



PA-X SPOTLIGHT: GENDER



# Re-invigorating Stalled Peace Negotiations: Challenges and Opportunities for Women's Inclusion

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This research draws on the PA-X Peace Agreement Database ([www.peaceagreements.org](http://www.peaceagreements.org)), a database of all peace agreements at any stage of the peace process from 1990 to 2016. The database is fully searchable and supports both qualitative and quantitative examination of peace agreements.

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This Spotlight was funded with generous support from the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development. This PA-X Spotlight Gender series is an initiative commissioned by UN Women's Peace and Security Section. The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of UN Women, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organisations.

This Spotlight is an output of the Political Settlements Research Programme ([www.politicalsettlements.org](http://www.politicalsettlements.org)) at the University of Edinburgh, which is core-funded by UK Aid from the UK Department for International Development (DFID), for the benefit of developing countries. The information and views set out in this publication are those of the authors. Nothing herein constitutes the views of the Department.

The authors would like to thank colleagues at UN Women who took time to review earlier drafts, including Mireille Affaa Mindzie, Rachel Dore-Weeks, Lauren von Eckartsberg, and Aneesa Walji. We are also grateful to external reviewers who similarly provided extensive and considered feedback on earlier drafts, including Maggie Beirne, Roger MacGinty, and Catherine Turner. Thanks are also due to the team at the Political Settlements Research Programme, including Laura Wise for reviewing earlier drafts, and Harriet Cornell, Robert Wilson, and Rick Smith of Smith Design Agency for proofreading and production work. Any mistakes which remain are the authors' own.

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## PA-X Spotlight Series

The PA-X Spotlight Series addresses questions regarding comparative peace processes, asked by those seeking to influence peace and transition processes in becoming more inclusive. Each Spotlight provides brief comparative peace agreement material regarding a key issue, sometimes with reference to the specific context from which the question originated, and sometimes framed more generally. This Gender Series deals with questions posed by a range of actors in the MENA region, with reference to women's meaningful participation as well as gender-sensitive and responsive approaches.

This Spotlight addresses the question:

When formal peace negotiations stall or break down, how do international mediators and other diplomatic efforts attempt to reinvigorate them? What challenges and opportunities do these efforts create for women and gender equality advocates?

## Introduction

Formal peace and transition negotiations often find difficulty in reaching a national peace accord, as processes in Syria, Libya, and Yemen illustrate. Here, formal negotiations have stalled or progressed very slowly without much apparent agreement on a national political settlement. This Spotlight addresses some of the main ways in which parties to conflict and mediators attempt to reinvigorate stalled formal (track one) negotiation processes, and sets out the inclusion challenges and opportunities for women that can arise.

We stress that women often play a key role along with civil society in pressuring stalled processes to move forward. They organise to put pressure on the parties involved in the conflict to resume or complete negotiations; they contribute key ideas to breaking log-jams; and often they keep the idea of peace alive by ongoing peacebuilding on the ground. This Spotlight does not address the strategies that women can use to put pressure on the parties to return to the negotiating table, which are well addressed elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> The role of women in influencing attempts to re-start stalled formal processes will be shaped by their role up to that point, which will vary from context-to-context.

Instead, in this Spotlight we draw on comparative peace process data to consider the key tactics that parties to conflict and mediators tend to employ when a formal so-called 'track 1' negotiation process between armed actors stalls, and consider the impact of these tactics on women with a view to informing strategies of engagement. The purpose is to provide information to gender equality advocates focused on anticipating and addressing challenges and to use opportunities effectively.

## When formal peace negotiations become stalled

Throughout a conflict there will be many ongoing attempts to end the conflict peacefully, many initiated by women along with other civil society partners. However, the term 'peace process' tends to be used when key parties engaged in the conflict move from the battlefield towards the negotiation table in an attempt to come to some sort of settlement.<sup>2</sup> The decision by parties to the conflict to enter negotiations seldom arises from a commitment to peace as such: the negotiation environment is characterised by an ongoing willingness to use violence to achieve political aims, and lack of trust between parties who have been trying to defeat or eliminate each other. As a result, formal peace processes are often fragile with a high likelihood of failure. Even processes that in hindsight have been fairly successful in ending violence, will typically have encountered moments of seemingly intractable impasse at some stage.

Peace negotiations become stalled and unable to progress for some of the following key reasons:

**Trust and Commitment problems.** Commitment problems occur when either one, or both, conflict parties are unable or unwilling to "credibly commit themselves to uphold the negotiated settlement in the future."<sup>3</sup> Lack of commitment may reflect that the parties have committed to talks for strategic reasons (such as securing or retaining international support, compromise or peace), with little commitment to compromising in a search for peace. The incentives offered by the peace process to end violence may not be perceived by those engaged in conflict to be sufficiently enticing. Parties to the conflict also face risks when entering peace negotiations.

Conflicts within states are often between the state or government and non-state armed actors. From the government perspective, recognising an insurgent group through dialogue risks legitimising the group and risks encouraging other groups to emerge and also press their claims (including violently). Governments can also fear that negotiations will be used to pressurise them to concede power, for example through a commitment to power-sharing or regional devolution of power, or even a transfer of power through processes of democracy.<sup>4</sup> For non-state armed actors, a ceasefire, perhaps with the promise of disarmament, can mean losing the leverage that has brought the state actors to the negotiating table (since the state will always retain its right to use force). Entering peace negotiations therefore risks defeat and annihilation. Mitigating commitment problems is one of the core tasks of peace talks and any eventual agreement, and often requires the support of third parties such as peacekeepers.<sup>5</sup> Often commitment issues are closely related to lack of trust in the other parties and in the peace process itself.

## Loss of peace process momentum

Peace negotiations can also stall less dramatically, for example, when talks continue with little forward progress, or are beset by game-playing and pre-conditions. Prolonged periods of internal or external diplomatic inaction can occur when other issues take precedence nationally, or even on the world stage, or when there is a lack of political will amongst the parties to progress. Alternatively, internationally driven processes can wane because of the lack of influence or lack of will of international actors to press the parties to reach a solution; or due to changing and newly competing national interests. Lack of progress can itself further unravel a peace process, by leading to wider social disillusionment with peace negotiations and a lack of popular support for the process, and/or a further deterioration of trust between the parties. Peace processes can lead to the emergence of 'no war, no peace' situations in which the parties to the conflict become 'comfortable' with a stalled peace process.

## Shifting conflict dynamics can change balances of power mid-negotiations

- ▶ **Emergence of new armed groups or political parties**, including those forged through new fragmentation or new alliances (sometimes caused by the formal peace process itself), can alter the balance of power that has led to peace negotiations, stalling the peace process
- ▶ **Emergence of new political leadership** following assassination, death by natural causes, non-conflict-related misadventure, or elections, may bring a new leadership on the state or non-state side with a strong anti-peace process stance. The commitment to conclude or implement peace agreements may then be almost non-existent (although of course, new leadership can also at times have the reverse effect of providing new opportunities for engagement and momentum).<sup>6</sup>
- ▶ **New interventions by new external actors** – new geopolitical players entering the conflict fray may also change dynamics of power changing the incentives of one or more national conflict party to compromise or not, as has been the case in conflicts in Syria and Yemen.



► **An unpredictable event interrupts the process with unforeseeable consequences.** A range of other events can interrupt and derail peace processes in ways that cannot be anticipated and planned for. These can include natural events, for example, the 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean had unintended consequences on the peace processes of Sri Lanka and Aceh (Indonesia). In Aceh, the tsunami helped galvanise the peace process producing five rounds of post-tsunami negotiations, wherein peace was viewed as a necessity for reconstruction. In Sri Lanka, the post-tsunami power-sharing agreement focused on reconstruction of affected Tamil areas, between the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. This agreement was challenged before the Sri Lankan Supreme Court for violating the rights of citizens and the territorial integrity of the state adding to a more general unravelling process in ways that fed in to a new wave of war.<sup>7</sup>

## Moves to Restart Formal Talks Processes: The Challenges and Opportunities for Women

When formal 'track I' negotiations stall there are several ways in which parties to the conflict and mediators attempt to move beyond the impasse. The precise methods chosen depend on the cause of breakdown in the negotiations. However, the mode chosen to re-invigorate talks will create both risks and opportunities for women's inclusion and opportunities to influence the talks.

Below we set out seven main ways that conflict parties and mediators tend to use to re-invigorate stalled talks, and point to their opportunities and challenges for inclusion of wider social groups, including women.

### 1. 'Tent widening': expanding the talks process to include new actors

'Tent widening' of the negotiations process to include new actors in formal talks processes and indeed in a new transitional governance arrangement, is often used to address new conflict dynamics. The central focus is often on how to involve additional insurgent groups. Essentially, tent widening involves opening up the formal talks process to include new contenders to power, and can also be used to increase the legitimacy of the peace process. Often talks focus on revitalising transitional arrangements. Increasing the number of participants in talks can have the effect of: (a) reducing the influence of parties to the conflict already involved in negotiation processes; (b) enabling a recalcitrant or in-effective head of government to be side-lined or removed from office; and (c) bringing on board new conflict parties to induce them to commit to a ceasefire. These additions may, however, unbalance previous understandings as to the nature of women's involvement in the negotiations. Moreover, as we shall see sometimes tent-widening which concentrates on including new violent actors can have the effect of further emphasising the use of violence as a criteria for inclusion, and in doing so may further exclude non-violent organisations such as women's associations.

Tent-widening responds to some of the incentives created by the peace process – notably that fighting has been understood as the key tool for winning a place at the table. It can lead to an ever-increasing conflict-tent-widening dynamic. Some of this pattern has been seen in Liberia from 1990 to 1997, Sudan during the 2000s, and South Sudan in recent times.

**Opportunities and risks for inclusion.** Tent-widening, however problematic, can nonetheless open new opportunities for women's inclusion. Where women were excluded from the original talks or transitional government, tent-widening initiatives may present a new opportunity to argue for and gain inclusion to the talks process. Often mediators are aware that the peace process needs more public legitimacy and involvement, and the engagement of groups beyond armed actors. Where new conflict has emerged, international actors are often concerned not to be seen to reward violence, and may be amenable to reconstituting talks on a wider basis than before. In South Sudan for example, a 'revitalisation' process relating to the break-down of a previous agreement included a range of civil society actors in discussions at the talks table, broadening inclusivity beyond the conflict parties. This example should be treated with caution, as it ultimately did not lead to an inclusive agreement, but ended in a revitalised agreement which continued to prioritise the views of armed actors and their international supporters, despite gender provisions.

Tent-widening can also carry new risks of exclusion. Where a stalled peace negotiation is dealt with by bringing in new actors, sometimes a previous process in which women have worked hard to gain avenues of influence can become more exclusive. As more actors are brought into the process, they sometimes retreat into ever narrower negotiations focused on the pre-conditions of armed actors relating to any commitment to stop armed action. The desire to end violence can lead to an increasing focus on the needs of armed splinter groups, who demand more secrecy, and a range of demands relating to their inclusion in the new constitutional order as the price for a ceasefire. Sometimes this may narrow a previously broadly participative process and agreement, as happened in Burundi and Northern Ireland. In both cases, new negotiations narrowed to largely focus on the demands of the recalcitrant parties, rather than reconvening the broad participative structure that had led to the [Belfast / Good Friday Agreement](#) and [Arusha Accord](#), respectively. In both examples, broad-based peace agreements secured with significant input and influence from women, were essentially re-written by much narrower 'bi-lateral' processes with parties that had not agreed to the peace agreement first time around, this time without direct women's or civil society input to the process.

Tent widening also has limitations relating to how legitimate the process is, as new armed actors become involved because of their capacity to use violent force, in a process that aims to re-constitute the state as a legitimate rule-of-law state. Moreover, as the number of participants at the negotiation table increase, it can become more difficult to reach a settlement.<sup>8</sup>

### Countering exclusion and mounting arguments for inclusion

Constituencies beyond the main conflict parties – notably women – will have to decide what stance to take regarding 'tent widening'. Will they oppose it? Or will they use it to argue 'me too', for a place at the table, or at least clear input into the talks process? Often difficult strategic decisions will need to be made concerning when and how to push for meaningful inclusion, and the risks of the process fracturing further. Strategies will have to be decided upon by the women in their own context, weighing up what the political deliberations can bear and how best to pursue meaningful participation and equality. However, civil society actors, including women, will be able to mount strong arguments that if talks are opened-up to more armed actors to address their use of violence, then they should also be opened to those with experience of and a commitment to building peace – including women's organisations and allied constituencies.

