Overcoming Essentialisation

Understanding and Supporting Women's Diverse Roles in Peace Processes

Johanna Poutanen and Catherine Turner

MARTTI AHTISAARI
PEACE FOUNDATION

Acknowledgments

Our sincere thanks to all workshop participants for providing their valuable insights, experiences and recommendations for the development of this publication. Our thanks also to Irene Fellin for her crucial role in designing and facilitating the workshop on which the report is based.

A special appreciation to Vesna Skare Osbolt, Emmily Koiti and Enas Al Arashi who kindly shared their stories for the case studies, and to Sarah Taylor for her valuable feedback and review of the paper.

Authors

This briefing note was researched and written by **Johanna Poutanen** and **Catherine Turner**

Copy-editing: Asha Pond

Design and layout: www.revangeldesigns.co.uk

Illustrations: Emma Philip

About CMI

The CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation is an independent Finnish organisation that works to prevent and resolve violent conflicts through dialogue and mediation. **www.cmi.fi**

About Institute of Advanced Studies (IAS)

Founded in 2006, the Institute of Advanced Study at Durham University offers world-leading researchers a unique space for transformative reflection in and beyond individual disciplines. This paper was produced as part of IAS research and fellowship project "Mediation for the Twenty First Century: connecting the local and the global". **www.iasdurham.org**

This initiative has been supported by the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Finalisation of the publication has been made possible with the partnership support of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Executive Summary

Over the past few years, increasing attention has been directed to defining and promoting women's 'meaningful participation' in peace processes. As we strive for clarity on what 'meaningful' means, we may easily overlook all that participation entails. In doing so, we risk perpetuating simplistic understandings of women as feminist peacemakers, overlooking other aspects of their identities and potentially weakening their space and ability to influence peace process outcomes.

Drawing on a multi-stakeholder workshop and individual interviews with political and civil society leaders from different contexts, this briefing note seeks to provide greater conceptual clarity on the different roles that women play in formal peace negotiations and the factors that shape their role formation.

There are two prominent expectations directed to women taking part in formal peace processes. First, women often experience pressure to speak on so-called 'women's issues' and limit their contribution to gender expertise. Second, female delegates are commonly faced with the competing demands of thematic expertise on the one hand, with constituency representation on the other. Such double bind is rarely experienced by their male counterparts.

These externally imposed assumptions undermine women's political identities, reduce them to essentialized stereotypes and curtail their space to contribute. Women's participation is likely to be most effective where there is strong alignment between their own role conception and the expectations that others have of their contribution. Conversely, where alignment is poor, women often struggle to exert meaningful influence on the process.

Importantly, women cannot be treated as a single and unitary category when it comes to their participation in formal peace processes. To address this, we propose a matrix for analysing role formation by paying attention to four key factors that frame a participant's role formation in the context of formal peace negotiations: selection process, form of participation, source of authority and purpose of participation.

To provide a more differentiated understanding of women's participation, we need to consider what support is provided to women in their different roles. With greater conceptual clarity, national and international partners to any mediation process can help to dispel generalisations and move us beyond essentialist understandings of women's agency.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEDIATORS:

- Design processes and provide support for women's diverse roles
- Terms of reference can help establish clarity on roles and expectations
- Prioritise women's engagement on substantive issues

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENTS SUPPORTING A PEACE PROCESS:

- Provide political backing and draw on national frameworks
- Target tailored financial and technical support to women
- Enable cross-cutting cooperation without requiring a neat consensus

Introduction

Over the past few years, increasing attention has been directed to defining and promoting women's 'meaningful participation' in peace processes. But as we strive for clarity on what *meaningful* means, we may easily overlook all that *participation* entails.

There is a slowly growing appreciation of the diversity of roles that women play at different levels of peace and transition processes, from political negotiators to technical advisors and civil society advocates – yet relatively little attention is paid to how these differences in roles shape women's ability to influence the process and its outcomes.[1] Overall, our understanding of the various roles and identities that women have in peace processes remains generalised and underdeveloped.[2] This gap also speaks to broader limitations that characterise both mediation scholarship and praxis, as the dynamics of identity and agency of men and women in peace processes are still poorly understood and rarely studied empirically.

Since the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000, huge steps have been taken to embed the normative priority of women's participation in peace processes into international policy.[3] However, the apparent success of global advocacy on women, peace and security (WPS) has also created new challenges for women's meaningful participation in practice. At the heart of this tension are different understandings of the purpose of women's participation. The distinction between descriptive and substantive representation, and the connections between presence and influence, continue to shape advocacy and practice in this area.[4] These different conceptions of identity and women's roles can come into conflict when faced with the reality of peace processes.

