

Women's Role in Mediation and Peace Processes in Africa

Nkechika Perpetua Ibe and Seth Appiah-Mensah

Abstract

The adoption of the UNSC resolution 1325 and its related resolutions gave impetus to the clamor for more women's participation in peace processes including mediation which encompasses conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Despite efforts to mainstream gender perspectives as a means to advance peace and security in Africa, the level of participation of women in mediation from the community level to the global level remains dissatisfying. This article interrogates the role of women actors in mediation and peace processes in Africa, using Nigeria and Somalia as case studies, to contribute to this debate. Given the fact that women are disproportionately impacted by conflicts in Africa, we argue that their lead role in peace and conflict resolutions, and interventions is an essential ingredient for durable peace but one that is lacking in contemporary practice.

Author Profiles

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Introduction

The inclusion of commitments to increase the number of women in high-level mediation roles in Women Peace and Security (WPS) resolutions dating back to United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000 has resulted in calls for strategic commitments to gender parity as a necessary condition for enabling women mediators. Arguing in favor of increasing the representation of women mediators, existing research in the WPS field puts forward that where women are included (representation and participation) in peace processes, more sustainable agreements are reached (Council on Foreign Relation, 2023). Turner (2019) has pointed to the connection between participation and effectiveness and to this being central to the advocacy efforts at increasing the representation of women.

Statistical evidence of the contribution of women mediators to the outcome of peace processes is lacking. However, this paper presents a subjective experience of women in peace processes in Africa, with their own narratives as a way of defining the role they play in the mediation process. The African Union (AU) posits that women's participation in peace negotiations in a variety of official roles is significantly low or non-existent (African Union 2016, 20). This suggests that there are a number of existent factors responsible for why the call and the push for women's representation in peace processes are lacking in contemporary practice. This leads us to ask, are women's role in peace and conflict resolutions and interventions disregarded in that there is an under-reporting of their participation? Are women excluded from mediation processes as a result of which their peacebuilding work is not really reflected in formal peacebuilding processes and structures in Africa? This investigation is linked to identifiable factors of women's low representation in formal peacebuilding in Africa, namely; the patriarchal culture of most African societies, misconstrued agency of women during times of war and peace, and more importantly, the under-reporting of the work women do informally to foster peace, as seen in the works of Olaitan and Isike (2019), Onyewere (2017) and Selimovic et al (2012).

It is for this reason this paper places emphasis on the need to increase the number and visibility of women involved in mediation and the work women are doing to advance peace in their communities across Africa. We use Somalia and Nigeria as case studies after taking into account the significant roles women have played in post-conflict reconstruction in these countries. The paper explores the nature of mediation and peacebuilding work women have engaged in at formal and informal levels of their society in rebuilding after the civil war. The purpose is not only to highlight women as agents of formal mediation and peacebuilding, but also to establish the

influence of their informal mediation tactics, negotiation skills and peace work into formal peace processes and structures in Africa. In this regard, it is relevant to first conceptualize and distinguish between mediation and peacebuilding (formal and informal) in order to establish the undeniable importance of women's representation and participation at all levels of peace and conflict resolution for an achievable and long-lasting peace outcome.

Gender, Mediation and Peacebuilding: A Conceptual Clarification

Gender and Mediation

The intersection of gender with mediation and peace processes has been a subject of discussion in recent years. While gender as a social construct connotes both male and female, this paper focuses specifically on women due to their low visibility in peace processes despite their quiet work in this regard. According to Turner (2022), 'gender and mediation refers to the ways in which women, their rights and interests are taken into account in peace processes'. It is a concept adopted and popularized with the aim to ensure inclusivity in the mediation and peace processes. The UN Guidance for Effective Mediation (2012) defines "inclusivity" as the 'extent and manner in which the views and needs of conflict parties and other stakeholders are represented and integrated into the process and outcome of a mediation effort'. Therefore, adopting an inclusive mediation approach is predicated on the assumption that 'building sustainable peace requires integrating diverse societal perspectives, those of conflicting parties and other stakeholders, into the peace process' (UN, 2012). Also, the UN Guidance on Gender and Inclusive Mediation Strategies (2017), 'builds on the premise that mediation strategies that systematically include women, and civil society more broadly, are more likely to generate broad national ownership and support for a negotiated settlement and to lead to a more sustainable peace'. Hence, the importance of gender inclusion in mediation and peace processes can be understood as an attempt to eliminate power imbalance as well as create room for better results.

