

Supporting Women in Negotiations: A Model for Elevating their Voices and Reflecting their Agenda in Peace Deals

Written by Carla Koppell

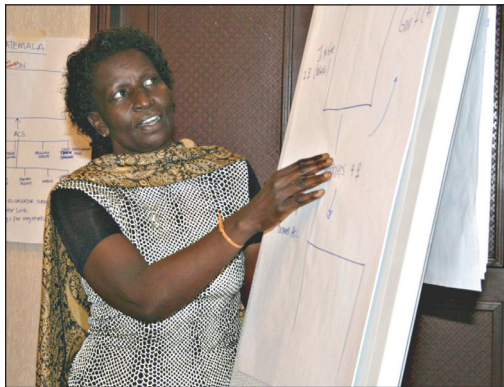
Negotiations create foundations for re-establishing peace. Peace accords lay out the terms for halting violence. Often, they develop frameworks for divvying up power, ensuring security in the conflict-affected area, and charting the transition to stability, good governance, and economic prosperity.

Women are alarmingly underrepresented in negotiations. In 2009, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) found in a review of 21 major peace processes held since 1992 that women were less than 8 percent of the delegates to talks and less than 3 percent of agreement signatories.¹ Insufficient representation has implications for the content of agreements; when women are present, even as observers, accords reflect increased attention to gender and women's priorities and needs.² Women also often strengthen accords' focus on ensuring security on the ground, promoting reconciliation, and reintegrating both former combatants and those displaced by conflict into society.

The Institute for Inclusive Security is one of several organizations that have convened women preparing for or involved in negotiations. This brief documents two of Inclusive Security's consultative efforts that have increased the presence and influence of women in peace talks.

Bringing Together Ugandan Women Negotiators

In December 2007, Inclusive Security brought together the women involved in talks between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army. The talks, mediated by the Government of Southern Sudan, had begun in July 2006. The ten women who participated in the consultation in Nairobi—the site of the talks—included the female negotiators for the Government of Uganda and the LRA, a female legal adviser to the LRA, parliamentarians, and civil society observers. They were joined by Jebbeh Forster, gender adviser to Joaquim Chissano, the UN Secretary General's special envoy to the talks. The goal of the consultation was to enhance the women's influence and involvement in the negotiations by facilitating communication and collaboration among female participants. The consultation resulted in:



At Inclusive Security's December 2007 consultation, Ugandan participants built on lessons learned from negotiations in other countries.

- a list of specific strategies for collaborating to engender the negotiations, such as adding women expert observers and increasing the number of women on the LRA and government teams;
- plans for connecting those at the negotiations back to the public in conflict-affected regions; and
- a detailed strategy for advocating to Special Envoy Chissano, developed in response to Jebbeh Forster's offer to arrange an opportunity for consultation participants to meet him.

Inclusive Security designed the three-day consultation to begin with personal introductions and opportunities to share experiences. Subsequently, sessions focused on why women's participation is important to negotiations. Video clips of women from other conflict zones stimulated discussion of various structures used around the world to bring women into negotiations, and participants practiced negotiation skills in a simulation of a fictitious nego-

1 *Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations: Connections between Presence and Influence*, United Nations Development Fund for Women, January 2009.

2 *Ibid.*

tiation. The second day focused on strategies for influencing the negotiations and building participants' advocacy and messaging skills. The last day focused on concrete planning for next steps—advocating to Special Envoy Chisano, inserting women's priorities into the ongoing dialogue, and reporting from the formal talks back to conflict-affected communities.

After the consultation, the participants continued to work together. For example, women civil society observers provided female delegates with specific suggestions for strengthening attention to key issues being negotiated. The consultative process helped enable:

- the addition of a second female negotiator to the LRA team: Jane Adong Anwar, an attorney who participated in the consultation, was added to the team and was quickly lauded for her contributions to the talks;
- observer status at the negotiations for female civil society leaders;
- presentation of declarations and position papers by female negotiations participants. Provisions for health care and education of former combatants were strengthened in the protocol for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration. The United Nations lauded the DDR protocol, which highlighted the unique needs of men, women, children, youth, and the disabled, for its expansive approach;
- explicit acknowledgement of the importance of having women in the talks by the mediator, government negotiators, and the LRA team. The US observer commented that the women “greased the wheels of the negotiations”;
- UNIFEM funding of The Women's Coalition for Peace (an NGO coalition) to attend the talks and to transmit information from the negotiations to local communities in the conflict-affected North.

Though the final peace agreement was never signed, several topical protocols were agreed upon and now inform Northern Ugandan reconstruction and reconciliation. Women in civil society and government have continued to cooperate, calling for transparency and women's inclusion in the recovery process.

Engaging Darfurian Women Leaders in Preparation for Talks

In fall 2007, the UN and African Union announced that renewed peace talks for Darfur would be held in Sirte, Libya to pursue the durable peace that the Darfur Peace Agreement had failed to provide. Inclusive Security organized a consultation in September with 25 women leaders representing the three regions of Darfur, multiple ethnicities, and at least ten of the many political movements involved in the conflict. Participants included 2 of the women who had served on the Government of Sudan negotiating team during early talks to resolve the conflict in Darfur and 15 women members of the Gender Expert Support Team that had participated in the seventh round of previous peace talks in Abuja.

