods, education, or humanitarian work—where peace and security concerns are embedded.

Policy and Development Practitioners

- **Map existing women's networks:** Identify and engage women's groups already contributing to peace and security outcomes to avoid duplication of efforts and maximize input from existing constellations of local actors rather than relying on ad hoc or one-off consultations.
- **Enable direct engagement:** Reduce reliance on intermediaries and create pathways for grassroots women to engage directly with policy processes.
- **Institutionalize participation:** Build structured, sustained mechanisms for coalition input into policy design and programming, avoiding reactive or symbolic inclusion.
- **Bridge policy silos:** Develop strategies that link humanitarian, development, and security agendas, including through aligned budgeting and programming frameworks, to avoid women's coalitions having to spend the majority of their time administering small sums of funding from a range of funding streams. Consider the use of pooled funds.
- **Support sustained partnerships:** Move beyond crisis-driven consultations toward longer-term relationships that strengthen trust and influence over time.

Global Women's Networks

- **Foster informal transnational networks:** Support spaces for informal dialogue, peer exchange, and rapid lesson sharing among women leaders from conflict-affected settings.
- **Support cross-national learning:** Facilitate exchanges, conferences, and training that center grassroots leadership and practice-based learning.
- **Amplify diaspora engagement:** Document and share lessons on how diaspora women's movements can effectively support domestic coalitions during moments of crisis.
- **Strengthen connective infrastructure:** Act as bridges across regions, sectors, and levels to support alignment, solidarity, and collective power.

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