

OCTOBER 2024



Supporting Women's Impactful Participation in Peace Processes

Learnings from Kyrgyzstan, Uganda, and Palestine



A Network of People
Building Peace



**Women's Peace &
Humanitarian Fund**

A United Nations & Civil Society Partnership

Introduction

Women's participation in peace processes is widely recognised as a critical factor in achieving sustainable and inclusive peace. Data consistently demonstrates that when women are involved in peace negotiations, agreements are more likely to be durable and reflective of diverse needs.¹ Despite international commitments, including United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 and subsequent UNSC resolutions on women, peace, and security (WPS), women's involvement in peace negotiations and the implementation of peace agreements remains significantly low. According to the UN Secretary-General's 2023 report on WPS, women constituted only 16% of negotiators in UN-supported peace processes in 2022, a decline from previous years.² This marginalisation persists even though women are often disproportionately affected by conflict and play essential roles in peacebuilding at the local level.

To address this gap, the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) partnered with the United Nations Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF), Rapid Response Window (RRW) in November 2021 as one of its international implementing partners.³ We were driven to become RRW's implementing partner by its aims to enhance the participation and influence of women peacebuilders in peace processes by providing rapid, short-term, and accessible funding and, when needed, technical support to women-led initiatives.

This paper documents the experiences and lessons learned by GPPAC as an implementing partner to RRW between January 2022 and July 2024. Focusing on projects implemented in Uganda, the Central Asia region (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan), and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), we explore innovative strategies developed by local women peacebuilders to overcome barriers to their participation in peace processes and the implementation of peace agreements. These strategies include capacity-strengthening initiatives, economic empowerment programmes, community engagement, advocacy, trauma-sensitive approaches, the creation of inclusive platforms, and efforts to transform sociocultural norms.

By analysing these initiatives, this paper seeks to demonstrate the potential of flexible, context-specific approaches that prioritise local leadership in promoting women's impactful participation in peace processes. The learnings aim to inform practitioners, policymakers, and donors by providing practical insights and recommendations for designing and implementing future programmes. Ultimately, the goal is to contribute to more inclusive and effective strategies for achieving sustainable peace through increased women's participation in peace processes and the implementation of peace agreements.



The paper is structured as follows:

- 1. Contextualising the barriers to women's participation in peace processes:** An in-depth look at the specific challenges faced by women in the Yumbe District of Uganda, the Ferghana Valley region in Central Asia, and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.
- 2. Learning from the activities and strategies implemented:** A discussion of the key takeaways and how these lessons can inform future initiatives.
- 3. Recommendations:** Practical suggestions for international donors, peacebuilding organisations, and local civil society to enhance women's participation in peace processes.

This paper underscores the importance of supporting women-led interventions that are adaptable to local contexts. It advocates for genuine, equitable partnerships and flexible funding mechanisms as essential components in strengthening local women's capacities, access, and impact on peace processes globally.

Contextualising the Barriers to Women's Participation in Peace Processes

The projects supported within the RRW framework are implemented in diverse and challenging contexts, including Northwestern Uganda, Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan), and the OPT. Each of these settings presents unique geopolitical, social, and cultural dynamics that impact opportunities for women's participation and influence in peacemaking.

This section outlines some of the prevailing dynamics and the specific challenges and barriers to women's participation in peace processes and the implementation of peace agreements they create. In doing so, it brings attention to the context-specific nature of the challenges faced by women while also highlighting some commonalities and common threads that could be observed across all contexts. It also provides some background information about the main activities carried out by GPPAC local partners within the framework of RRW, which are explored in more depth in the following section.



Uganda: Yumbe District

In Uganda, the **Center for Conflict Resolution (CECORE)** has been leading efforts to enhance women's participation in peacebuilding within the Yumbe District. This region in Northwestern Uganda has a history of conflicts linked to the operations of the Ugandan National Rescue Front (UNRF) and the Ugandan National Rescue Front II (UNRF II)—armed groups loyal to former President Idi Amin.⁴ Amin came to power through a military coup in 1971 and was ousted in 1979, after which many of his loyalists fled to neighbouring countries, launching rebellions against the Ugandan government. Between 1996 and 2002, UNRF II conducted violent attacks, looting, rape, and forced recruitment, leaving deep scars on the Yumbe community.⁵

Women in the Yumbe District face a range of socioeconomic and cultural barriers that limit their participation in peace processes and decision-making:

- **Traditional gender roles and stereotypes:** Women are often confined to the roles of wives and mothers, which undermines their autonomy, restricting their mobility outside their homes and limiting their involvement in public life.
- **Economic disempowerment:** Lack of access to land and financial resources exacerbates women's dependency and limits their ability to participate meaningfully in community affairs.
- **High prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV):** Issues such as forced and early marriages disproportionately affect young girls, undermining their health, education, and agency.





These barriers have historically prevented women from speaking up during public gatherings and actively participating in decision-making and peace processes. The peace dialogue with UNRF and UNRF II was no exception; the UNRF II peace agreement was signed without the direct participation of women, despite their involvement behind the scenes, including by working with both sides to bring them back to the table when the negotiations stalled.⁶ This absence meant that the concerns of local women were neither considered nor addressed, leaving them excluded in the implementation of the peace agreement and key decision-making processes.