Corroboratively, Leigh (2002) argues that 'it is women, and particularly female mediators using the female mediation style, who are able to empower women during a mediation to help them overcome any power imbalance they might otherwise suffer'. For Turner (2019), the representation of women in peace processes is basically based on two grounds; 'the belief that participation of women leads to greater recognition of gendered aspects of conflict in a peace process and gender sensitive peace agreements are more likely to be sustainable'. According to Krauss et al (2018), understanding women's participation in mediation and negotiations for peacebuilding is found in the link between women-led civil society groups and female delegates which often 'positively impacts accord contents and its implementation'. This understanding is based on their finding that the quality of the peace accord and its implementation rate are the strongest predictors for durable peace and the fact that women's direct participation in peace negotiations positively impacts the durability and quality of peace.

On the other hand, understanding the concept of gender as applied in mediation and peacebuilding processes includes an integration of gender courses and trainings for mediators and their teams. The idea behind this stand rests on the need to ensure that mediators are gender aware and sensitive in their operations. Also referred to as adopting a 'gender-lens' to mediation, this gender awareness and sensitivity approach according to Turner (2019) 'is a means of addressing the risk of tokenism in women's participation, and the difficulties of connecting participation in the process with influence on its substance'. It can also be a practice that further eschews mediocrity that might be empowered in the process of fostering inclusion and rather advances meaningful participation of women in mediation and peace processes.

Clearly there are different ways gender in mediation can be applied and understood. However, this paper defines it as the conscious integration of the agency of women in both formal and informal peace processes for a more meaningful and sustainable peace.

Mediation and Peacebuilding

Mediation as a concept and practice plays an important role in peacebuilding. A common definition of mediation was given by the United Nations as 'a process whereby a third party assists two or more parties, with their consent, to prevent, manage or resolve a conflict by helping them to develop mutually acceptable agreements' (United Nations, 2012). This is supported by Bercovitch and Jackson (2001, 4) defining mediation as a 'flexible but structured undertaking' in which conflict parties seek their own solution to the conflict, assisted by an impartial intermediary. This suggests that mediation is always offered on the basis of consent which further distinguishes it from judicial processes of dispute settlement in that it is not binding on the parties for its implementation. Here, the mediator facilitates communication and agreement where possible so the ultimate responsibility for reaching a solution rests with the parties involved.

Zartman and Touval (2007, 438) simply defines mediation as 'a mode of negotiation in which a third party helps the parties find a solution that they cannot find by themselves'. This explicitly highlights that mediation is an action undertaken by an autonomous; outside individual or group using persuasion technique rather than coercion with the aim to reach a solution acceptable to the conflicting parties involved. Moreover, mediation is no longer restricted to the traditional model of a sole mediator engaging parties in intensive talks to reach an outcome (Bercovitch and Jackson 2009), but can be much more informal and flexible. Thus, mediation is a process that works out conflict management and resolution by resolving an ongoing dispute, mainly through negotiations and appealing to the common wishes of the parties to end violence and prevent its recurrence (Wallensteen and Svensson 2014, 316). They point out that mediation can occur at any stage of a conflict, from an early stage before conflict escalates into violence, during a conflict as a means of negotiating a ceasefire or cessation of hostilities, or to ensure the effective implementation of a peace agreement. Mediation can take many forms which may include informal talks and shuttle diplomacy where the mediator conveys messages between parties who do not meet face to face.

Active participation by the involved parties is another crucial concept in both mediation and peace processes ((Wallensteen and Svensson 2014).

