

Getting to the Point of Inclusion: Seven Myths Standing in the Way of Women Waging Peace¹

In early 2008, Kenyan streets were filled with people wielding machetes wet with the blood of their political rivals and those ethnically different from them. Kofi Annan sat with Kenyan leaders, negotiating peace as death and destruction raged around them.

On the outskirts of Nairobi, the Kibera slum was one of the theatres of this seemingly endless violence – until a 15-year-old girl was killed. She died with people around her, including a photographer documenting her last moments. Among those watching was the previously unknown Jane Anyango, who was galvanized into action by the girl's death. She moved from door to door, mobilising women in protest. In less than two hours, Ms Anyango and a friend had 200 women marching, chanting for the fighting to end and pulling men they knew off the streets.

The nation was divided on tribal, political, and religious grounds, “Yet, when we called for women to join us, nobody cared which [community] we were from,” Ms Anyango says.

Her group took the name Kibera Women for Peace and Fairness and grew to include a large number of women working towards a common goal: convincing male relatives to stay clear of violence. The group sent a message to the wives of the Prime Minister and the President, “Talk to your husbands to end the conflict; we got our men off the streets”. The women created inter-ethnic platforms and, during the 2013 elections, Ms Anyango and her colleagues patrolled Kibera in pairs. If they saw a man demonstrating, they called his wife, aunt, mother, girlfriend, or daughter.

No security force could have used these tactics; no political party could have had quite the same effect. The women of Kibera took charge of the peace and security agenda, these bridging ethnic divides that men still find hard to negotiate.

The Challenging Search for Authentic Voices

In our experience, the vast majority of mediators support the inclusion of women and the protection of their rights. They recognise that talks are less democratic if half of the population is not represented. Importantly, many have seen firsthand the influential contributions to peacebuilding that women like Jane Anyango make when they change the dynamic within a community – or a country.

But mediators don't want to be in the lonely, and generally ineffective, position of being the sole voice calling for expanded participation, particularly when it seems the culturally 'inappropriate' thing to do. Above all, they want the violence to stop and will do whatever they can to end fighting.

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It may be tempting, then, to put aside the framing of inclusive negotiations for fear the process may thus become too complicated and fraught with risk. “If I’m seen as favouring some women over others, won’t that jeopardise my impartiality? I’m lucky to get the parties to the talks; how can I push them even further? How do I know which women to contact? Will I be seen as perpetuating a Western notion in a context where it is not culturally appropriate?”

As the nature of conflict changes, the job of the mediator has become more complex. Violence is diversifying, with a growing number of state and non-state actors, and decreasing clarity about which constituencies each represents. Lines between civil and armed groups are sometimes blurred, and long-standing local disputes have been awakened during national revolutions. Transnational crime networks operate with stunning sophistication and insurgents can get instructions and materials to build bombs from the internet. Our global culture of instant information is also dramatically changing the dynamics of mediation. Billions of people now have access to the leveling power of social media. Lead negotiators have Twitter accounts while university students mobilise hundreds of thousands through Facebook.

In an ever-crowded space, mediators need access to representative voices with authentic constituencies. They need to engage with those who have a stake in lasting peace and the corresponding courage to build it. Ultimately, they need more women in more peace processes.

Our goal in writing this paper is to equip mediators with examples and to expose several myths that, if left unchallenged, can prevent peacemakers from doing their best work.

At best, mediation is messy and complicated. But meaningfully involving women at all stages is by no means impossible, and by all means worth it.

MYTH 1: It is hard enough to get parties to participate – introducing new actors will destabilise already precarious processes

Research shows the opposite to be true: while never discounting the challenges of dealing with a more diverse set of actors, multiple studies have found that involving civil society – including women – has resulted in greater stability in societies over the longer term. Most recently, an examination of 83 peace agreements in 40 countries from 1989-2004 found that the inclusion of civil society actors in a settlement increased the durability of peace, particularly in non-democratic societies. Peace agreements were 60% less likely to fail when both civil society actors and political parties participated in the process. Importantly, there was nothing in the study suggesting that the inclusion of civil society has negative implications for the durability of peace.¹

It appears that a growing number of major national and international negotiations now result in framework or transitional arrangements (where, normally, parties agree only on principles and an agenda for negotiating substantive issues), as opposed to comprehensive peace agreements. It may seem reasonable to argue that, in these more limited arrangements, inclusion is not as critical – that it is most important and appropriate to include additional, diverse perspectives in subsequent stages. For three primary reasons, however, this does not hold true.