To address the barriers to women's involvement in peacebuilding, CECORE launched a short-term RRW project from December 2023 to June 2024 aimed at empowering women to take active roles in influencing the implementation of the UNRF II peace agreement and addressing some of the gaps in women's participation.⁷

The project's activities included:

- **Capacity-strengthening workshops:** These workshops strengthened local women's essential skills in negotiation, advocacy and lobbying, leadership, and conflict resolution based on the request and needs assessment of local partners. They provided practical training and created safe spaces for women to practise these skills, thereby strengthening their confidence and competence to advocate and present their recommendations to local decision-makers.
- **Integration of trauma-healing components:** During the project, CECORE decided to integrate trauma-healing components into the workshops, building on successful practices from Central Asia. This addressed psychological barriers and helped women increase their resilience.
- **Community dialogues:** Designed for both women and men, these sessions highlighted women's contributions to peacebuilding and the barriers they face. Together, participants developed gender-responsive and inclusive solutions to local conflicts.

- **Awareness-raising campaigns:** These campaigns engaged local leaders, elders, and community members through discussions about the importance of women's participation in peace efforts. They aimed to challenge traditional gender roles by highlighting the valuable contributions women can make to peacebuilding.
- **Advocacy with local leaders:** CECORE created opportunities for women to share their recommendations directly with local leaders. This provided an opportunity to create stronger partnerships and ensure political and financial support to women's activities from the local government.
- **Economic empowerment:** Improving women's financial literacy and independence through training in entrepreneurship and income-generating activities. This component was added in response to needs identified during initial mapping and analysis, recognising that economic empowerment is key to supporting women's effective and meaningful participation in peace processes.

By focusing on these integrated strategies, CECORE aimed to address both the practical and structural barriers hindering women's participation in peacebuilding in the Yumbe District. The project sought to contribute to the empowerment of women by enhancing their skills, addressing psychological needs, fostering community support, and promoting economic independence.



Central Asia: Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan

The **Foundation for Tolerance International (FTI)** operates in Central Asia, focusing on the Ferghana Valley—a region affected by border conflicts between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and, previously, Uzbekistan. From 1991 to 2023, the area experienced significant security fluctuations. Violent conflicts in the 1990s and 2000s deteriorated safety in the communities in border areas. While relations between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan improved after 2016, and stability between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan followed in 2018, clashes between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan persisted, notably in 2021 and 2022. A ceasefire protocol signed on 19 September 2022⁸ brought hope for increased stability, but uncertainty remains.⁹

Women have been among those most affected by these conflicts. They comprised the majority of people displaced by recent violence, particularly in the Batken region along the Kyrgyz-Tajik border. The destruction and looting of property worsened economic precarity for many women. As heads of households—especially when

men migrate abroad for work—they disproportionately bear economic burdens. Social expectations place additional emotional and psychological strains on women. FTI's consultations revealed that when border security worsened and mobility was restricted, women sometimes crossed borders illegally to maintain family ties.¹⁰

Despite their significant contributions—organising self-help groups, providing shelter and food to displaced individuals, and advocating with local governments—women have been excluded from ceasefire discussions and efforts to resolve the border conflict. State-imposed restrictions on cross-border activities and ongoing tensions have eroded strong ties between women leaders from border communities, creating substantial barriers to them influencing peace processes.

In preliminary consultations conducted by FTI in March 2023, deep distrust between border communities living in the three countries was underlined. Local women peacebuilders have been noting that women and children experienced

psychological stress, depression, and fear of renewed hostilities. Further consultations between September and December 2023 highlighted the psychological trauma faced by women—not only due to displacement and loss but also from frontline work exposing them to others' trauma. Participants noted the lack of consistent psychological support available.

In response, FTI, along with partners **Istiqbolli Avlod** in Uzbekistan and the **Association of Scientific and Technical Intelligentsia** in Tajikistan, launched a project in July 2023 to empower local women peacebuilders to influence high-level decision-making.¹¹ The project aimed to elevate women's voices in peace processes and establish an informal network of women leaders from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan to contribute to regional peacebuilding.

Key activities included:

- **Resilience-strengthening workshops:** Using trauma-sensitive approaches, these workshops helped women develop coping mechanisms and enhance psychological well-being. They provided a platform to discuss experiences, share strategies, and support each other in dealing with the challenges of living in a conflict zone.

- **Consultations at national and regional levels:** FTI organised dialogues bringing together women peacebuilders from the three countries to develop joint strategies for non-violent conflict resolution. Involving women from marginalised communities and of different ages and social status helped break down sociocultural barriers and build solidarity.

- **Establishing dialogue with decision-makers:** In February 2024, the project partners held a regional meeting in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, where women peacebuilders and decision-makers from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan convened. This event provided an opportunity for officials from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to discuss peace for the first time since the 2022 conflict. It facilitated direct interaction between women peacebuilders and policymakers, aiming to include women's perspectives in high-level peace processes.

Through these strategies, FTI addressed psychological and structural barriers hindering women's participation in peace processes in the Ferghana Valley. The project empowered women by enhancing resilience, fostering collaborative networks, and creating channels for engagement with decision-makers.



Occupied Palestinian Territory: East Jerusalem, West Bank, and Gaza

Since 1967, Israeli government policies, such as land confiscation, movement restrictions, settlement expansion, and other forms of dispossession, have significantly disrupted lives in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, comprising East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza, leading to widespread hardship and instability.¹² This prolonged occupation by Israel has created a complex mix of political repression, ongoing conflict, and deeply rooted gender inequalities in OPT that severely limit women's participation in peace processes.¹³

Internal divisions and fragmentation further complicate the political landscape within the OPT. The longstanding split between major Palestinian political factions has persisted despite numerous reconciliation efforts, often without women's meaningful involvement. Intra-Palestinian dialogues have struggled to achieve unity. Fragmented territories and heightened security measures significantly hinder women's mobility and access to decision-making spaces. Additionally, social conservatism and traditional gender roles marginalise women, pushing them into conventional roles and excluding them from political leadership.

Palestinian women have been active in the struggle for their rights since the early 20th century, notably establishing the first Palestinian Women's Union in 1921 and holding leadership roles during the First Intifada in 1987. However, their participation in recent peace negotiations and political processes has diminished. Women peacebuilders face exclusion from high-level negotiations and internal reconciliation efforts. Their voices are often sidelined, and their contributions to peacebuilding receive little recognition, as political actors frequently view them as peripheral to conflict resolution.¹⁴

Social conservatism also challenges women's rights organisations. In 2022, conservative leaders in Hebron protested against the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and women's groups, hindering their operations and creating a hostile environment for women activists advocating for inclusive peace and gender equality.¹⁵

In response to these challenges, Palestinian organisations such as the **Palestinian Centre for Peace and Democracy (PCPD)**, **Middle East Non-Violence and Democracy (MEND)**, and the **Dr Haider Abdel Shafi Centre for Culture and Development (HCCD)** have implemented projects aimed at increasing women's political participation and advocating for their inclusion in peace processes with the focus on the internal reconciliation process.

Key activities of the PCPD-led project from July 2022 to January 2023 included:

- **Gender equality and peacebuilding trainings:** Participants were both young women and men. The trainings provided them with tools to challenge patriarchal attitudes and promote inclusive practices, aiming to shift societal norms and empower women for leadership roles.
- **Mentorship programmes:** PCPD and other partners built a network of young women and men peacebuilders through engagement and training. This contributed to fostering future leaders committed to gender equality and inclusive peace processes.

- **Advocacy with decision-makers:** PCPD, MEND and HCCD facilitated dialogues between young women (project participants) and local decision-makers to highlight commitments to WPS and provide recommendations with the aim to integrate women's perspectives into policymaking.

The security in OPT deteriorated radically following the attacks on 7 October 2023 by Hamas Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades and other Palestinian armed groups¹⁶ and subsequent Israel's military offensive on Gaza, which has led to an unprecedented loss of civilian lives¹⁷ and a humanitarian crisis in Gaza.¹⁸ The escalation of violence necessitated a shift in the type of support to women-led peacebuilding organisations, focusing towards sustaining organisational capacities and maintaining their local networks during periods of devastating war in Gaza and escalated violence in the West Bank. The project's focused support was shifted to sustaining organisational capacity¹⁹ and addressing heightened risks of women's peace activism and measures taken by several international donors to suspend or restrict their funding to Palestinian civil society.²⁰

Key Learnings Across Contexts

The experiences from Northwestern Uganda, the Ferghana Valley in Central Asia, and the Occupied Palestinian Territory reveal several overarching lessons on enhancing women's meaningful participation in peace processes. Despite differing contexts, common themes emerge that highlight effective strategies and insights applicable across various settings.

1. Locally Led and Adaptive Interventions Are Essential for Effective Conflict Resolution

A key lesson emerging from recent efforts in conflict resolution is the critical importance of locally led and adaptive interventions. In many initiatives, there is a tendency to replicate successful interventions from one context to another without sufficient adaptation. This often stems from constraints such as funding cycles, donor priorities, or a lack of deep understanding of the local context. Programmes may import models from different regions or Western contexts that do not translate effectively into diverse cultural settings. Such practices can lead to interventions that do not fit the local environment, resulting in wasted resources and missed opportunities to increase women's influence effectively.

Instead of applying standardised solutions across different contexts, locally led and adaptive approaches increase the capacity of local women peacebuilders to take the lead in designing and implementing initiatives. By doing so, interventions become more responsive to each community's unique challenges and dynamics.

In Uganda's Yumbe District, CECORE didn't just adapt existing models but worked collaboratively with local women to co-create interventions. They engaged women in identifying the barriers they faced and in developing strategies to overcome them. For instance, the integration of economic empowerment components emerged directly from dialogues with the women, who highlighted economic dependency as a key barrier to their participation in peacebuilding. This participatory approach ensured that interventions were not only context-specific but also owned and driven by the women themselves.

Similarly, in Central Asia's Ferghana Valley, the FTI employed an adaptive approach by continuously engaging with local women to understand their evolving needs amidst ongoing conflicts. The resilience-strengthening workshops were designed based on direct feedback from participants about the psychological trauma they were experiencing. This adaptability allowed FTI to remain responsive to changing circumstances, adjusting their strategies to address the immediate needs of the women.

In the OPT, the PCPD facilitated spaces for women to voice their perspectives and shape programmes. By mentoring young women and men and involving them in advocacy efforts, PCPD ensured that initiatives reflected the aspirations and realities of the Palestinian youth. This local leadership was crucial in navigating the complex political landscape and social conservatism within the OPT.



Why locally-led and adaptive approaches matter:

- **Enhanced relevance and sustainability:** When local peace actors lead the design and implementation of initiatives, programmes are more likely to address the community's real needs and priorities, enhancing their relevance and potential for lasting impact. They are also more likely to continue beyond project and funding cycles.
- **Empowerment and ownership:** Strengthening local women's capacity to lead interventions empowers them by fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility, increasing their influence and driving more sustainable outcomes.
- **Flexibility in dynamic contexts:** Adaptive approaches allow for flexibility in the face of changing circumstances, such as shifts in conflict dynamics or emerging security challenges, ensuring that local women peacebuilders' exposure to risk is lower and their interventions remain effective over time.

Adopting locally led and adaptive approaches enhances the effectiveness of initiatives which in turn can lead to broader national-level impacts. By enhancing local women's capacity to lead and adapt initiatives based on their evolving contexts, programmes become more relevant, sustainable, and impactful. This shift moves beyond merely tailoring external models to fit a context; it enables local actors to shape and own the process, leading to more meaningful participation and lasting peace.

2. Economic Empowerment as a Catalyst for Participation

Economic dependency and poverty are significant barriers that limit women's ability to participate in peace processes. Without economic independence, women may lack the resources, time, and social capital necessary to engage in activities. Economic empowerment enhances women's agency, enabling them to contribute more effectively to initiatives.

In Uganda, CECORE identified economic dependence and poverty as key issues hindering women's participation. Many women lacked access to land, financial resources, and income-generating opportunities, which limited their agency and decision-making power. Recognising this, CECORE introduced economic empowerment initiatives using a unique training design that integrated peacebuilding skills with financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and income-generating activities, forming a holistic approach that tackled multiple barriers simultaneously.

This holistic approach has not only increased financial independence among women but also improved their entrepreneurship skills, indirectly contributing to strengthening their confidence, leadership skills, and ability to engage in political and peace processes in the future. The success of economic training programmes in Uganda highlights the importance of exploring holistic approaches and the diverse needs of women when designing peacebuilding programmes.

"The poultry-rearing [economic] project has not only helped us generate income but also fostered a stronger sense of community among us."

Participant of the CECORE-led project from Town Council, Yumbe

The claim that economic empowerment can be a powerful catalyst of women's participation, enhancing their financial independence, confidence, and leadership abilities, has further been supported by the findings of the consultations conducted by FTI in the Ferghana

Valley region in Central Asia. As highlighted in the policy brief produced as a result of the consultations, investment in women's economic security and social infrastructure that supports women's economic activity, such as kindergartens, can increase women's meaningful participation in peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and post-conflict recovery processes.²¹ Furthermore, consultation participants noted that many women in border areas are financially dependent on their husbands or families, which restricts their ability to act independently and become involved in peace processes.

As described above, economic empowerment combined with capacity enhancement can become a key strategy in increasing women's participation by raising their confidence and increasing their independence. Providing women with the tools and opportunities to achieve financial independence significantly boosts their ability to participate in and influence societal engagements.

Why does economic empowerment matter?

- **Enhancing agency and decision-making:** Economic independence increases women's ability to make decisions about their lives and contributions to initiatives.
- **Reducing vulnerability:** Financial stability reduces vulnerability to exploitation and enables women to assert their rights and interests more effectively.
- **Facilitating participation:** With economic resources, women can afford the time and expenses associated with participating in trainings, meetings, and advocacy activities.

Economic empowerment is crucial for enabling women's participation in peace processes. Providing opportunities for financial independence enhances women's agency, confidence, and capacity to contribute meaningfully to efforts. Integrating economic initiatives into programmes addresses a fundamental barrier and promotes more inclusive and effective processes and should be a part of more longer-term initiatives geared towards increasing women's initiatives for peace.





3. Addressing Psychological Trauma and Strengthening Resilience Is Essential for Effective Participation

A critical lesson from the three contexts described above is the profound impact of psychological trauma on women's ability to participate in peace processes. Violent conflicts often leave deep psychological scars on individuals and communities, exposing women to violence, loss, and displacement, leading to emotional and psychological scars that can hinder their engagement. Addressing these psychological barriers is not just beneficial but essential for programmes geared toward empowering women to take on more active roles in their communities and participate confidently in peace dialogues.

In Central Asia's Ferghana Valley, local women faced profound psychological stress due to ongoing border conflicts and their roles in supporting affected communities. The FTI recognised that if these psychological traumas remained unaddressed, women's partici-

pation would remain limited. FTI conducted resilience-strengthening workshops that offered trauma-sensitive approaches, helping women develop coping mechanisms and emotional resilience. These workshops provided a platform for women to share their experiences, support each other, and build collective strength. By improving their psychological well-being, FTI enhanced the women's capacity to contribute effectively to peace efforts.

In Uganda's Yumbe District, CECORE recognised that many women had experienced deep-seated trauma resulting from prolonged conflict and high levels of SGBV. These traumatic experiences affected their confidence and self-esteem and hindered their ability to participate in public life. Learning from FTI's experience and understanding that traditional capacity-strengthening efforts would be insufficient without addressing these underlying issues, CECORE integrated trauma-healing components into their programmes. They provided psychosocial support through counselling sessions and support groups,

creating safe spaces for women to process their experiences and rebuild resilience. This integrated approach helped women overcome barriers to participation, enhancing their emotional well-being and confidence to engage in initiatives.

"We have become more resilient and better at adapting to conflicts and changes. We appreciated the resources and support provided. It has enhanced our resilience and adaptability."

Participant of the CECORE-led project from Romogi Peace Doctors Group

Why does addressing psychological trauma matter?

- **Restoring agency and confidence:** Trauma can diminish a person's sense of control and self-worth. Addressing psychological trauma helps increase women's agency and confidence, enhancing their capacity to meaningfully contribute to peace processes.

- **Enhancing effectiveness of interventions:** Without healing from trauma, women may not fully benefit from capacity-strengthening efforts or engage in advocacy activities. Psychosocial support contributes to a person's resilience, ensuring that other interventions are more effective.

- **Promoting sustainable peace:** Healing from trauma contributes to interpersonal and communal reconciliation, which is vital for sustainable peace. Addressing psychological wounds increases a person's resilience and helps prevent the perpetuation of cycles of violence.

Incorporating trauma-sensitive and resilience-strengthening approaches is vital for the empowerment of women in conflict-affected areas. Psychosocial support enables women to heal from past traumas, increase resilience, and engage more effectively in peace processes.



4. Creating Inclusive, Collaborative Platforms and Cultivating Peer Support

Creating safe and inclusive spaces for women peacebuilders of different generations and socioeconomic backgrounds to collaborate, strategise together, and influence peace processes has been essential for fostering sustainable peace. Through collaborative approaches, including network building and the creation of mentorship and peer support systems, women can increase their influence in peace processes and the implementation of peace agreements and overcome isolation, particularly in contexts where they are marginalised. Creating spaces where diverse women meet also contributes to addressing the barriers from an intersectional perspective, which recognises that different aspects of identity, such as gender, ethnicity, class and age, contribute to shaping diverse experiences of violence and exclusion.