Pushing for representation however, also requires being able to propose how women should be selected and enabled to influence the formal negotiating table. These discussions can be difficult among women, who will not have monolithic views or political positions and will also have diverse identities. The tensions can fracture alliances amongst women (and are sometimes exploited by the parties, or unintentionally triggered by the mediator), at the expense of developing a common agenda for the type of change to be sought at the negotiating table. Women, and other civic actors, may therefore require particular support and backing in terms of the space and resources needed to come together to form strategic alliances and think through where common strategies can be developed (although support can of course be useful at all stages of a process).

## 2. New multi-level approaches: talks to address forms of conflict 'above' and 'below' the national conflict

Peace processes may be constructed to attempt to move around stalled formal peace negotiations and address the local or international dynamics of a conflict by moving mediation efforts either 'downwards' or 'upwards'. Focusing conflict resolution efforts at a new conflict 'level' can open-up alternative paths to building peace via a 'multi-level peace process' strategy. This strategy is based on the reality that many conflicts are not between two main groups, but rather, involve complex conflict systems of multiple interconnected conflicts.

**'Below':** Local deals addressing localised conflict can offer opportunities to circumvent known 'difficult' individuals at the higher-levels, and create an island of peace within the larger conflict system. Conflicts characterised by ever-splintering armed groups may need forms of local agreement to stabilize the situation on the ground by addressing local conflicts that connect to the national conflict. Local peace conferences have been facilitated in locations such as Kenya, Somalia and South Sudan by: United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions; United States Agency for International Development (USAID); and civil society organisations such as the African Center for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), Inter-peace, and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (CHD) as well as national peacebuilding commissions. In addition to local level initiatives that operate alongside the national peace process, communities often enact and embody new forms of cross-community social, commercial and cultural interaction in the space provided by peace processes and ceasefires. See further Gender Series, Wise, Forster and Bell, 2019. Local Peace Processes: Opportunities and Challenges for Women's Engagement, Political Settlement Research Programme.

**'Above':** Increasingly, those who control the conflict can also be found outside of the country's borders, such as in neighbouring or other foreign states. Inter-state agreement between the wider conflict participants and under-writers may be required to try to create an international ceasefire and agreement to underwrite any national effort. Intra-state conflict with a geopolitical dimension often leads to inter-state negotiations between those regional and international actors who have used force in the conflict, or funded one side or the other, to address this international dimension of the conflict and incentivise national conflict parties to make peace. Conflict in Darfur, for example, was sponsored by external states and the final settlement relied on inter-state negotiations to stabilise intra-state disputes. Similarly, an African Great Lakes process producing frameworks for regional cooperation agreements with respect to linked conflicts in the region from 2004 onwards, sought to bring an end to state sponsorship of insurgencies in neighbouring states. Geopolitical conflict (and sometimes multiple competing conflict resolution processes) also characterises conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, such as in Libya, Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

**Opportunities and risks for inclusion.** A move beyond the national peace process to focus 'down and out' on localised agreements can open-up opportunities for women. Sometimes women as local activists and leaders may find it easier to be recognised and accepted as mediators, or to influence these talks processes, and to have gender-specific and humanitarian needs addressed. Women often play particularly significant roles in the broader community development initiatives which find space to operate during a peace process. Sometimes these initiatives can outpace the peace process, making it look leaden and static, see for example developments in Cyprus where a cross-island women's movement for equality and peace was created in the midst of a stalled formal process.<sup>9</sup> Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), aid programmes and UN Missions regularly feature a gender stream that can be used to support inclusion when available.

The introduction of new levels of talks for women can also present challenges for women's inclusion. Very localised agreements, for example, can be limited to local 'hard men', or be rooted in local traditional customs and controlled by male leaders, which may result in provisions which do not comply with international human rights equality provisions. Gender streams, while intended to promote women's meaningful participation, and integrate gender perspectives can meet with restrictive environments and inadvertently find work to silo so-called 'women's issues' so that women remain sidelined from discussions where broader decisions are made. Being involved in local agreement negotiations can also pose risks for women, because if an agreement subsequently breaks down the women who have mediated may also now be more visible as political actors and therefore more at risk.

A move to focus a peace process 'up and out' or 'above' the national process to address geopolitical dynamics of the conflict, can risk a process that is even less open to women. High-level diplomatic inter-state talks often feature participants drawn from state diplomatic hierarchies which are exclusionary of women. These talks tend to address ceasefire agendas and associated inter-state security issues, in which women's concerns are often understood by mediators to be secondary to the imperative to 'stop the fighting'. For example, the 15th Anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Women, Peace and Security, saw widespread support in the open Security Council debate. Despite this, a couple of days later, an inter-state conference on Syria apparently included no female delegates, despite the innovative creation of mechanisms such as the Women's Advisory Board and a civil society forum in the Geneva talks process itself. The Turkey/Russia/Iran-led 'Astana' process has been similarly exclusionary of women.

Where included, women often struggle for meaningful participation. In the Israel-Palestinian Madrid Conference talks of the early 1990s, for example, Hanan Ashrawi was present on the Palestinian conference team, but sometimes given the 'softer' role of talking to the media, being excluded from some talks. Ultimately the entire negotiation team was bypassed by direct PLO-Israeli talks happening in a secret back-channel that negotiated the Oslo Accord separately from the formal Madrid Conference, and where no Palestinian women were present. This side-lining of women's concerns occurs even though women understand security agendas and women's equality as closely related, particularly regarding how social and physical security is to be guaranteed in practice.

Some opportunities for women's inclusion may still arise. Where states involved in these geo-political 'support' negotiations strongly espouse a commitment to international norms and inclusion of women, they may be open to listening and responding to women's concerns through side consultations or other mechanisms.

**Countering exclusion and mounting arguments for inclusion.** Local leaders need the support of local constituencies, including women, who may be the only people with cross-party levels of trust high enough to broker agreements. A greater emphasis on women's inclusion in 'track II', or 'track III' sub-national processes can also break down some of the resistance or barriers to women being involved in the formal peace process, where these exist. Inter-state processes may be susceptible to local and transnational civil mobilisation of women, which pushes these processes to open-up, and address a broader range of concerns.

### 3. Changing the mediator, using new third parties for new monitoring or enforcement tasks, or setting new deadlines

Using new modes of international participation in the formal talks process, such as a change in the international organisation providing the mediation, or a switch of mediator, are sometimes used to generate renewed confidence or momentum in a stalled mediation process. In Syria and Yemen, when talks have failed, a change in the profile of the lead mediator has been used to create a 'break' in the process and a sense of a 'new beginning' (however illusory these have proved in practice). Sometimes, the mediating organisation or country will change, as the parties search for new brokers. Strong arguments also exist to appoint women mediators with more frequency which may find influence at these moments.<sup>10</sup> Thorny issues such as disarmament, can be addressed by proposals for new forms of third party involvement to increase trust and address commitment fears. In Northern Ireland, for example, Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa's African National Congress (ANC), and Martti Ahtisaari, former Prime Minister of Finland, became involved in the inspection of arms dumps from the Irish Republican Army (IRA) at a critical time in the process.<sup>11</sup> New people holding levels of trust among the parties to the conflict, or fresh ideas and energy, can be used to inject confidence into moving forward to implement past peace agreement commitments. Finally, sometimes new deadlines are set in an attempt to get the parties to commit.



**Opportunities and risks for inclusion.** Often the style of the mediator is quite personality-driven, and this can create new opportunities and new risks. A new mediator may be open to alternative ways of doing business, and will often start work by meeting key constituencies, as a way of understanding the conflict dynamics, and of 'road testing' proposed new initiatives. If women have not been involved, or have been inadequately involved previously, a new opportunity for challenging the format may arise. However, the change of mediator will not necessarily enable the process to shed the political baggage associated with former mediators and phase of negotiations. In addition, there is a risk, of course, that a new mediator may be less (rather than more) receptive to inclusion of women than the previous one. Even with an innovative approach to gender inclusion, a new mediator in practice can mean a new start-up time in which women must re-build a relationship of influence with the new mediator. There may be some loss of knowledge relating to the detailed history of the process with a new team, which can reduce the impact of former gender equality commitments made during the process. Gender expertise can also change for better or worse with any new team.