Mediation serves as a non-violent mechanism for resolving conflicts (Guelke 2008, 63-68). The objective is to bring together parties on a voluntary basis, allowing them to address grievances related to the stated incompatibilities that gave rise to violent behavior. In most cases, mediation includes a mediator along with the primary parties and/or their representatives or advisers. Occasionally, mediation may also incorporate secondary parties to the conflict. The mediator can be designated or invited, serving as a third party to the conflict or as a neutral actor. A mediation process can be considered domestic when it is internally led without the engagement of an external third party. These processes often exhibit robust and assertive elements, stemming from the prior experiences of the conflicting parties.

According to Berkovich and Jackson (2001), 'mediation is conducted through direct, face-to-face interactions between the belligerents, although occasionally the mediator may engage in what is known as shuttle diplomacy. The practice of mediation is occasionally conducted "in public," involving the deliberate leaking of information about the process to signal positions to external audiences. However, more often than not, mediation is carried out in a closed and non-transparent manner. The manner in which mediation is implemented can significantly influence the outcome of the process. Both external and internal mediators may choose to conduct a peace process in a manner that aligns with or advances their own self-interest, such as their national interests'.

Additionally, various types of conflicts, including local armed conflicts, civil wars, systemic conflicts, intercommunal violence, one-sided violence, or great power rivalries, are likely to exhibit different mediation dynamics in terms of form and character (Bercovitch and Jackson 2001). Mediators addressing ongoing violence typically adopt one of two fundamental strategies. The mediator might condition discussions on the conflicting parties to halting violence or may require the parties to commit to the mediated outcome by putting an indefinite end to violence. Ceasing hostilities is advantageous for the parties involved, as it signifies a commitment to peace and fosters confidence and trust both for the opposing party and the mediator. Violence occurring during negotiations is likely to disrupt the power balance, introducing uncertainty into the situation. Addressing conflicting parties often involves managing spoilers, hawks, and stubborn actors (Miall et al 1999, 64).

The relationship between peace mediation and peacebuilding can be viewed as going hand in hand. Andy Knight defines peacebuilding as a process that 'embraces immediate, short-, and longer-term policy approaches to laying the foundation upon which peace can thrive' (Knight 2004, 356). Peacebuilding is largely perceived to be a process of creating conducive conditions that will enable a conflict-habituated system to become a peace system. According to Reyckler (2001), peacebuilding goes beyond conflict management as it attempts to fix core problems that are

underlying in conflict and change the pattern of interaction of the parties involved. Isike (2009, 30) supports this notion as he defines peacebuilding as the “processes and activities involved in normalizing relations and reconciling the latent differences between the disputing sides in a conflict with a view to enabling sustainable peace”. He contends further that peacebuilding is an overarching concept that includes conflict transformation, restorative justice, trauma healing, reconciliation, development, and good leadership, which all have implications for conflict prevention given that poor and bad governance are at the root of armed conflict in many African states. This understanding of peacebuilding is built on the notion that relationships are central to conflict and peacebuilding as seen in relational conceptions of conflict transformation such as those of Galtung (1996) who defined peacebuilding as the process of creating supporting structures that remove the causes of wars and offer alternatives to war in situations where war might occur. Drawing together these broader definitions of peacebuilding, Porter argues that ‘peacebuilding includes all processes that promote non-violence and foster equality, justice and human rights’ (Porter 2007, 33-4).

According to a Discussion Note prepared by the International Peace Academy in 2005, the connection between mediation and peacebuilding should be viewed as a partnership. This challenges the conventional linear perspective that regards peacebuilding as an activity that takes place after successful mediation. They present three key considerations regarding the connection between mediation and peacebuilding. Firstly, mediated agreements play a role in shaping peacebuilding initiatives. Secondly, the ongoing negotiation is essential for implementing a mediated peace agreement. Thirdly mediation significantly influences peacebuilding activities, particularly when it comes to implementing agreements.