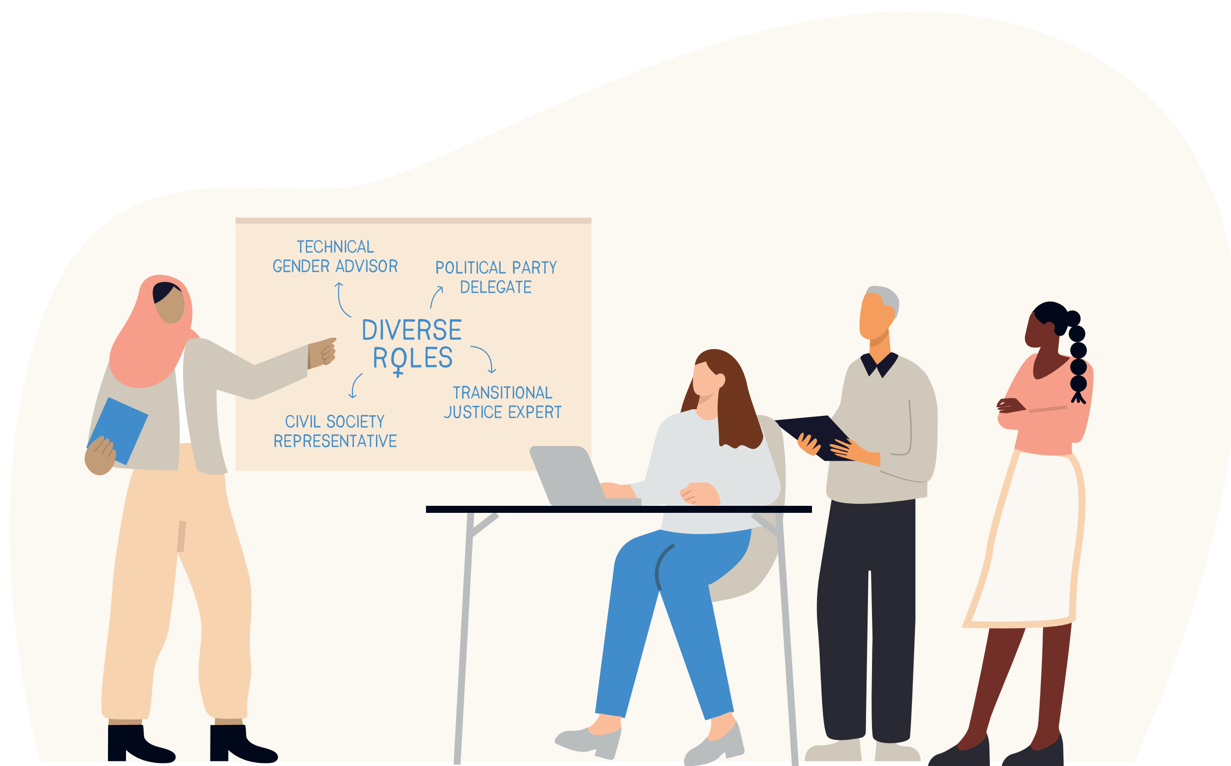
At their core, these tensions relate to the tendency towards 'essentialism' when it comes to women's participation. Essentialism involves assuming a single or essential nature that binds all members of a given group together, imbuing them with common interests that, in the most extreme versions of the idea, transcend the interests that divide them.[5] Importantly, essentialism is not so much a theory as a largely unrecognised mindset that permeates political discourse. It is argued that the key problem with essentialism is when empirical generalisations, having been treated as universals, are built into simplistic truths and turned into political platforms – and then recycled as imperatives. Consequently, those who do not conform to the expected or desired pattern of behavior are viewed as not true members of their group.[6] In the case of women's participation, women are assumed to participate on the basis of the single identity of 'woman'. This has also come to be associated in global advocacy efforts with certain assumed characteristics of women, such as peacefulness or feminism, which justify women's inclusion.[7]

Insights from democratic theory suggest that the greatest casualty of descriptive representation is often appreciation of diversity, whereby women's presence becomes valued only to the extent it advances a particular substantive agenda. Essentialism is said to haunt every group that aims to organise politically around a facet of identity such as gender.[8] Advocacy for descriptive representation, akin to 'women in peace processes', can unintentionally emphasise the worst features of essentialism – promoting the idea, for instance, that a woman can or should represent all women, regardless of her political beliefs, age, ethnicity or other identities. The discourse on women's roles in peace processes is characterised strongly by such simplifications.