Expanding Networks Across Contexts

In Central Asia's Ferghana Valley, FTI established an informal network of women leaders across Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. This network facilitated dialogue and the development of joint strategies for conflict resolution, providing a space for women to collaborate across borders and bridge divisions caused by recent tensions. A regional meeting in Tashkent exemplified this effort, bringing together women leaders and decision-makers in a groundbreaking dialogue. By connecting women from different communities, FTI fostered solidarity and collective action, enhancing their capacity to influence peace initiatives at higher levels.

In the OPT, the Palestinian Centre for Peace and Democracy implemented mentorship programmes that built a network of young leaders committed to gender equality and inclusive peace initiatives.

These programmes strengthened the capacity of both women and men to advocate for inclusive policies and greater involvement of women in decision-making processes. The networks provided peer support, opportunities for collaboration, and platforms to amplify their voices, integrating an intergenerational approach by pairing younger women with experienced mentors to facilitate knowledge transfer and foster continuity in leadership efforts.

Inclusive and Collaborative Platforms

Creating inclusive and collaborative platforms has been pivotal in fostering sustainable peace across different regions. For instance:

- **In Uganda:** CECORE organised community dialogues and workshops where local women developed a joint strategy to advance peace-building and the implementation of a peace agreement. These platforms were supported by partnerships with local organisations like Participatory Rural Action for Development (PRAFORD)²² and Youth Peace Champions²³, enhancing community mobilisation and routine monitoring processes.
- **In Central Asia:** FTI's consultative meetings brought together women peacebuilders to engage in dialogue and develop joint strategies for nonviolent conflict resolution. These workshops, enriched by the expertise of GPPAC members from the Western Balkans²⁴, fostered a safe environment, encouraging participants to share personal stories and establish trust early in their interactions.
- **In Occupied Palestinian Territory:** PCPD's engagement with young leaders led to the formation of a cohesive network advocating for women's inclusion in peace negotiations. Building on the learnings and achievements of the PCPD-led short-term RRW project, GPPAC also facilitated the formation of a consortium of CSOs from East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza, aimed at inclusive peaceful conflict resolution. Although the consortium's project was postponed due to escalated conflict, the collaborative proposal underscored the importance of joint approaches.

Why does network building matter?

- **Enhancing collective influence:** Networks amplify women's voices, making their advocacy more powerful and harder to ignore.
- **Providing support and resources:** Collaborative platforms offer emotional support, share best practices, and provide resources that individual women might not be able to access on their own.
- **Facilitating knowledge exchange and intergenerational learning:** Networks enable women to learn from each other's experiences and strategies, fostering the development of future leaders and ensuring the sustainability of initiatives.

Building networks and collaborative platforms significantly enhances the impact of women's efforts on peace and security. By working together, women can increase their influence, overcome structural barriers, and contribute more effectively to peace processes. Networks foster solidarity, collective action, and intergenerational learning, which are crucial for driving meaningful and lasting change. The emphasis on inclusivity ensures that all women, regardless of background or status, have the opportunity to contribute to peace-building efforts, supported by continuous, transparent, and productive communication within the network.

5. Direct Engagement with Decision-Makers Increases Women's Influence

Facilitating direct engagement between women peacebuilders and policymakers is pivotal for ensuring that women's perspectives are included in peace processes and that policy decisions are effectively influenced. If women lack access to decision-making arenas, their contributions may be overlooked or undervalued, diminishing their impact on building sustainable peace and resilient communities.

In Uganda's Yumbe District, CECORE pioneered initiatives that created structured opportunities for women to present their recommendations directly to local decision-makers. One notable intervention was the organisation of meetings with district officials, where women advocates highlighted the necessity for gender-sensitive social services. During these sessions, women articulated specific needs, such as access to healthcare tailored to the needs of gender-based violence survivors and educational programmes for girls affected by violent conflict. As a result of these direct advocacy efforts, district officials pledged support for integrating women's groups into local government initiatives. This integration facilitated ongoing dialogue between women leaders and policymakers, ensuring that women's insights informed the development and implementation of community projects. Furthermore, CECORE established follow-up mechanisms, including regular feedback loops and joint monitoring committees, which reinforced accountability and sustained the impact of these policy changes.

In Central Asia's Ferghana Valley, FTI organised a landmark regional meeting in Tashkent, which served as a unique platform for women leaders from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan to engage directly with government officials. This event was particularly significant as it marked the first time officials from these countries engaged in peace dialogues since the 2022 border conflict.²⁵ FTI employed innovative strategies to facilitate meaningful interactions, such as round-table discussions, collaborative workshops, and joint statement drafting sessions. These activities encouraged open communication and mutual understanding between women peacebuilders

and policymakers. The inclusion of interactive formats allowed women to present data-driven proposals on conflict resolution and community relief and recovery, which policymakers found compelling and actionable. Consequently, several initiatives were launched, including cross-border women's committees aimed at fostering dialogue and cooperation between the nations.

In the OPT, the PCPD organised targeted dialogues between women activists and local decision-makers to underscore the importance of upholding commitments to WPS agenda. These targeted dialogues focused specifically on how women's groups could influence policy and governance structures directly, ensuring that women's perspectives were systematically incorporated into local governance and conflict resolution strategies. The targeted dialogues were based on the recommendation of youth-led research on how to support Palestinian women's active political participation.²⁶

Why does direct engagement matter?