**Countering exclusion and mounting arguments for inclusion.** Constituencies for peace will often have to re-galvanise their own drive for a new mediation phase, and rearticulate ideas for moving the process forward to a new mediation team with new ways of working. Continually stalling peace negotiations can wear-out groups committed to peaceful change, and the move to a new mode of mediation can often feel as if it offers little to change the fundamental conflict dynamics. The main challenge to re-engaging may be finding energy to 'start again' and re-establish connections with the mediation process. However, repeated failure can lead mediators to be more creative in their strategies and more open to the ideas of wider constituencies and creative ways of engaging with them.

#### 4. Invoking back-channel mediation

Sometimes where formal negotiation processes have really run aground, alternative secret talks are established to explore ways of stimulating the formal process moving again. Official negotiations conducted in secret, initiated via 'back channels', have been used in a variety of processes including the Yemeni process, Colombia, Northern Ireland, and talks between Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers' Party.<sup>12</sup> Back-channel negotiations may evolve from 'free agent' initiatives where an individual from one side or a third party may use personal contacts with high-level officials with a view to exploring options for a peace process. In 1986, Hendrik Jacobus Coetsee, the South African Minister for Justice, Police and Prisons, opened channels of communication with ANC leaders through the imprisoned Nelson Mandela.<sup>13</sup> Back-channels may be opened through unofficial third parties including journalists and civil society organisations.<sup>14</sup>

Although useful for establishing contact, the use of back-channels often becomes less effective the longer negotiations remain secret.<sup>15</sup> The longer secret talks continue, the more the risk rises that the process will fail to move forward. This is primarily due to the exclusive nature of secret talks.

**Opportunities and risks for inclusion.** The risk for women is that secret 'talks about talks' focused mainly on those involved in fighting are often very exclusionary of women. Although talks may ostensibly focus on whether and how the parties might return to the negotiating table, conflict parties rarely decide on a new talks process without requiring some undertaking as to how issues of substance will be addressed. Women may not know about the talks, much less have a chance to influence them. They may find, however, that secret negotiations processes have set the talks agenda, and the parameters of what it means to 'solve the conflict' have been put in place in ways that exclude the issues women face or understand to be important to ending the conflict. Issues such as secret amnesties and ceasefire terms, and even the full talks agenda, may all emerge from these discussions. Opportunities for women remain largely dependent on who is at the talks, what their agenda is, and their commitment to sharing of information relating to the secret process; or whether the mediator introduces parallel forms of wider consultation.

**Countering exclusion and mounting arguments for inclusion.** It can be difficult to counter the exclusions of secret talks – particularly if it is not open knowledge that they are taking place. While processes may need side or back-channel initiatives for a limited period, at some stage negotiations and deals need to be made public to allow for more general acceptance and inclusion. During back-channel negotiations, influence is often dependent on who you know and what you know, and using these connections quietly and subtly. Networking activities are important, with women sometimes able to piece together the mediation picture because they can draw information from sources across conflict divisions. It is also possible to organise constituencies for change to mobilise around key ideas for peace, in the hope of influencing whatever secret talks may be ongoing.