Firstly, the exclusion of peaceful civil society actors reinforces negative incentives: if you want a seat at the table, bear arms. As respected Mozambican leader and former South African and Mozambican First Lady Graça Machel notes, “When you give prominence to the warring parties at the expense of consulting and involving the majority of people, you are giving them rights to decide on behalf of the others, in essence rewarding them for having taken up arms.”²

Secondly, transitional and framework agreements lay important foundations for long term stabilisation. The exclusion of key stakeholders from this level of talks not only jeopardises the sustainability of an agreement, but condemns them to struggle even harder for representation in future rounds of negotiations. Advocating for a quota, funding, or even recognition becomes more difficult after agreements have been signed and programmes designed.

Thirdly, while a framework or transitional agreement may be essential to ending hostilities, it is not tantamount to creating lasting peace. For stability to endure, particularly in civil war situations, underlying dynamics must be addressed right away through processes informed by those with the greatest understanding of those dynamics and a genuine stake in their resolution.

THE MEDIATOR'S BOTTOM LINE: Though often challenging, the benefits of increasing the perspectives included in negotiations – including those leading to framework or transitional agreements – generally outweigh the risks.

MYTH 2: Women's perspectives can be brought in later – they're not useful in stopping the guns now

We are sympathetic to the argument that urgency is critical to negotiations, and that anyone who comes to the table had better be able to stop the fighting. Fortunately, very often, women can.

Around the world, women have been integral in getting parties to the negotiating table and in ensuring that, once there, they remain committed to the process. Fed up with the war in their countries, women from Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone joined forces in 1999. Facing three Presidents who had vowed to never talk to one another, they used unconventional tactics to compel them to attend negotiations – including threatening to lock the President of Guinea in a room until he did so.³ In 2004, women from the region came together again to force a non-violent resolution to stalled peace talks in Liberia.⁴ For years, when talks faltered in Sri Lanka, a woman served as an impartial bridge between parties.⁵ In India's Naga region, as the ceasefire wavered, women sustained it by mediating between national security forces, underground opposition forces, and a range of tribal factions and groups.⁶ In Colombia in 2002, when the Government broke off peace talks with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and initiated an armed offensive, women's groups mobilised 40,000 people in protest.⁷ Among the pastoral communities frequently in conflict in Kenya, conflict primarily stops because it is the women who settle local disputes and have the experience to know when the conflict parties have reached a mutually hurting stalemate. In Pakistan, women are working with families to dissuade young men from becoming suicide bombers.⁸

There are many examples where women participate directly in negotiations – representing parties or as civil society contributors – and create dynamics that enable short and long term progress. During negotiations on Darfur, for example, women “raised previously neglected issues that all parties could agree on, such as food security; these issues effectively served as confidence-building measures.”⁹ During Ugandan negotiations, observers from the United States found that women delegates “greased the wheels”, facilitating communication among the parties.¹⁰ As Dr Ozonnia Ojielo who is the Coordinator, Conflict Prevention and Recovery at UNDP describes, “Women help parties move away from the type of zero-sum thinking that consistently stalls negotiations.”¹¹

Women also tend to broaden the set of issues addressed in negotiations beyond military action, power and wealth-sharing to address the underlying drivers of the conflict. In Guatemala, women ensured that talks addressed police power and civilian oversight of the security sector.¹² In Uganda, women insisted that talks between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Government address long term reintegration of combatants in communities, securing the provision of health care and education.¹³

THE MEDIATOR'S BOTTOM LINE: Including women is not simply the right thing to do; it is the smart thing to do. General Lazaro Sumbeiywo, a Kenyan envoy who served as chief mediator in Sudan, explains, “What I have learned through experience is that a peace agreement without women participating at the highest level is a recipe for short-term, not long-term, solutions.”¹⁴

MYTH 3: Mediators have little authority to insist on greater inclusion of women

Discussions related to authority normally focus on the mediator's mandate, which can vary widely. What is consistent across negotiations, however, is that mediators represent organisations and that these organisations have standards and shared principles. While a mediator may be politically impartial, s/he is never impartial in terms of values.

