

Concept Note

Gender-Inclusive Peace Processes: Strengthening Women's Meaningful Participation through Constituency Building

Overview

UN Women and CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation are co-hosting a global conference entitled *Gender-Inclusive Peace Processes: Strengthening Women's Meaningful Participation through Constituency Building*.

Dates	7-27 July 2021
Location	Globally and virtually
Objective	Explore good practices and strategies for gender-inclusive constituency building and its linkage to women's meaningful participation in formal peace processes. Discussions will be oriented toward contributing to new and existing peacemaking efforts, with a particular view toward the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).
Participants	Peace process practitioners, including political party and civil society actors from conflict-affected contexts, policy leaders, analysts and scholars in their individual capacity and/or from non-governmental organizations, think tanks, the UN and regional organisations. Particular attention is directed to also engaging actors that have not previously contributed to global conversations on women, peace and security.

Background

Last year marked the 20th anniversary of the first Security Council resolution on women, peace and security (WPS), resolution 1325 (2000). Recognizing and building upon on the sustained efforts of women peacebuilders, policy actors, academics and others, the anniversary served as an occasion to acknowledge progress while also pointing to persistent gaps in implementation. One area that has proven itself to be particularly resistant to change in the WPS agenda has been women's direct participation and representation in formal peace processes. Women's inclusion in formal peace processes has been far from equal with women serving as only six percent of mediators, six percent of signatories and 13 percent of negotiators between 1992 and 2019.¹

With rising awareness and rhetoric about the importance of women's inclusion in peace processes, there also remains a need to go beyond inclusion and operationalize the full, transformative potential of women's meaningful participation. The outbreak of COVID-19 and the multiplying effects of the public health crisis in conflict-affected contexts has only added to the urgency behind calls for responsive and

¹ [Women's Participation in Peace Processes](#), Council on Foreign Relations (2020).

evidence-based approaches to effectively respond to both the pandemic and conflict and harness sustainable peace.²

As digital technology and non-violent mass movements apply a democratizing pressure on formal peace processes, questions around legitimacy and accountability are becoming increasingly prominent. Yet, primarily negotiated between parties to the conflict, it is rare that peace processes are democratized fully, whether through an electoral or other political process. In this context, ideas around constituency building remain strikingly underexplored, including the many gendered dimensions associated with it. Scholars have found that one reason why women's inclusion is correlated with more durable peace agreements relates to the linkages between women signatories and women civil society groups.³

There may be different definitions of constituency building⁴, but ultimately it is about encouraging deliberation between representatives in political processes and their constituents. It is about formal representatives building a support base, as much as it is about encouraging accountability for those who are deemed to represent the views of others or particular sets of ideas and interests in peace processes. From a more critical perspective, the issue of constituency building raises questions about peace process design from a democratic perspective and the all-too-common essentialist assumption that one woman represents all women, or that women can represent "women's issues" only. At the same time, further discussion on the topic should avoid creating yet another set of higher expectations of women political figures and their qualifications as representatives. More deliberate reflection on the matter should rather move toward a reconceptualization of women as equal political actors, but also deepen our understanding of the gendered dynamics of accountability and representation in contemporary peace processes. Ultimately, efforts to broaden constituencies can also contribute to democratizing peace processes and generating social buy-in for lasting agreements.

Objective

The objective is to explore good practices and strategies for constituency building processes to strengthen women's substantive representation and meaningful participation in peacemaking. Discussions will carry an emphasis on contributing toward new and existing peacemaking efforts, particularly in the Middle East, where intractable conflicts continue to pose grave threats to civilians and erode previous progress towards gender equality and sustainable development.⁵

With knowledge exchange and comparative learning across country contexts, discussions will focus on two main sub-themes in the context of constituency building:

- The Work of Building Constituencies: What are some effective strategies used by women delegates in formal peace processes to build and nurture a base of support in their communities including diaspora? How can digital methods or other tools be used in this regard? How might the

² E.g. COVID-19 and Conflict: Advancing Women's Meaningful Participation in Ceasefires and Peace Processes, UN Women and DPPA (2020).

³ Jana Krause et al., Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace, *International Interactions* (2018).

⁴ Herewith constituency-building is not viewed simply as an electoral matter revolving around campaigning and canvassing; or as a "constituency service" by an elected representative, but more broadly, concerning the relationship between representatives in political processes and their constituents.

⁵ [Global Peace Index](#) (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2021).

gender dimensions of constituency-building vary depending on a representative’s affiliation to a government, armed group, civil society or political party?

- Encouraging Constituency Building in Peace Processes: How do constituency dynamics shape the peace process overall, or a given representative’s participation therein? How does the process of constituency-building affect constituencies themselves, including their views of a peace process and the legitimacy of its outcomes? What are some effective measures, tools, sequencing considerations and other design options (e.g. media engagement) that mediators and external partners can adopt to enable constituency-building in the context of formal peace processes?

Participants

The conference will bring together approximately 60-100 participants, including women who have engaged in peace processes for Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen, as well as from elsewhere in the world, including Colombia, South Sudan, Georgia and Philippines. With technical inputs and facilitation from experts and thought leaders, discussions will be designed to promote a sharing of experiences and cross-fertilization of ideas among practitioners and experts across different country contexts.

Format

Over a one-month period, a series of panel discussions and technical sessions will be held, both in smaller group and plenary format. Some sessions may be held under the Chatham House Rule of non-attribution to facilitate open discussion. Simultaneous translation will be available in Arabic, English and Spanish. The discussions will be by invitation only, except for the opening panel, which will lay out key dilemmas, insights and needs for further exploration. After the discussions are completed, a conference report will be produced to capture learnings and concrete recommendations for good practices on the topic.

Opening	7 July 10:00 EST / 16:00 CET – 1.5 h
Key Themes	8 July 10:00 EST / 16:00 CET – 1.5 h
Working Group Session 1	14 July 09:00 EST / 15:00 CET – 2.5 h
Working Group Session 2	15 July 04:00 EST / 10:00 CET – 2.5 h
Closing	27 July 10:00 EST / 16:00 CET – 1.5 h

This conference is made possible through a long-term collaboration with and financial support from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in cooperation with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs.