

## Task Force 4: Peace, Security, and Global Governance



## The Role of Women's Organizations in the Peace Architecture: A Missing Piece?

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### Abstract

Despite the existence of normative and policy mechanisms to enhance women's participation in peace processes, such mechanisms, both at the international and state levels, have yet to produce meaningful participation of women or acknowledge gender equality as a key aspect for achieving sustainable peace. In pursuit of these goals, states have often overlooked the role of women-led grassroots organizations, restricting them to the role of mere operational partners. This policy brief sheds lights on the contribution of women's organizations at the grassroots level in formulating innovative peacebuilding strategies that also address the root causes of conflicts. The Group of 7 (G7) in Germany recognized the need for creating a financing mechanism to develop the G7 process

of peace finance; such financial commitments must be accompanied by specific plans to support women-led grassroots organizations and movements. To do so, we recommend the G7 to (i) foster the effective implementation of existing normative and legal frameworks to promote women's participation in peace processes and provide adequate funding, (ii) advance women's roles within peace negotiations and include the practice of consultations with local women's organizations at different stages of the peace negotiations, and (iii) incorporate core support to women-led grassroots organizations in the international cooperation and development agenda.

## Introduction

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Gender equality is a prerequisite for effectively mobilizing grassroots organizations and civil society's participation in peace negotiations. Through this policy brief, we hope to encourage and inspire decision makers to create a new norm to take further actions by stimulating the exchange of best practices. What is needed now are bold, transformative actions to envision fairer societies—both within and beyond the G7 countries—built on feminist principles of social and gender justice and inclusion. We call for a structural transformation, a truly feminist approach that goes beyond inclusion in existing decision making but rather seeks to transform the very spaces in which people make decisions. By realizing commitments to gender equality, the G7 members demonstrate their determination to guarantee participation and equal opportunities for all. The G7 leaders must choose: either reproduce obsolete conditions and structures or break new ground by dismantling the structural barriers at the normative, political, and institutional levels that disenfranchise women from participation in political affairs and peacebuilding.

Whether it is the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, climate change, or the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine, crises disproportionately affect women and those already suffering from structural disadvantages, endangering the limited gains in gender equality and women's rights made over the decades. To counter detrimental developments and achieve equality and justice for all, the G7 and beyond must make clear actions and commitments to address persistent gender inequalities that inhibit the advance of women's participation, such as limited access to education and economic opportunities for women, as well as unequal representation in political and decision-making processes. Countries must also address societal and cultural norms that often restrict women's mobility, hampering their participation in public life, including peacebuilding (Javed, Chattu, and Allahverdiipour 2021).

Patriarchal norms foster analytical blind spots that limit women's depiction as mere victims of conflict. While applying gender analysis to peace and security institutions and policy instruments is laudable, it cannot be done in a manner assuming that women's experiences and interests are homogenous and that their historical exclusion is a coincidence on a grand scale (ICRW 2018). When women-led grassroots organizations are engaged in peace efforts, they contribute a more comprehensive and heterogeneous approach both to women's experiences of inequality and to women's initiatives to achieve equal peace.

## Challenge

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Although gender equality has been positioned within G7 agendas not only as a stand-alone task but as a comprehensive goal with implications in fields including environmental sustainability, poverty reduction, crisis response, and rule of law, in practice, specific mechanisms to ensure meaningful participation of women in peace efforts are still scarce. The G7 Leaders' Communiqué in 2022 endorsed the G7 Dashboard on Gender Gaps, which represents a milestone in holding the G7 accountable for its efforts toward achieving gender equality. Yet, crucial aspects of the gender equality agenda remain off the radar in such a monitoring instrument and therefore are not part of the agenda setting. Neither the G7 Leaders' Communiqué in 2022 nor the recommendations formulated by the Gender Equality Advisory Council address the promotion of women's role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. This policy brief exhorts G7 leaders to take action to advance women's participation in peace efforts through the engagement of women's organizations as a precondition to achieve sustainable and equal peace.