- **Influencing policy decisions:** Direct dialogue enables women to present their concerns and recommendations, striving to directly influence policies that affect their lives and communities.
- **Increasing visibility and recognition:** Engaging with decision-makers and public outreach raises the profile of women's contributions, challenging stereotypes and highlighting the value of their involvement in peace processes.
- **Building sustainable relationships:** Establishing connections with policymakers fosters ongoing collaboration and support for women's initiatives, ensuring long-term impact and continuity.

Direct engagement with decision-makers is crucial for integrating women's perspectives into peace processes and policy formulations. By facilitating structured and meaningful interactions between women leaders and policymakers, organisations can ensure that women's insights and recommendations lead to tangible policy changes and sustained improvements in community resilience.



6. Holistic Approaches Enhance Impact

A critical lesson drawn from the contexts described above is that holistic approaches, which integrate multiple strategies addressing various facets of women's experiences, significantly amplify the overall impact of interventions. Women's opportunity to participate in peace processes is often hindered by a combination of socio-economic, psychological, and cultural barriers that intersect to create unique challenges. This intersectionality—where different aspects of identity such as gender, ethnicity, class, trauma, and the effects of violence and discrimination overlap—means that focusing on a single aspect, such as skills training, or advocacy, without addressing other underlying barriers may not significantly increase women's participation.

In Uganda's Yumbe District, CECORE implemented a multifaceted programme that worked collaboratively with local women to design interventions addressing their specific needs. Recognising that women faced a complex web of intersecting barriers—including limited skills, illiteracy, psychological trauma from conflict and gender-based violence, economic dependency, and restrictive sociocultural norms—CECORE integrated multiple strategies into their approach.

CECORE conducted workshops to enhance local women's skills in negotiation, advocacy, leadership, and conflict resolution, equipping them with practical abilities needed to engage effectively in peacebuilding. They integrated trauma-healing components to address psychological barriers, providing psychosocial support that helped women process their experiences and rebuild resilience. Economic empowerment was promoted through training programmes focused on financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and income-generating activities, reducing dependency and providing the resources necessary for active participation. Additionally, CECORE facilitated dialogues and awareness campaigns to shift sociocultural norms, engaging community leaders and members to create a more supportive environment for women's participation.

The impact of this holistic approach in Uganda was significant. Because CECORE addressed multiple barriers, local women's confidence increased, and their mental health and economic independence improved²⁷. This comprehensive empowerment fostered a sense of ownership over their roles in initiatives. Changing attitudes within the community reduced resistance to women's involvement in public affairs, enhancing the sustainability of their engagement. Moreover, the holistic approach allowed CECORE to adapt to changing circumstances, ensuring interventions remained effective over time.

In Central Asia's Ferghana Valley, the FTI employed a holistic approach by continuously engaging with local women to understand their evolving needs amidst ongoing conflicts. Women in this region dealt with psychological trauma, economic hardship, sociopolitical exclusion, and sometimes interethnic tensions—all intersecting to exacerbate their marginalisation. FTI's approach enabled women to overcome multiple barriers simultaneously by considering various dimensions of their identities and experiences.

FTI conducted resilience-strengthening workshops employing trauma-sensitive approaches that helped women develop coping mechanisms and enhance psychological well-being based on direct feedback from participants. Capacity-strengthening workshops provided women with skills in nonviolent conflict resolution and strategies. By facilitating consultations at national and regional levels, FTI established networks among local women leaders across Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. This fostered strengthened influence and solidarity, as local women became more effective in influencing peace processes, benefiting from improved skills, strengthened resilience, and supportive networks. FTI's continuous engagement with participants allowed for adaptability, ensuring interventions remained relevant and effective amidst changing conflict dynamics.



Why are holistic approaches more effective?

- **Addressing interconnected and intersectional barriers:** Women in conflict-affected areas often face multiple, overlapping forms of discrimination and disadvantage. For instance, a woman may experience marginalisation not only because of her gender but also due to her economic status, ethnicity, age, or experience of trauma. Holistic approaches recognise these intersecting identities and aim to address them comprehensively.
- **Synergistic effects:** Integrated strategies can create synergistic effects where the impact of one component enhances the effectiveness of others. For example, economic empowerment can boost a woman's confidence and agency, which in turn enhances the effectiveness of leadership training and her ability to engage in peace processes.

- **Sustainable change:** Holistic approaches promote sustainable change by addressing the root causes of marginalisation rather than just the symptoms. They tackle structural inequalities and empower women on multiple levels, leading to long-term improvements in women's status and participation.

Building on the foundations laid by locally led initiatives and direct engagements with decision-makers, the holistic approaches described here underscore the necessity of simultaneously addressing all dimensions of women's lived experiences of conflict. By integrating strategies that encompass economic, psychological, and sociocultural dimensions, these approaches do not just address immediate barriers but foster an enabling environment that supports women's full and sustained participation in public life.

7. Flexibility in Funding and Adaptability Enhance Project Effectiveness

Conflict-affected environments are inherently unpredictable, especially during violent escalations, when the needs of communities evolve rapidly. The ability to remain flexible and adapt support to emerging needs is crucial for ensuring that interventions remain relevant and effective. It has been well documented that when local peace-builders are forced to rely solely on funds dedicated to specific programmes, they cannot respond to changing needs on the ground.²⁸ While the specific nature of the RRW limits the scope of support to increasing women's influence in peace processes and the implementation of peace agreements, the flexibility of the funding mechanism and the trust-based relationship as one of its core elements allowed for the necessary flexibility during moments of crisis.²⁹

In the **OPT**, **GPPAC**, in collaboration with **RRW**, had to swiftly adapt its focus in response to escalating violence and funding challenges. Following severe escalations in violence, including the attacks on 7 October 2023 and the subsequent Israeli military offensive on Gaza, which precipitated a humanitarian crisis, **GPPAC**, with WPHF support, shifted its efforts towards supporting local partners like **PCPD**, **MEND**, and **HCCD**.