The emphasis has been on ensuring ways of having women's voices heard as a necessary first step.[9] However, this approach belies the complexity of the different ways in which women seek to influence such processes.[10]

Although it may prove impossible to completely overcome this tendency to assume homogeneity within a group, we can counter it.[11] To do this, it is crucial to expand our understanding of the different ways in which women seek to make meaningful contributions to peace processes in both theoretical and practical terms. This briefing note seeks to provide greater conceptual clarity on the different roles that women play in formal peace negotiations[12] and the factors that shape their role formation. Such clarity should also enable the development of more effective strategies for supporting women to leverage their roles in practice, and counter the persisting tendency for essentialisation. At a deeper level, these questions help us to understand agency, representation and legitimacy in contemporary political processes to build sustainable peace.

This policy brief draws on a multi-stakeholder workshop and individual interviews with political and civil society leaders from different contexts; all women with diverse experience of peace processes in Afghanistan, Colombia, Croatia, Cyprus, Nepal, Northern Ireland, Palestine, South Sudan, Ukraine and Yemen. The workshop was held in Durham, United Kingdom in February 2020 and the conclusions have been validated by the participants. The initiative is a collaborative effort by the Durham University Institute for Advanced Studies (IAS) in collaboration with CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation and Instituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), with support from the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office.



Reconceptualising women's roles in peace processes

The colloquial references to 'women's role' or 'women's participation' in peace processes obscures the myriad positions that women hold in the context of formal peace negotiations. In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the diverse roles that women play in and around peace efforts more broadly. Most notably, this literature has identified modalities for women's inclusion at different phases of formal peace processes and highlighted the various roles women civil society actors play in building peace and confidence in war-torn societies.[13] More recently, attention has shifted to examining more qualitative aspects revolving around the idea of 'meaningful' participation and the connections between participation and the outcome of peace processes.

For example, the findings of Krause et al imply that women's participation in peace processes strengthens the quality and durability of the subsequent agreement.[14] This line of research has also highlighted the ways in which connections are made on the basis of single identity characteristics. At the same time, and perhaps as a result of these tendencies, the nuances of women's representation and participation in peace processes – be it as delegates in the negotiations, civil society representatives or as members of auxiliary bodies – have remained understudied. While these gaps in our understanding on roles and identities concern all peace process participants, they tend to be particularly salient for women, who can find that the role they are expected to play does not match their own expectations about the purpose of their participation. In this research we encountered two particularly strong tendencies.

The **first** is that female delegates, regardless of their role within talks processes, often experience pressure to speak on so-called 'women's issues'. Even delegates who did not stand on a gender related platform were often expected to advance gender sensitivity through their participation, notwithstanding the contradictions this may pose to their own role conception. The underlying assumption is that the purpose of women's participation is to promote gender sensitivity.

The **second** is that women who participate in peace processes are often expected to be able to manage the competing demands of thematic expertise on the one hand, with constituency representation on the other. This was particularly acute where women were assumed to be able to represent all women. While the accusation of not being sufficiently representative is often used to challenge women's authority to speak in peace processes, it is rarely applied to other stakeholders. Women's ability to bridge the gap between their participation on the basis of expertise, and as a representative of broader constituencies, is hindered by the requirement of confidentiality, which leaves women unable to consult fully with parties or groups outside the process. This leaves them open to personal attack on the basis that they are putting their own priorities above those of women more generally.

These tensions emerge prominently in discussions on women's participation, where there remains a lack of clarity and agreement about the ultimate purpose of participation and representation. At times this has had the damaging effect of combining all women into the figure of the feminist peacemaker. We suggest that a more disaggregated approach is needed to understand how different roles combine as part of an interconnected system of participation, in order to advance women's equality more generally in the field of peace mediation.

So what exactly are the various roles and mandates that women have in formal processes? How do these mandates shape their ability to influence the mediation process and outcomes? Whether a delegate is participating in the negotiations as a member of her political party or as a representative of civil society, for instance, may fundamentally shape the opportunities and constraints for her contribution. The criteria and constituency leading to her selection will often determine what agenda items she is consulted on, and the extent to which she is expected to have a say on key issues. This background will also likely determine whether there are formal or informal 'red lines' for the substantive agendas she can advocate.

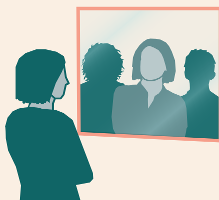
Understanding women's participation through role theory

To better understand the challenges of women's participation, and to illustrate the ways in which essentialism can impact on women's experience of participation, we draw on role theory as a conceptual tool. The concept of 'role' was originally developed by sociologists to denote the assumptions and values that individuals bring to their interactions with others, and to understand how these assumptions shape our behaviour and positions in society. The theoretical framework of role theory can thus bring greater conceptual clarity to the dynamics of participation in formal peace processes, and can aid in understanding women's interactions with other stakeholders in these processes.