Whether as a lead envoy, chair of a high-level panel or Special Representative of the Secretary-General, a mediator is expected to uphold the standards and principles of the institution s/he represents. A United Nations (UN) mediator is prevented, for example, from endorsing peace agreements that provide for amnesties for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, or gross violations of human rights, including sexual and gender-based violence.¹⁵

Direction in terms of women's participation in negotiations is rarely as specific. But nearly every organisation has codified guidance that buttresses a mediator's pursuit of inclusion. In the UN (the entity that frequently issues mandates to mediators), the Security Council has passed numerous resolutions recognising women's agency in preventing and stopping war. The first, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (passed in 2000), stresses "the importance of women's equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution."¹⁶ In 2003, the African Union adopted the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, which calls on parties to "take all appropriate measures to ensure the increased participation of women."¹⁷ The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Organization of American States, and many other bodies have similar guidance. Some 39 countries now also have national action plans affirming the principles of UNSCR 1325 and, in many cases, specifically requiring women's full participation in negotiation and mediation teams.

Regardless of mandate, most mediators rightly contend they have little ability to insist on virtually anything! Limitations apply to women's inclusion as much as to a range of other topics or conditions. To varying degrees, however, mediators have influence. They have the power to convene. By meeting regularly with women from civil society, they can send a powerful signal that those voices matter. Mediators and their teams can frame discussions, asking questions and eliciting information in a way that draws attention to the ways that issues might differently impact on women, men, girls and boys. Mediators can persuade the parties that including women in delegations is in their interests (see Myth 4), and mediators have access to international actors such as contact groups, many of which themselves exert influence on the parties through funding, political recognition, and other forms of support.

Importantly, parties can hardly take seriously a male mediator's claims about the importance of women's perspectives if his team does not include female top advisers. As a Sudanese woman said to Jacqueline O'Neill after meeting an all-male, high-level UN delegation, "Why should the men in our parties believe the UN when it says that women are important to the talks? They have access to the whole world, but didn't think even one woman was capable of being on their team?"

THE MEDIATOR'S BOTTOM LINE: Mediators have a large and growing body of mandates, guidance, norms and established practices that compel them to ensure women's meaningful inclusion. Rightly, mediators will always need to use discretion to navigate messy realities and only they will know how far to push. 'Bulldozing' does not work, but creativity is often an option. A mediator may:

- Reference supportive UN Security Council Resolutions, adopted organisational principles, and national legal frameworks.
- Offer parties positive incentives, such as additional pleaces at the table for those who include a critical mass of women.
- Authorise the creation of a Gender Expert Support Team – a non-partisan, representative group of women (and potentially men) with expertise on specific issues, who serve as a technical resource for all. (His Excellency Salim Salim did this during the Darfur negotiations in 2007.¹⁸)
- Urge respected independent bodies to lead consultations with women leaders and conduct a gendered analysis of key issues.¹⁹
- Ensure each member of the mediation team – male and female – receives quality, relevant, context-

specific training on inclusion.

MYTH 4: Mediators lose valuable political capital by urging parties to include women

In some cases, parties can identify specific benefits which may result from including women in their delegations, or by having women contribute as civil society representatives. These benefits occur when women's participation supports broader objectives.

As an example, parties to negotiations frequently seek international legitimacy. When Jacqueline O'Neill once asked the leader of a Darfurian rebel movement why he had announced that his group would include 25% women negotiators, he replied, "Well, isn't that what all of you in the international community do?" He saw inclusion as a stepping stone towards global recognition – one of his core objectives.

Domestic approval is essential, particularly for movements seeking to transition into political parties. Numerous cases show how the inclusion of women can increase the perceived legitimacy of peace processes, and parties associated with them, by local stakeholders. Many people recognise that these stakeholders are also voters, at least 50% of whom are normally women! In the Philippines, public perception of the legitimacy of negotiations improved substantially when women were appointed as four of the five official mediators.²⁰

Parties wanting to implement agreements also benefit tremendously when women subsequently generate support for them in communities. Referring to negotiations that led to Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, Dr Priscilla Nyanyang Joseph Kuch, Deputy Minister of Gender, Child and Social Welfare for South Sudan explained, "Our leaders knew they needed us [women] to sell the agreements back at home. We took it to villages and explained what self-determination meant and how eventually we would be able to vote on whether or not to separate. Women later made up the majority of voters (52%) in the referendum."²¹

THE MEDIATOR'S BOTTOM LINE: If accused of disrespecting women and their rights, most people will become defensive. But when presented with the potentially positive effects of women's contributions, parties may recognise direct benefits. They may also perceive a mediator who identifies women's strengths and influence as more culturally sensitive than one who implies that women are passive victims. By framing the inclusion of women to parties as a means to advance everyone's interests, a mediator has the opportunity to demonstrate insight and actually strengthen relationships.

MYTH 5: 'Women's issues' are discrete, separable topics

The insights and experiences that women bring to negotiations are essential to understanding and successfully addressing every topic on the table – including those most central to the conflict.

Women often do, see, and hear things differently from men, which leads them to have unique perspectives and priorities. The term 'women's issues' typically refers to these perspectives and priorities and the topics associated with some of them. But the term perpetuates the misconception that these topics are relevant only to other women and can be addressed in isolation. When mediating, Alice Nderitu often encounters a misperception that "men speak for the tribe" while women speak only for other women and children.

In 2010, when asked for their perspectives on the topics being addressed in formal negotiations, women across Sudan and South Sudan surprised many facilitators. They spoke immediately about agreements related to petroleum, emphasising that any deal reached needed to address environmental regulation. Why? Because they see unregulated oil extraction and transportation polluting land, rivers and lakes. Since women are traditionally responsible for collecting water, pollution means they must travel further to find viable sources. The journey exposes them to attacks and sexual violence. Some are forced to relocate with their children – often separating families and destroying the social fabric. And, with women responsible for

80% of agricultural production, they are deeply concerned about food security.²²

In Afghanistan, women are leading calls for a national process to engage those most affected by war in a dialogue on how to cultivate and sustain peace.²³ Libyan women are designing inclusive constitutional reform processes to ensure that women, minorities, and vulnerable groups have a voice in determining their country's future. In El Salvador, women negotiators effectively pressed for the inclusion of unarmed opposition supporters in beneficiary lists for land and other resources, preventing a potential crisis and a possible resumption of the conflict.²⁴

THE MEDIATOR'S BOTTOM LINE: Where communities are involved, there is no such thing as 'women's issues'. The vast majority of topics women raise are security related. Many topics affect men and women differently, and neither sex can speak fully for the other.

MYTH 6: The inclusion of women is Western-driven and sometimes culturally inappropriate

Because men make up the majority of combatants, many assume that war is men's domain. But women play a wide range of roles during and after conflict: from combatant to peacebuilder, mediator to spoiler.

Overwhelmingly, women are powerful forces for preventing and ending war. In Somalia and Somaliland, women have served as peace envoys, known as *ergo nabaded*. They consult with warring groups and promote reconciliation. Similarly, in Pashtun communities the traditional practice of *nanawati* involves a woman participating in conflict resolution by approaching the home of an enemy family, knowing that family is culturally obligated to give her shelter. This gesture carried out by the woman then obligates the men of the disputing families to resolve their conflict.

The 'culture argument' is often used by people seeking to suppress others as a way of gaining or maintaining control. "If women's exclusion from mediation related to peace and security were [merely] a cultural phenomenon – we would see significant variance globally [in women's involvement]," explains Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, former member of the UN's Mediation Standby Team and its first expert on gender and inclusion. "The fact is that their exclusion is by and large universal – suggesting that the problem is not one of culture difference, but one of power. Those who have the power and those who seek it through the barrel of a gun, have no interest in being challenged or held accountable by members of their own societies – especially if they are strong women. Culture is an easy excuse for keeping them out."²⁵

Those pursuing this control will frequently presume a mediator does not know the history or reality of women's leadership. In every context, however, there are women who want a say in the decisions that affect their lives. Including their voices may require a culturally sensitive approach, but that is a matter of tactics, not values. Committed mediators discern the difference.