With the institutional support it received, **PCPD** focused on sustaining its core capacities, ensuring staff positions were maintained, and keeping vital local networks intact. This support allowed PCPD to implement safety protocols for women activists and address increased threats while also diversifying funding sources and strengthening local partnerships to continue its advocacy and peacebuilding work.

Similarly, **HCCD** and **MEND** utilised flexible institutional funding to strengthen their organisational capacities. **HCCD** retained key staff members, maintained workflow and communication during crises, sustained and rebuilt connections, and developed an organisational strategy focused on promoting peaceful responses to violence, gender equality, and voluntary work. **MEND** enhanced its capacity for nonviolence training and youth engagement, while securing financial support for future programming through obtaining professional support for its fundraising efforts. The flexibility in funding allowed these organisations to remain resilient, adapt to evolving challenges, and maintain their focus on promoting peace and social justice during times of unprecedented crisis.

Why do flexibility and adaptability matter?

- **Responding to emerging needs:** Flexible support mechanisms can adjust to new challenges or opportunities, ensuring that interventions remain relevant and effectively address the current priorities of the community.
- **Enhancing effectiveness:** Adaptable approaches improve outcomes by incorporating lessons learned and addressing unforeseen barriers, thereby maximising the impact of interventions.
- **Sustaining impact:** Flexibility allows organisations to navigate changing environments, maintaining momentum and ensuring sustained progress even amidst adversity.



Flexibility in project design and implementation is essential for responding effectively to changing circumstances and emerging needs within conflict-affected areas. Flexible funding, strategic guidance, and capacity-strengthening have enabled organisations like CECORE and PCPD to adapt their strategies dynamically, enhancing the relevance and impact of their interventions. Adaptability not only ensures that efforts remain responsive to the communities they serve but also fosters organisational resilience, enabling sustained empowerment of women to contribute meaningfully to stability and resilience within their communities.

Recommendations

Based on the key learnings across contexts above we identified seven thematic areas in which action of diverse stakeholders can help improve women's influence in peace processes and the implementation of peace agreements. Namely these are 1. tailor capacity-strengthening programmes to local contexts; 2. integrate economic empowerment in programmes; 3. expand trauma-sensitive approaches and strengthen its evidence base; 4. foster inclusive and collaborative platforms; 5. engage men and boys as allies in promoting gender equality; 6. address socio-cultural barriers systematically; 7. provide long-term, flexible, and adaptable funding; and 8. document and acknowledge local women's contributions. Targeted recommendations on specific actions for donors, civil society organisations, governments, and United Nations entities are listed below.



1. Tailor Capacity Strengthening Programmes to Local Contexts

- **Donors:** Provide flexible, responsive funding to support women-led initiatives to adapt to the changing dynamics of conflict environments. Allow for adjustments in programme strategies and methods as required by evolving local conditions, supporting the incorporation of new training modules or swift adaptations to unforeseen challenges.
- **Local and Women-Led CSOs:** Engage meaningfully with local communities to understand the specific needs and challenges women and girls face in conflict-affected environments. Leverage local knowledge and practices in designing and implementing capacity-strengthening programmes that address socioeconomic barriers. Ensure active involvement of local women and girls in all stages of the programme to maintain relevance and effectiveness.
- **International NGOs and Peacebuilding Agencies:** Foster partnerships that support the co-design of programmes with local organisations, treating local women peacebuilders as experts. Provide resources and technical support to adapt global best practices to the nuanced demands of local contexts.
- **Governments:** Support policies and initiatives that strengthen local capacity and recognise local women leaders' and peacebuilders' contributions and expertise. Facilitate an enabling environment for local initiatives by reducing bureaucratic obstacles and providing governmental backing to local women-led efforts.

2. Consider Integrating Economic Empowerment in Peacebuilding Programmes

- **Donors:** Allocate specific funding for economic empowerment initiatives to longer-term peacebuilding financial envelopes to support women's financial independence and decision-making capabilities to enhance women's overall participation in peace processes.
- **Local and Women-Led CSOs:** Propose and implement long-term programmes that improve women's economic status through entrepreneurship training, access to microfinance, and market development. These initiatives should be closely aligned with local needs and include elements of financial literacy to empower women economically and socially.
- **International NGOs and United Nations Entities:** Provide local CSOs with technical support and resources to develop long-term economic empowerment programmes. Ensure these programmes are integrated with broader peacebuilding efforts to maximise their impact on increasing women's roles in peacemaking.
- **Governments:** Develop policies that support the improvement of women's economic status by providing them with access to education and necessary social infrastructure to relieve some of the burdens of unpaid care work and protection measures from exploitation and discrimination in the marketplace. Facilitate access to credit and markets for women entrepreneurs, especially those in conflict-affected areas, to boost their economic participation and influence and address barriers to women's participation in peacemaking efforts.

3. Expand Trauma-Sensitive Approaches and Strengthen Their Evidence Base

- **Donors:** Fund both the development and expansion of trauma-sensitive approaches in peacebuilding programmes, with a focus on community-led healing initiatives that are culturally appropriate and sustainable. Invest in research and long-term studies to identify best practices and build an evidence base for future decisions in trauma-informed peacebuilding.
- **Local and Women-Led CSOs:** Consider integrating trauma-sensitive methodologies into programme design and needs assessments as a standard practice. Collaborate with experts in trauma and mental health to develop and implement programmes that address the psychological impacts of conflict in a culturally appropriate manner aligned with specific needs identified in the context. Collaborate with researchers to document and analyse the impact of these approaches and use monitoring and evaluation evidence to adapt programmes, ensuring they meet the needs of women affected by conflict.
- **International NGOs and United Nations Entities:** Support local peacebuilding organisations in implementing trauma-sensitive approaches by strengthening their capacity. Share resources and best practices for trauma care, ensuring they are holistic and align with other capacity-building efforts. Facilitate partnerships with local CSOs to integrate trauma-sensitive methods into broader peacebuilding initiatives. Upon demand offer technical support to improve local strategies and ensure programmes adapt to the changing needs of conflict-affected communities.
- **Governments:** Endorse and promote policies that acknowledge and address the psychological impacts of conflict, especially on women and girls. Support the inclusion of trauma-sensitive approaches in national mental health strategies and peacebuilding frameworks for wider implementation. Use insights from trauma-sensitive programme evaluations to inform national and local policies, fostering gender-sensitive, trauma-informed peacebuilding. Advocate for comprehensive support systems for women in conflict zones, including access to mental health services and community-based networks.