The goal of this consultation was for women likely to be involved in the negotiations to develop a common agenda. Over three days, participants agreed on key priorities for talks and outlined proposed structures for the peace process that would give women and other marginalized groups sufficient voice in negotiations.

The consultation was structured to build connections among participants. It began with personal introductions by each participant and then discussion of the importance of women in negotiations; once again, video clips were used to enliven the exchange. A discussion of the value of coalitions followed, as did a simulated negotiation and a presentation of alternate negotiating structures from around the world. The next day focused on participant creation of consensus priorities and the development of negotiating structures that could be used by the international community to create more-inclusive talks. The consultation concluded with an advocacy dinner during



Sudanese participants in Inclusive Security's September 2007 consultation discuss women's priorities for the approaching negotiations.

which the women presented their priorities and models for negotiations to key decision makers from the UN, African Union, European Union, and various governments, including the US and Norway.

When talks later began in Sirte, few women were on the negotiating teams. Women leaders and civil society representatives were, however, asked to attend and address the opening ceremony and to participate in parallel forums. Though the negotiations did not advance, observers commented that the women and civil society representatives were the “silver lining” to an otherwise failed process.

Replicating Successful Experiences Convening Women Negotiators

Key to Success: Where women are participating in talks, offer an opportunity for all women involved to meet separately from male delegates.

→ **Recommendation:** Include women from negotiating, mediation, and expert support teams, as well as observer delegations.

→ **Recommendation:** Select meeting space that will allow women to speak freely and feel independent of their larger delegation; this may be a location distant from the talks.

→ **Recommendation:** Start as early in the process as possible, even prior to the launch of the negotiations, to maximize women’s potential for influencing the agenda and content of accords.

Key to Success: If too few women are involved on negotiations teams or as observers to convene, reach out to and involve a diverse set of women leaders from civil society and government who can help bring women’s perspectives to talks.

→ **Recommendation:** Be sure that consultations include an ethnically and geographically diverse mix of women who are technical experts in different fields.

→ **Recommendation:** Gather a group of leaders who are not affiliated with any party at the talks OR involve women who represent all of the parties at the negotiations.

→ **Recommendation:** Choose meeting space perceived as neutral by the women and the parties to the negotiation.

→ **Recommendation:** Coordinate with the mediator and his/her staff, host country representatives, third party observers, and delegates to seek observer status for women and/or to prepare participants in the negotiations to receive contributions on negotiations issues from women participants in the consultation.

Key to Success: Offer multiple opportunities for interaction and exchange.

→ **Recommendation:** Enable participants to interact regularly, organizing discussions for them about the topics being covered in formal talks.

Key to Success: Reach out to key allies involved in the negotiations.

→ **Recommendation:** Involve members of the mediator team or other observer delegations who are positioned to advance the women’s agenda.

→ **Recommendation:** Provide written recommendations to those involved in the talks as mediators, negotiators, and observers.

→ **Recommendation:** Schedule meetings and events to enable women to present their ideas and proposals and to cultivate relationships with key stakeholders.

Key to Success: Enable participants to get to know one another as individuals; many may not have previously met or spoken with each other.

→ **Recommendation:** Organize informal meals to encourage interaction.

→ **Recommendation:** Create sessions on the agenda for participants to share stories and information about their backgrounds.

→ **Recommendation:** Ask participants to introduce themselves to those they do not know and to work with different people during the course of the consultation.

Key to Success: Recognize that a consultation is a sub-negotiation of parties involved in armed conflict.

→ **Recommendation:** Ensure that a trained facilitator and conflict resolution specialist helps facilitate. Poor facilitation may *increase* divisions among participants.

→ **Recommendation:** Spend time creating an atmosphere of trust and building relationships among participants.

→ **Recommendation:** Acknowledge that participants have many areas of disagreement; ask that they focus on what they think needs to be done for women.

→ **Recommendation:** Begin by discussing the needs and priorities of women; presenting stories and video clips of women peace builders from around the world can spur discussion. (The Institute for Inclusive Security has a collection of films of women leaders reflecting on their work.)

Key to Success: Help participants find common ground.

→ **Recommendation:** Ask sub-groups to identify sets of the key needs and priorities for women in the negotiations; highlight the commonalities.

→ **Recommendation:** Review each of the key areas of negotiation and discuss what should be addressed from women's perspectives.

Key to Success: Enable women to provide substantive input to the talks.

→ **Recommendation:** Assist participants in the development of analyses and recommendations on women's priorities and needs regarding each of the key topics in negotiations.

→ **Recommendation:** Help women create written recommendations for issues to address in the negotiations and for language to include in components of the peace accord.

→ **Recommendation:** Widely distribute all written documents discussing the analyses and conclusions of women.

Key to Success: Provide logistical support to facilitate women's engagement.

→ **Recommendation:** Offer childcare in conjunction with meetings.

→ **Recommendation:** Provide security for women and consider ways to offer security for women's families back home.