This recommendation builds on recent scholarly work that reveals a correlation between the presence of women peacemakers and the role of local civil society in peace efforts since local nongovernment organizations (NGOs) involve women to a much greater degree than states and intergovernmental organizations do (Kreutz and Cárdenas, forthcoming). Further, there is empirical evidence from 27 formal peace processes analyzed by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security in which women's organizations led parallel initiatives that not only informed but also contributed to the formal peace negotiations (Dayal and Christien 2020). For instance, women played a crucial role in Liberia, bringing an end to the country's civil war in 2003; the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace organized protests that brought international attention to the conflict and helped pressure the warring parties to negotiate a peace agreement. The 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro in the Philippines and the 2016 peace agreement in Colombia illustrate how women's organizations have played a key role in engaging local communities in peace efforts and advocating for the inclusion of gender provisions in the peace agreements (Dayal and Christien 2020; Bouvier 2016). Similarly, the Southern Sudan Women's Constitutional Coalition (SSWCC), in addition to pushing for women's participation in the peace process, also advanced the inclusion of women's rights in the constitution. These facts reveal that peace is established not only at the negotiation table, so the G7 must expand the scope of the partners they consider strategic in the pursuit of peace. To this end, we formulate proposals on three main areas: (i) the effective implementation of existing normative and legal frameworks to promote women's participation in peace processes supported by adequate funding; (ii) the advance of women's roles within peace negotiations, including the practice of consultations with local women's organizations; and (iii) the support of women-led grassroots organizations in the international cooperation and development agenda. To implement these three proposals will require a holistic understanding of the gender equality agenda and an intersectional approach to the women, peace, and security agenda.

## Proposals

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An intersectional approach to the women, peace, and security agenda can make several things possible. First, it can help us identify and build on the existing community-led spaces and initiatives, allowing us to recognize the value women add to the informal peace process and bring these mechanisms into the broader negotiations and peace processes. In innumerable examples globally,

women have demonstrated their ability for bridging divides and setting up spaces for peaceful transformation of relationships and conflict narratives (Berry 2018; Kamenou 2020; Cárdenas 2022). Second, it can allow us to critically analyze the challenges, barriers, and social norms that prevent the meaningful participation of women, as bringing women to the negotiation table does not always necessarily lead to an inclusive peace process. An intersectional approach enables us to understand, beyond quotas, the norms, practices, and deep structural barriers that contribute to the marginalization of women's needs and experiences during and after conflict. Finally, it can allow us to recognize that women are autonomous actors and that different gendered experiences exist in conflict. Women are often excluded from peace processes as a result of a universally accepted narrative of women in conflict being simply victims of war. By adopting an intersectional approach, we can move away from narrow, gendered, binary stereotypes and assumptions and instead recognize the various roles that women play during the conflict as local peace mediators, combatants, and humanitarian responders.

## Fostering the Architecture for Women's Participation in Peace Processes

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A vast international framework that promotes gender equality, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, and subsequent resolutions on women, peace, and security,<sup>1</sup> has been adopted by G7 members and incorporated in their agendas for international cooperation for development. However, the G7 must scale up political commitment toward the international framework for women's participation and hold its members accountable for the observance of such instruments.

Recent research reveals the increased involvement of women in mediation efforts following the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (Kreutz and Cárdenas, forthcoming). Drawing on this evidence, this policy brief urges the G7 to observe and foster national action plans (NAPs) for women, peace, and security as relevant and comprehensive tools to actualize commitments toward women's participation. NAPs provide a national framework for the women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda and facilitate multi-stakeholder work by engaging different institutional actors and civil society. Currently, 104 United Nations (UN) member states have issued a NAP, yet, in practice, only 43% of them contain an allocated budget (Cárdenas 2020). Among G7 members, only Canada's NAP has an allocated budget.

Without adequate funding, the political will and state commitments with regards to the promotion of women's participation will remain in the field of rhetoric. The 2022 communiqué highlights the G7 commitment to make every effort to collectively increase the share of the G7's allocable official development assistance for advancing gender equality. Advancing the WPS agenda must be part of this share, and to do so, supporting the design and implementation of NAPs in conflict-affected countries is a relevant multi-stakeholder instrument. Furthermore, the G7 can

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<sup>1</sup> Following the adoption of Resolution 1325 (2000), the United Nations Security Council adopted subsequent resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019), and 2493 (2019).

include the implementation of the WPS agenda in the requirements for accessing funds in projects taking place in conflict-affected countries.

The analysis of NAP commitments in recent years sheds light on a more salient role attributed to civil society in the implementation of the WPS agenda and, therefore, an increased focus on a multi-track approach that articulates the contribution of women's organizations' peace initiatives in high-level negotiations (UN Women 2021). Within G7 members, the cooperation with conflict-affected countries is increasingly taking a multitrack approach, as illustrated by the NAPs of Canada and Japan. Building on these experiences, we recommend the G7 to strengthen political will in supporting a dialogue of plural actors within conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts.

## **Advancing Women's Roles within Peace Negotiations**

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Merely inviting women to peace negotiations that are inherently patriarchal does not equate to meaningful participation or inclusion. Negotiations need to go beyond women having a "seat at the table," as women face several obstacles, including violence. We must assess the changes required in the broader political system to overcome obstacles as well as prevent any backlash that women might face. While the objectives and indicators associated with the G7 WPS agenda support women's groups, we cannot replicate an "add women and stir" approach that does not address structural barriers for women's participation. Such unequal systems that have prevented women from participating in institutions will not dissipate automatically following women's entry into the halls of power.