Third party influence may also be leveraged to ensure some degree of women's representation. With regards to the Northern Ireland process, concerns over 'exclusivity' of a new round of secret talks were raised by Nationalist/Republican/Catholic women, at the Women's Agenda for Peace Conference (1994) - a self-organised response to the outcome of the secret talks, held just before the IRA ceasefires were announced. This conference raised awareness that women had misgivings about whatever secret processes were going on, and wanted some input. Later widening conferences continued to raise awareness, increase political pressure and devise strategies for women's inclusion. These processes resulted over time in initiatives such as: the creation of the Women's Coalition - a new political party organised to take part in the talks process; the creation of a human rights 'agenda for change'; and increased visibility of women in the delegations of the parties most connected to the conflict, including those with socially conservative political positions.<sup>16</sup>

## 5. Shuttle Diplomacy

Shuttle diplomacy can be used to restart talks where the mediator 'shuttles' between parties and puts together a proposal or agreement to restart talks based on the separate conversations. Shuttle diplomacy may occur when distrust between the parties is so great that they refuse to meet in the same room. Instead, messages, plans, strategies and white papers are brought back-and-forth between the conflict parties by a mediator. A recent example of shuttle diplomacy occurred in the first round of Yemeni talks in Geneva in July 2015, when UN Special Envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed acted as the courier of messages between an alliance consisting of Ansar Allah (the Houthis) aligned with those loyal to former-President Ali Abdullah Saleh, and the opposing UN-backed Yemeni Government of President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi. The UN-led talks in Geneva regarding Syria are all conducted by means of shuttle diplomacy between parties in different rooms, and also the Women's Advisory Board, and a Civil Society Support room.

**Opportunities and risks for inclusion.** Often shuttle diplomacy focuses on moving between those seen as the main parties who need to commit to stop fighting. The Syrian process has shown some innovation in enabling shuttling between groups beyond the parties to the conflict, by creating the aforementioned Women's Advisory Board and Civil Society Support room, albeit these mechanisms are not without problems and challenges relating to who is present and who is not. If the mediator is committed to inclusion, shuttle diplomacy can create space for them to move not just between armed actors, but between a wider range of parties than they might be able to deal with in a formal face-to-face talks taking place in one room at one moment. This can enable mediators to gather a range of ideas as to how to reinvigorate the talks and build legitimacy for their proposals.

**Countering exclusion and mounting arguments for inclusion.** Women often gain access to mediators in moments of shuttle diplomacy through a range of tactics and strategies, many of which are employed simultaneously. Women can best ensure that they are on the 'shuttle list' both by advocacy and by presenting innovative ideas for breaking log-jams. They can pressurise mediators to meet and listen. They can build connections to allies who will also work to influence the talks to speak to the needs of their communities and women's rights.

## 6. Undertaking confidence building measures

Finding and implementing 'confidence building measures' (CBMs), is another strategy used to reinvigorate stalled peace negotiations. CBMs can offer concrete ways to build trust and good-will among parties and between conflict parties and the population at large. Usually CBMs are easily quantifiable actions that can be addressed immediately without resolving wider conflict issues, and that are often mutually beneficial as between the armed actors. Examples include exchanging prisoners (particularly high-level prisoners) or mortal remains of victims, or opening roads and facilitating the flow of goods and persons. What constitutes a CBM is usually down to the parties to the conflict and what they understand to build trust in the process. However, often a strong CBM aims at building trust not just between the direct conflict parties, but also between their wider constituencies of support. During the Turkish-Kurdish peace process from 2012-2013, the failure to implement proposed CBMs contributed to the breakdown in talks. On the one hand, the Kurdistan Worker's party rejected the unilateral reformulation of proposed CBMs by the Turkish government. Whereas, the Turkish government accused the Turkish Worker's Party (PKK) of dragging their feet on their commitment to withdraw their fighters into Northern Iraq.<sup>17</sup>

**Opportunities and risks for inclusion.** Basic humanitarian provision or measures to reduce or limit violence can be important CBMs. Women are often directly engaged in combating the effects of violence within their communities and can bring on-the-ground experience of what will in practice build confidence in the process among their sceptical communities. This is an important resource for peace talks. The risk of CBMs is that if they are focused purely on the parties to the conflict, they can produce measures – for example protecting the impunity of parties – which may undermine popular support for the process. Without the insights of women and civil society, the parties may also agree CBMs without any sense of what is likely to go wrong in implementation, or providing for any implementation mechanisms. Women often have close-hand experience of conflict dynamics which can be useful to designing CBMs.