THE MEDIATOR'S BOTTOM LINE: Learn the precedent. Mediators should come to negotiations armed with the truth about the history of women's leadership in that culture. There will never be a shortage of local women who know it and who are eager to share their rich backgrounds. Recall, too, that the international framework for women's inclusion, UN Security Council Resolution 1325, originated from men and women in the Global South – and from diplomats from Bangladesh, Namibia and Jamaica, not from Western diplomats in New York.²⁶

MYTH 7: Peace agreements can, and should, be gender neutral

A gender-neutral peace agreement would apply equally to men and women who would be partners in designing, implementing and evaluating programmes. Unfortunately, the conditions for such an agreement do not yet exist.

Drawing on his experience of supporting negotiations to end two decades of conflict in Angola, Ambassador Donald Steinberg, currently Deputy Administrator of the US Agency for International Development, explains, “A peace agreement that is ‘gender neutral’ is, by definition, discriminatory against women and likely to fail.”²⁷ While originally proud that the Lusaka Agreement did not contain “a single provision that discriminates against women,”²⁸ Ambassador Steinberg quickly realised that the exclusion of women and gender considerations from the peace process and the resulting agreement not only “silenced women’s voices on the hard issues of war and peace, but it also meant that issues such as internal displacement, sexual violence, abuses by government and rebel security forces, and the rebuilding of social services, such as maternal health care and girls’ education, were given short shrift – or no shrift at all.”²⁹

As a recent study by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue points out: “Gender-neutral language can be one way to disguise exclusion, so it is preferable to use specifically inclusive terminology (‘men and women of Aceh’ rather than ‘people of Aceh,’ for example). There is a difference between clauses directly aimed at or about women (for example, addressing female victims of sexual and gender-based violence) and provisions which appear gender-neutral, but whose consequences are actually gendered (for example, clauses affecting ‘combatants’, who may be men or women,”³⁰ each of whom can be affected differently).

THE MEDIATOR’S BOTTOM LINE: The need for specificity in language is a matter of long term sustainability. What alternatives can a mediator promote when facing resistance from parties unwilling to include women in negotiations or explicitly protect their rights in an agreement? A mediator might:

- Call attention to inaccurate references such as “women and other minorities” and counsel parties against the consistent use of infantilising terms such as “women and children”. (Women are adults and therefore possess agency; children are not legally responsible for their actions.)
- Encourage parties to agree on definitions of terms, such as “the population”, and ensure they cover men and women, boys and girls.
- Replace, as the HD Centre study suggests, the consistent use of male pronouns with inclusive terminology, such as (English-speakers use of) “s/he.”
- Looking ahead, support the creation of a mechanism to ensure, or track, funding for women’s participation in the implementation of agreements and propose a quota for women in implementation and oversight bodies.

Conclusion

At the 2012 Oslo Forum, ‘inclusion’ was a prevalent theme. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said that “unless our country becomes a more inclusive society, we won’t have achieved a genuine transition.” Mediators of the Yemeni peace process said that there was an “inclusion deficit,” and that this deficit is the biggest driver of challenges to full implementation of the political agreement reached in November 2011. In the Forum’s discussions on Syria, much attention focused on how a peace process must address the large numbers of young people and civil society groups who are driving resistance but are not party to talks. Participants heard that, in the Philippines, “the concept of inclusion drove some of our most important successes.” Yet, there could have been more discussion about the responsibility of the mediator to promote or ensure this inclusion.

The topic resonates across the field of mediation because it is clear that, in the 21st century, ensuring that diverse communities are represented in peace negotiations is in the strategic interest of mediators. Mediators also have an opportunity to capitalise on women’s potential for contributing to peace talks which has, all too frequently, been ignored or undervalued due, in large part, to misconceptions. Although the participation of women is but one component of inclusion, it is critical to ensuring the equity and efficacy of peace processes.

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