Reassessment of African Efforts in Advancing Women's Participation in Mediation and Peacebuilding

The African Union underwent a rebranding in 2000, a period that coincided with the adoption of UN Resolution 1325. This resolution aimed at enhancing women's involvement in peace processes and promoting a more gender-sensitive approach to peace and security. The main responsibility of the African Union Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) is to oversee peace and security matters on the continent, including various related issues. Within this framework, ensuring the involvement of women in peace and security, particularly in peace processes, is a significant priority for APSA. To address this concern, APSA has initiated agendas, workshops, panels, and other mechanisms. The initial step taken by the African Union (AU) and APSA to enhance women's representation and participation in peacebuilding involved incorporating the principles of UN Resolution 1325 into the AU's gender-related frameworks (Hendricks, 2017). The integration of UN Resolution 1325 into the African Union's WPS frameworks was one such step. Subsequently, the African Union took a step further by appointing a special envoy specifically tasked with addressing women's roles in peace and security (AU 2015, 2016, 2016b).

The Maputo Protocol, an extension of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Rights of Women in Africa, was adopted in 2003. Article 10 of this protocol affirms women's entitlement to a peaceful existence and emphasizes their right to actively participate in the promotion of peace. It urges member states to implement measures facilitating women's involvement in structures and processes related to conflict prevention and management at all levels (AU, 2004). Building on this, the African Union (AU) continued its commitment to gender equality and women's participation in peace and security matters. Key subsequent initiatives include the solemn declaration of gender equality in 2004, the AU Gender Policy in, and the launch of the Gender, Peace, and Security Programme in 2014. This program serves as a continental framework for the AU and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and its related resolutions on women, peace, and security (Hendricks, 2017). The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) Roadmap for 2016-2020, as outlined by the African Union (AU, 2016), underscored the prioritization of gender mainstreaming. The AU Peace and Security Council, in alignment with this commitment, organized an open session specifically addressing the involvement of women in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. In March 2017, responding to the imperative of enhancing women's roles in conflict prevention and mediation, the African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC) established the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation, known as FemWise-Africa. This network is designed to bolster the participation of women in conflict prevention and mediation efforts while promoting the effective implementation of commitments to include women in peace-making processes across Africa.

Olaitan and Isike (2019) posited that despite considerable efforts to promote the active involvement and representation of women in peace processes across the continent, there persists a notable deficiency in the engagement and representation of women in mediation and peacebuilding initiatives. Hendricks (2017) contends that, notwithstanding efforts in advocacy, the establishment of frameworks, the training of female mediators, and advancements in terms of women's involvement in peacemaking have been sluggish.

For Hendrick, addressing this will require the incorporation of a formal mediation and peacebuilding procedures focused on context specific implementation plan by member states. These includes directing much more efforts towards developing policy documents that will formalize the diverse but mostly informal mediation and peacebuilding activities of women by conducting continent-wide studies. In carrying this out, the AU should work to eliminate every bias that tends to dismiss significant and ongoing contributions women make in informal mediation and peacebuilding efforts towards fostering peace. Furthermore, for global recognition, this policy framework must be inclusive and be integrated into existing formal peace processes. Also, women's groups involved in mediation and peacebuilding activities should be identified, duly acknowledged and involved in reintegration programs in advisory capacities for the African Union (AU) on Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) (Hendrick, 2017)

Women's Role in Mediation and Peace Processes: The Nigerian Perspective

Notable conflicts and attacks in Nigeria since 1999 from Niger Delta militants in the southern region and Boko Haram insurgents primarily in the northeast have been resisted by women who have actively countered violent extremism. For instance, Ibeanu (2005) emphasizes that women in the Niger Delta have played a pivotal role in mitigating militancy by facilitating negotiations to generate new gender dynamics and foster reconciliation between the state and militants. Anugwom (2009) further reiterates that in this capacity, women primarily serve as peace mediators and guardians of societal order. They leverage their social networks and engage in gender-specific activities to alleviate the threat posed by militant youths.

According to a joint analytical report by the UK government and the UN Women Nigeria (UN Women Report, 2021) at all the six geopolitical zones, women are actively engaged in various initiatives aimed at safeguarding women's rights, protecting vulnerable individuals, particularly women and children, and addressing issues such as arbitrary arrests and abduction of women. Additionally, women advocate for the enactment of laws like the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill and the Child Rights Act to safeguard children, prevent child marriage, and combat sexual and gender-based violence. They also play crucial roles in promoting and defending the rights of women peacebuilders, facilitating access to justice, and utilizing alternative dispute resolution methods, often employing cultural and musical activities to foster peace within communities. In conflict-affected areas like the North East, women contribute significantly to the reintegration of children and former combatants, including those associated with extremist groups like Boko Haram, through dialogue and mediation efforts. Specifically, in Borno State, women are actively involved in the disarmament and reintegration of repentant extremists, employing a comprehensive approach encompassing disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration strategies.

Furthermore, women lead initiatives such as peace education through establishing peace clubs, conducting research to counter extremist narratives, and supporting the reintegration of child soldiers into society. At the grassroots level, women implement interventions to address conflicts between farmers and herders, as seen in examples from consultations in the North Central and South East regions, where women participated in reopening blocked cattle routes and ensuring compensation for crop damage to prevent further escalation of violence (UN Women Report, 2021).

In today's Nigerian society, marked by ethnic, religious, and political turmoil, women, regardless of their Christian or Muslim affiliations, consistently engage in conflict resolution efforts, often assuming active roles. During the Jos crises of 2010, the frequent incidents of children being harmed in their homes and schools, coupled with the rape and killing of women and young girls,

Figure 1: Channels for Women's Peacebuilding in Nigeria



Source: *Women's Mediation Analysis Report, UN Women Nigeria, 2021*

prompted the women of Jos to stage a demonstration. Their protest ushered in a period of tranquility in Jos for a while. Subsequent protest marches by the women of Plateau in 2010 and 2011 and most recently in 2024 after the December 2023 massacre garnered widespread attention and were prominently featured in various Nigerian newspapers. Following this, a few months later, Muslim women similarly expressed their concerns through a peaceful demonstration. These protests had a significant impact in pacifying the intense crises in Jos. Unfortunately, despite the significant contributions that women make in informal and grassroots peace efforts, they often face exclusion from formal peace processes. This was evident in Jos, where women were inadequately represented in the government-established Tribunals and Commissions of Enquiry tasked with addressing the Jos crises. Among the twenty-three members across three tribunals, only two were women (Falola and Yacob-Haliso 2017, 199).

On multiple occasions, women from Bonny and Ogoni engaged in peaceful protests, seeking negotiations with the Federal Government and oil companies. As Njoku (2014) posited, it is unfortunate that these demonstrations frequently concluded with the brutal killing and assault of the women involved. Beyond the collective endeavors of women, there have been initiatives by individuals and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) focused on peace training. These include the Young Mediators Association of Nigeria (YONAMAN), and the Human Rights Association of Peace and Conflict Resolution, established in collaboration with women academics in the South East of Nigeria, with a focus on training young mediators and negotiators in educational institutions across Nigeria in effective conflict resolution approaches. Additionally, there are NGOs such as the one dedicated to Women's Peace and Security (affiliated with the United Nations), the Christian Women for Peace Association, and the Muslim Women Association. Regrettably, these NGOs have been functioning in isolation, lacking government support or recognition despite their significant role in maintaining peace and order within society.

Nevertheless, there is a recent development initiated by Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which involves the establishment of a West African Women Training on Peace Mediation. This marks an innovative step in formally training women to actively participate in conflict resolution and peace-building efforts in the West African region. Additionally, the Armed Forces of Nigeria have been able to attain 27.9 per cent female troops participation in peacekeeping operations, surpassing the 17 per cent recommended benchmark by the United Nations (Security Women, 2023). While these represent significant effort towards recognition of women's role and capacity in peace processes, there is need for sustained support, spotlighting of women's work in these areas and government accountability towards ensuring women's inclusion in mediation, peacebuilding and equally, peace operations across formal peacebuilding structures in Nigeria and Africa.

Women's Role in Mediation and Peace Processes: The Somalia Perspective

According to Cindy Horst (2017) gender identities and roles have significantly changed due to the impact of the changing political system, the impact of women's movements, civil war and religious transformations. Somalia has become entangled in a prolonged conflict following the civil war, marked by clan warfare that led to the collapse of the state, exacerbating security concerns and creating social divisions within the Somali community. Similar to other post-conflict nations, the civil war had a particularly profound impact on women. Ingiriis (2013, 318) noted that the Somali civil war involved the use of rape as a tactic by militias, with the aim to humiliate and eliminate adversaries by targeting and disgracing their women as it brought about family dissolution.

Amid these difficult circumstances, Somali women resist identifying themselves as war victims and instead actively embrace their role as agents of peace. They consistently shoulder responsibilities, acting as bridge builders and serving as the cohesive force that binds families together, fostering community connections beyond clan boundaries (Svensson 2012). Also, according to Lewis (1994), for the enduring stability of peace and peacebuilding, Somali women have been historically recognized for their role in conflict reconciliation, primarily in creating a communication link between conflicting parties during the transition from war to peace. Nevertheless, they are often excluded from formal dialogue, negotiation, and mediation, roles traditionally reserved for elders.

Notably, Somali women have oftentimes been at the forefront of peacebuilding efforts. Female agency in bringing warring parties together in inter- and intra- clan conflicts is widespread in Somalia. Women are able to quickly transition from one end of the spectrum to the other to pursue collective peace through a range of activities, including acting as peace envoys, putting pressure on male family members, fund raising, holding demonstrations, doing advocacy work and influencing war strategy. The flexibility and malleability of female agency promotes simultaneous efforts to generate collective peace-making. In Figure 2 we see a detailed description of each of

these activities and how they are employed by Somali women to build peace at the clan level. Also, based on the Kismayo study, Somali women not only show their versatility by engaging in multiple activities to promote peace, but also demonstrate their resilience and adaptability (Horst 2017).

Figure 2. Summary of diverse actions taken by women from Kismayo to end conflict and promote peace.

<i>Type of actions</i>	<i>Details</i>
<i>Persuade male family members</i>	Beseech, demand, persuade their menfolk at home, for example, by refusing sex, refusing to fulfil their traditional gender roles, threatening divorce
<i>Network, mobilize collectively</i>	Strategize within and across clan lines through women-to-women talks
<i>Fundraise and mobilize resources</i>	Mobilize to fundraise to cover the cost of peace meetings, the demobilization of fighters, or the purchase of civilian clothes
<i>Take direct action</i>	Place themselves physically between the warring parties
<i>Organize demonstrations</i>	Demonstrate through the streets to draw attention/ canvass support for peace
<i>Advocacy</i>	Organize public collective prayer meetings
<i>Peace envoys</i>	Lobby their elders and the elders of lineages to which they are related
<i>Peace envoys</i>	Act as peace envoys for the men, taking peace messages to the enemy
<i>Intelligence gatherers</i>	Collect intelligence about the enemy for their own elders to help them prepare
<i>Emotional appeal</i>	Compose and recite or sing poems in front of men
<i>Logistical support for peace meetings</i>	Organize meetings to bring people together, provide the venue for peace meetings: place 'the peace mat' (<i>gogosha</i>)
	Cook, feed, look after the elders attending the peace meeting

Source: Horst (2017, 246)

It is to be noted that these characteristics apply equally to women under government and Al-Shabaab (AS) control respectively. Interestingly, women who are wives to AS fighters enjoy a privileged life that allows them to become very influential. This is attributed to the fact that by

marrying an AS fighter a woman is said to be fulfilling two critical functions; one is procreating and taking care of the next generation of AS fighters, and two, inculcating AS ideology to their children until they reach the age of eight when they leave home to attend AS madrasas (Horst 2017, 252). Their privileged status comes from Al-Shabaab's Executive Council which allows them to engage in businesses, own mobile phones and enjoy freedom of movement in AS-controlled areas. Combined with the economic power they are building, autonomy in their daily lives, AS wives could potentially be effective influencers in long-term efforts to achieve a negotiated settlement with AS.

In the formal, peacebuilding architecture, Somali women are underrepresented, and arguably this is linked to their overall under representation in government. However, from a total absence in the parliament in the first decade, there has been notable participation and representation in subsequent indirect elections. While 30 percent of the quota in parliament is expected to go to women, the last two elections, 2016 (24 percent) and 2021 (20 percent),¹ failed to reach the goal. Nevertheless, this is seen as glass half full than a glass half empty or work in progress, at best. In 2021, the United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, Amina Mohamed, welcomed the milestone Somalia had achieved during the 2016 elections with 24 percent of the parliamentary seats occupied by women (UN 2021). Worryingly, this figure dipped to 20 percent in the 2021 elections. Goodwill ambassadors also played pivotal roles in both the 2016 and 2021 elections cycles. Most of these goodwill ambassadors were women activists who pushed for the attainment of the 30 percent quota. Their efforts were complemented by women's groups such as the Somali Gender Equity Movement (SGEM), Somali Women Leadership Initiative (SWLI), Somali Women's Study Center (SWSC) as well as civil society umbrella organization Somali Non-State Actors (SONSA) (Affi and Hassan 2022).

Despite this modest progress, the 30 percent quota for women remains a gentleman's agreement. A collective gender advocacy is required to ensure that it is reflected in the 2012 Provisional Constitution currently being reviewed by the parliament. This is the kind of gender disruption that Tripp (2015) argues is necessary for behavioral and policy change as it would empower women politically and economically.

Another condition that Tripp identifies for bringing change is women's participation in women's movements and giving a voice to women in national and international issues, particularly in peacebuilding. In post-conflict Somalia, women groups have not only initiated discussions among clans to promote peace but also deliberated on shaping a lasting vision for Somali society. This included the development of a national constitution, which was ultimately ratified in 2012. According to a study conducted by Gichuru (2014) in Mogadishu, Somalia, in the post-conflict

¹ In the Senate, women's representation in the 2021/22 election increased from 24% to 26%, while it decreased in the House of the People from 24% to 20%.

period, women actively participated in peacebuilding processes. Their engagement was evident in community-level peacebuilding efforts, such as dismantling illegal checkpoints established by armed military groups. Additionally, women played a vital role in forming groups that included both women and youth, aiming to contribute to the ongoing maintenance of peace within the community. This finding is supported by Saggiomo (2014) who states that the involvement of women in peacebuilding processes was further facilitated through the involvement of international women development organizations that promoted their active participation and amplified their voices.

In 2012, the Garowe II Principles included the 30% quota only because, in addition to pressure from the international community, women lobbied and organized 3,000 women in a march in Mogadishu at a time when most parts of the city were under the control of al-Shabaab (Affi and Hassan 2022).

The third condition that Tripp (2015) identifies is empowerment through international norms. As a patriarchal society, Somalia struggles with the implementation of gender equality and gender empowerment. According to UNDP, Somalia ranks 4th from the bottom on the UNDP Gender Equality Index, scoring 0.776 (1 represents complete inequality). The 2012 Provisional Federal Constitution of Somalia provides equal rights to both men and women, although mechanisms for attaining this objective are still lacking. The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) is committed to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. The Provisional Federal Constitution stresses women's equality with men and emphasizes women's effective participation in all spheres of life, including public offices and in decision-making. In 2016, the FGS adopted a National Gender Policy with the aim to further gender mainstreaming in its peace and state-building processes. The National Development Plan, 2017-2020, adopted gender mainstreaming as a cross-cutting theme. As a result, "the Somalia Federal Government accedes and domesticates various regional and international gender instrument and Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), African Charter on Human and People's Rights Protocol (ACHPR), protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights of Women in Africa 2003 (the Maputo Protocol), the Solemn Declaration on gender equity in Africa, (SDGEA), Protocol on the Prevention and Suppression of Sexual Violence against Women and Children, the Beijing Platform for Action, UN Resolution 1325 and 1820, and other relevant gender specific international and Regional Resolutions, Instruments and Conventions." (FGS 2015 6-7).

Collectively, these instruments provide a framework and guidance for the promotion and institutionalization of gender mainstreaming. It enables the international community to advocate for greater accountability for delivering gender results. During the 2016 and 2021 election cycles, the international community leveraged these instruments to exert pressure on Somalis to achieve modest women representation quota.