4. Foster Inclusive and Collaborative Platforms

- **Local and Women-Led CSOs:** Leverage existing networks and form new alliances to strengthen women's roles in peace processes and the implementation of peace agreements. Facilitate cross-regional forums that enable women from diverse backgrounds to share experiences, strategies, and best practices. Prioritise the inclusion of marginalised voices to ensure a broad spectrum of perspectives is represented in peacebuilding discussions.
- **Donors:** Invest in the development and sustainability of networks among women peacebuilders. Provide flexible, adaptive funding that allows for the organic growth of these networks and supports the dynamic needs of women engaged in peace processes. Encourage initiatives that foster long-term relationships and collaborative efforts across borders and conflict lines.
- **International NGOs and United Nations Entities:** Support the scaling up and strengthening of women's networks through technical assistance and capacity strengthening. Facilitate connections between women's groups in different regions to enhance their collective influence and share successful approaches to overcoming barriers to influencing peace processes such as those established through the WPHF Global Learning Hub (L-HUB).
- **Governments:** Promote policies that support networking and collaboration among women peacebuilders within and across national boundaries. Provide platforms where these networks can influence policy and decision-making processes, ensuring women's perspectives are integrated into national and international peace efforts.

5. Engage Men and Boys as Allies in Promoting Gender Equality

- **Local and Women-Led CSOs:** Develop community-based initiatives that involve men and boys in discussions about gender equality and the importance of women's participation in peace processes. Use culturally relevant methods such as community dialogues, workshops, and local media campaigns to reshape perceptions and behaviours.
- **Donors:** Fund programmes specifically designed to engage men and boys as allies in gender equality efforts. These programmes should aim to transform traditional gender norms and demonstrate the social and economic benefits of women's full participation in peace processes.
- **International NGOs and United Nations Entities:** Provide support and training for local CSOs to develop and implement gender sensitisation programmes that involve men and boys. Share global best practices and successful case studies highlighting the role of men and boys in supporting gender equality.
- **Governments:** Promote policies that encourage men's involvement in gender equality initiatives and support educational programmes that teach gender equality from an early age. Implement legal frameworks ensuring women's rights are protected and promoted, emphasising equitable opportunities for all.

6. Systematically Address Sociocultural Barriers

- **Local and Women-Led CSOs:** Conduct thorough analyses of sociocultural barriers at all stages of programme design, implementation, and evaluation. Implement initiatives that actively involve both women and men to transform harmful gender norms and promote gender equality at the community level. Utilise grassroots insights to develop culturally sensitive and locally driven interventions.
- **Donors:** Provide targeted funding that supports identifying and transforming sociocultural barriers to women's participation in peace processes. Ensure flexible funding mechanisms that allow for adaptive and culturally responsive approaches, and prioritise long-term investments in initiatives that aim to change social norms and behaviours at the community level.
- **International NGOs and Peacebuilding Agencies:** Partner with local CSOs to develop programmes that address sociocultural barriers, ensuring these initiatives respect local contexts and aim to promote systemic change. Support capacity-strengthening in local organisations to enhance their effectiveness in implementing these programmes and share best practices and resources across different regions to foster a collaborative approach to overcoming gender-specific challenges.
- **Governments:** Enact and enforce policies that support gender equality and the elimination of sociocultural barriers that hinder women's participation in peace processes. Work to include education on gender equality in national curricula and support initiatives that engage community leaders and influencers in promoting women's roles in peacebuilding and decision-making processes.

7. Provide Long-Term, Flexible, and Adaptable Funding

- **Donors:** Commit to long-term funding that supports core and organisational needs of women-led peace initiatives, ensuring their sustainability and effectiveness. This type of funding should be flexible enough to adapt to the changing dynamics of conflict-affected environments and responsive to the evolving needs of the programmes it supports, including psychosocial support and economic empowerment of women.
- **Local and Women-Led CSOs:** Advocate for and utilise long-term, flexible funding to build organisational capacity and sustain peace initiatives. Implement adaptable programme strategies that can shift according to community needs and conflict dynamics, ensuring ongoing relevance and impact.
- **International NGOs and United Nations Entities:** Facilitate access to sustainable funding sources for local partners and support them in developing organisational resilience. Advocate with donors for funding models that combine rapid crisis response with long-term commitments and flexibility to enhance the effectiveness of peacebuilding efforts including by complementing them with economic and psychosocial recovery components.
- **Governments:** Support policies and funding mechanisms that provide long-term, flexible support for peacebuilding initiatives, especially women-led. Ensure governmental funding strategies are responsive to the needs of peace initiatives and contribute to their long-term sustainability.

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Published by

the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC)
Alexanderveld 5, 2585 DB
The Hague, the Netherlands
T: +31 (0)70 311 0970 | E: info@gppac.net | www.gppac.net

Funded by

Women's Peace & Humanitarian Fund

GPPAC is ISO 9001:2015 certified

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