The goal of achieving women's meaningful participation in peace negotiations and the incorporation of gender equality within the peace agenda requires strong political will from G7 members who are involved in mediation efforts. The G7 must set an example by making explicit commitments to nominate and appoint women as mediators, including in leadership positions. Further, G7 members must require gender expertise among their staff taking part in processes of conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

What is missing from the previous commitments is recognizing the complementarity of the peace initiatives developed at the grassroots level and in the official peace negotiations. As research on women's participation in peace processes reveals, when women mediators are involved, conflicts are more likely to conclude in peace agreements (Kreutz and Cárdenas, forthcoming). Further, women's participation can provide access to a wider range of actors, such as those in local civil society, that contribute specific knowledge of the conflict and can improve the implementation phase of an agreement (Justino, Mitchell, and Müller 2018).

Several experiences of multi-track approaches in peace efforts provide empirical content to this argument. Examples include the European Union commitment to engage women's groups in high-level mediation processes in Nepal, Papua New Guinea, and Somalia (Cárdenas 2020) as well as the Women's Advisory Board in Syria facilitated by UN Women and the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (UN Women 2021). The G7 must provide political and financial support for women's organizations and particularly grassroots ones to engage in dialogue with track 1 and to provide insights to the peace negotiations.

## Incorporating Core Support to Women-Led Grassroots Organizations

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We must recognize women’s organizations as strategic actors in the design and implementation of contextualized, sustainable policies and not only as operational partners. The 2023 G7 summit is an opportunity for the G7 members to reflect on their role as international donors and to assess the long-term impact of their strategies. The G7 in Germany recognized the need for creating a financing mechanism to develop the G7 process of peace finance. Actions on peace finance must be accompanied by specific plans to support women-led grassroots organizations and movements. The 2022 report by the Gender Equality Advisory Council (GEAC) underscores the importance of targeting NGOs and initiatives that advocate for women’s rights. Despite the contribution of these organizations in advancing the agenda of gender equality, the resources granted to them “are usually small in scale and granted for project-specific work, rather than integrated into budgets for long-term, sustainable initiatives” (GEAC 2022: 25). The GEAC report also emphasizes that the funding often overlooks grassroots organizations and instead targets large intergovernmental organizations based in developed countries. Reaching the local knowledge of civil society organizations and women’s organizations is a key aspect in developing the WPS agenda. By acknowledging and supporting the valuable knowledge and experience of grassroots organizations with direct, flexible, and sustainable funding as well as with methodological tools, G7 strategies will be able to build a diverse, thorough community of practices in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. By doing so, the G7 can counter standardized models that often face resistance within the recipient communities, have structural limitations in their implementation, or are simply not feasible. Therefore, we underscore the importance of adopting the GEAC recommendation to “incorporate new markers that track the direct financial support of women’s organizations and activities in support of gender equality and whether funds are granted for long-term core funding or short-term projects” (GEAC 2022: 21).

## Relevance to the G7

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The G7 is one of the most prominent collective action mechanisms within the community of democracies, and the impact of its actions reaches beyond G7 countries. Therefore, all of the normative, political, and financial bodies of the G7 must understand the interconnectedness of sustainable peace and gender equality. The G7 can only fulfill its commitments to pursuing sustainable and equal peace by adopting a broader understanding of women’s meaningful participation in peacebuilding and by situating women-led civil society and grassroots organizations as strategic partners within its peace architecture. Further, this policy brief has shed light on the importance of an intersectional approach to the women, peace, and security agenda that helps to address societal and cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequalities and limit women’s participation in peacebuilding efforts.

Based on sound evidence, we propose three main actions by which the G7 can accomplish its commitment to promote the role of women in peacebuilding and conflict resolution:

- (i) Foster the implementation of national action plans with policy instruments and adequate funding. Further, incorporate the observance of the women, peace, and security agenda as a key factor in assessing the areas and partners for international cooperation strategies.
- (ii) Create opportunities for women's leadership roles and promote their role as mediators.
- (iii) Provide sustainable financial and political support to women's organizations, particularly grassroots ones, and by doing so, facilitate a multi-track approach to peace negotiations.

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### About Think7

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Think7 (T7) is the official think tank engagement group of the Group of 7 (G7). It provides research-based policy recommendations for G7 countries and partners. The Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI) is the lead chair of T7 under Japan's 2023 G7 presidency.