**Countering exclusion and mounting arguments for inclusion.** Often it is those outside of the formal talks process who can come together and articulate what might build confidence in the process and enable the parties to move forward. In Northern Ireland, for example, human rights groups and women's groups were key in articulating the types of measure that could build confidence in the peace process at moments of log-jam. For example, the development of a 'human rights strand' to the talks emerged in response to a critical impasse in which one side sought to tie all-party talk to a pre-condition of the decommissioning of weapons, and the other sought to delay the decommissioning of weapons until a final deal was agreed. Human rights and women's groups re-framed this dispute in terms of the need to build confidence in non-violent methods of political change, by including new human rights commitments and institutions as a key item for the talks agenda. Women can influence talks processes by constructing strong arguments as to how CBMs can build civic trust in peace negotiations and enable the parties to the conflict to reinvigorate processes by reassuring their key constituencies. Their views should be actively canvassed.

## 7. One side making a unilateral move

Rejuvenating peace processes can also be accomplished by one party making a unilateral move to either change its own position to make compromise more possible, or inject a measure of generosity and good faith into a process, in a way that builds trust with the other side. For example, when faced with a log-jam in the South African peace talks, President Frederik Willem De Klerk, (controversially) held a whites-only referendum on the continuation of negotiations with the ANC. Winning the referendum helped him move forward with the peace talks having neutralised detractors from his own side. More dramatically, in the Basque conflict, the separatist Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), found that it could not engage the Spanish government in peace talks, but decided that it should not let its historic opponent dictate its own moves for peace. An unusual 'unilateral' peace process – to use a paradoxical term – ensued, that over time led to ETA disarming, announcing an end to conflict and making a form of apology.<sup>18</sup> In Algeria, during the 1990s, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika addressed a past failed process by unilaterally implementing what were often controversial measures aimed at ending the conflict usually by providing for referendums to ratify and legitimise these measures with the public (helping to end the conflict but failing to implement further transfers of power over time).

**Opportunities and risks for inclusion.** Often a stalled process will require a change in the stance of one or both parties to conflict. Those outside the direct process can encourage unilateral moves which will build confidence in the process and stress to leaders the importance of building an additional level of popular support and momentum for the process. Women can often work across party lines to try to coordinate 'unilateral' moves, in which one triggers or encourages further initiatives, thus providing a sense of momentum to a stalled process. A party that is thinking creatively about how to get the process it wants may also be open to a range of influences and ideas from women and others.

Engaging in a unilateral process involves risks for the parties involved in taking unilateral steps. Often parties can only take these risks if they can be sure of support from their core constituency. Paradoxically, a process designed to make unilateral compromises can involve parties establishing deeply exclusive processes designed to win support to move forward towards a key compromise with armed state opponents. For example, the referendum held by De Klerk appeared to the ANC and the majority black population as a defiant push-back against their aim of multi-party democracy because it involved De Klerk's core constituency only, using a racially-discriminatory franchise. In Algeria, Bouteflika's elite-driven reform process in the 1990s was much criticised over its lack of opportunities for participation and his own long tenure in power (now ended). Unilateral moves not involving reciprocity by opponents can also be quickly reneged on.

**Countering exclusion and mounting arguments for inclusion.** Those beyond the armed groups are usually critical to their confidence and willingness to move unilaterally. Here women's strategies in building social movements to pressurise parties to come back to the table, or to take the required steps to re-open the formal talks, can be critical to bringing parties back to the negotiating table.

## Conclusion

Peace processes are often very much about a sense of momentum. The impression of momentum is often critical to creating the idea that something positive is possible and is closely linked to the psychology of the participants in formal peace talks, the media, and society in general. Re-invigoration measures are often about reviving hope, energy levels, expectations, and fostering political imagination around to the types of initiatives that mediators and parties can embark on. There is no one strategy for reinvigorating a stalled negotiation process. Women will often undertake activities designed to bring momentum in what they understand to be an ongoing peace process, even when the formal talks process is stalled. This short Spotlight has sought to provide comparative peace process information on some of the strategies used by mediators and parties to conflict and to set out the opportunities and challenges for the inclusion of women that result. It aims to help women and gender equality advocates better understand strategies typically used/available to reinvigorate stalled formal peace negotiations and the related risks/opportunities so that they can develop strategies to address them.



## Key Resources

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