Conclusion

While Nigeria and Somalia are culturally and politically different, women's role in mediation and peacebuilding bear a lot of similarities. Against cultural, religious and political constraints, women in both countries are pivotal in the peace and security agenda, providing leadership in mediation, preventing conflict, reconciliation and general peacebuilding efforts. Women in both countries have effectively used every arsenal they have in their quiver to demonstrate both their willingness and a commitment to pursue peace at all cost.

In Nigeria, women have effectively used protests to demand peaceful resolution of conflicts, although few were fatal due to the brutality of the police. The incredible courage demonstrated by women across the country, from Niger Delta militants in the southern region to Boko Haram in the north, compelled rethinking on how gender is integrated into the conflict resolution, mediation and peacebuilding equation. Through the establishment of training and peace clubs from the grassroots, Nigerian women have nurtured a resilient capacity to lead and participate in mediation and peacebuilding. Beyond the collective activism and advocacy, including the marches, training facilitated by NGOs such as Young Mediators Association of Nigeria (YONAMAN), the Human Rights Association of Peace and Conflict Resolution, established in collaboration with women academics in the South East of Nigeria, have been noticeably helpful for young mediators and negotiators in educational institutions across Nigeria to learn effective conflict resolution approaches. Despite demonstrating immense capacity to pacify warring parties and bring about peace at the grassroot, women are disproportionately underrepresented in the formal level such as the government-established Tribunals and Commissions of Enquiry into the Jos crisis where only two women were appointed to the twenty-three-member Commission. There is also a lack of government support for NGOs engaged in facilitating training activities for the women in mediation and peacebuilding. Hence increased encouragement from government institutions would enhance the efficiency and productivity of these organizations, contributing to the development of a generation skilled in peacebuilding and conflict management.

Somali women have similarly used protests to force changes in the violence/peace continuum where necessary. Interestingly, women under AS-controlled areas and FGS controlled areas do not shy away to use whatever means they can to secure peace, including placing themselves in between warring factions if needed. Since the 1990s, Somali women have been very actively working to promote peaceful inter-clan coexistence. In this process, they have faced several social, cultural, public constraints that have limited their impact. Nonetheless, they continue to be the bulwark for conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding. In the formal sector, women face uphill task competing with male counterparts for several reasons, including an unfair 4.5 clan formula²,

² The 4.5 clan formula was birthed at the Arta Conference in Djibouti in 2000 and later in Mbagathi, Kenya in 2002. The formula notably adopted in Somali is key to the distribution of political power at different level.

limited implementation of the 30% quota for women representation in politics and public life, lack of financial support for women in politics, discrimination and sexual abuse, as well as public perception.³

To tackle these challenges, three conditions should be met; gender disruptions, stronger women networks and associations, and support of the international community. First, a proactive national (local or clan) and international agenda on gender inclusivity in mediation and peacebuilding should be put in place in school curriculum, media, religious places of worship and de-stigmatization of women as weak, incapable and unequal partners with men in mediation and peacebuilding. Second, aggressive education, including at the tertiary level, should be undertaken with the support of NGOs and international partners to ensure that women, regardless of education status, are enabled to function as part of the collective female agency for change. The first and second steps are critical gender disruptions that would accelerate women's participation across the board. Third, in the case of Somalia, women empowerment through the 30% quota should be enshrined in the 2012 Provisional Constitution of Somalia. Fourth, women activism should be encouraged and supported at all levels of government. Last but not the least, the fact that the international community continues to advocate for adherence to UNSCR 1325, AU and other internal obligations on gender inclusivity helps to sustain a push to adherence and accountability. However, while international efforts at empowering women in Somalia are welcome, it is important not to subsume the 'local' in the 'international' as sustainability will ultimately depend on the resilience of the former. Investment in the local area is therefore *sin qua non* to women's empowerment in peace and security discourse.

³ Public perception points to the role women are perceived to play primarily in the Somalian society which includes advising as well as providing help to their husband when needed. These perceptions oftentimes breed exclusion.

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