ROLE THEORY IN A NUTSHELL

Sociological role theory posits that an individual's behaviour is guided by expectations held by the self and by others. Individual actors learn these expectations through experience and social interaction. In other words, roles refer to social positions that are constituted by ego (self) and alter (other) expectations regarding the purpose of an actor in an organised group.[15]

Key concepts:



Role conception refers to an actor's own perception of his or her position and purpose vis-à- vis others in society.

Role performance refers to the actual behaviour and expression of an individual occupying a given role.

Role expectations refer to assumptions and perceptions held by others about the behaviours and qualities associated with a given social position. These expectations are signaled through language and action.

Role conflict refers to a situation in which contradictory, competing or incompatible expectations are associated with an individual's role in a group or society. According to some role theorists[16], role conflict can be resolved in three ways: first, an actor can communicate with others to alter their expectations; second, she can reflect on her own position and change her own role conception; or third, she can (temporarily) adjust her behaviour to align with the expectations of others.

Managing role expectations

To root our inquiry in the reality of formal peace processes, we present three case studies drawn from the experiences of women negotiators and representatives from different geographic contexts. By doing this we aim to illustrate the variety of ways in which women participate in formal peace processes and the different factors that shape their goals and substantive agendas within the talks process. The case studies explore the ways in which the 'role conceptions' of the women themselves aligned with the 'role expectations' that others had of them, and how this alignment impacted on their participation.

What is clear from the case studies is that women's experience of participating, and their effectiveness in their roles, are strongly influenced by the extent to which externally imposed assumptions shape their participation.

CASE STUDY 1 Alignment between role conception and expectations

Vesna Skare Osbolt was appointed by the Croatian government to lead its peace negotiations concerning the war-affected areas of Eastern Slavonia 1996-1998. Her example illustrates how strong alignment between key power-holders' expectations and one's own understanding of his/her role provides a robust foundation for effective role performance.

Vesna Skare Osbolt's selection to the lead negotiator's role in 1996 was, in her words, "a coincidence – since nobody wanted the job". She had been working as an advisor to the President when the UN asked Croatia to nominate a representative to lead the negotiations with the Serbian side. The post was perceived to be highly unpopular, and after two very senior government leaders had declined to take on the task, the President asked Vesna to do so. The process lasted until 1998, with the third party role played by the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (UNTAES) and the Special Envoy, Thorvald Stoltenberg.

The appointment came with strong presidential backing and clear guidance: "My role was to stop the war, establish the peace process, return Croatian territory and expelled Croats, and create conditions for the Serbs to live in the area. It was very concrete and practical", Vesna describes. There was political consensus at home about what the lead negotiator was to do, and both UNTAES and the Serbian lead negotiator shared that understanding. However, "I also had many opponents, be it on the Serbian side or some factions at home who accused me of being 'too friendly with the Serbs'", Vesna notes. But the opposition seemed to be less about Vesna's role in the process per se, and more about political competition or opposition to the peace process as a whole.

The negotiations were concluded successfully in two years. Vesna had discretion to act within her remit, while daily communication with the President and regular exchanges with key stakeholders in the government, parliament and international community ensured continued backing. In addition, the process had very active media coverage that nurtured broader public buy-in. It was the "real political backing by the creators of politics" that proved to be most helpful for Vesna in carrying out her role successfully. At times this was accompanied with support to advance the peace process or strengthen confidence building, such as organising elections or opening shared markets, which translated commitments into concrete actions. "It was how I established credibility, that I was seen to live up to my words and promises", Vesna underlines.

What is notable in Vesna's case is that there was a high degree of alignment between her own role conception and the role expectations that others had of her in the peace process. These expectations were generally unambiguous and, crucially, were backed up by the authority of the government who had appointed her, continuously validated by the most high-level decision-makers, and accompanied by the active political backing of those who had selected her to this position to begin with. All of these factors seem key to the success in her role performance as the lead negotiator.

However, it is rare to have such a shared, consensual understanding of one's position and goals in a peace process. Such lack of clarity can lead to poor alignment between a delegate's own role conception and the expectations that others have for their contribution.

CASE STUDY 2 Where role conception and expectations are unclear

Emmily Koiti served as the Youth Representative in the South Sudan peace process from December 2017 until the signing of the Revitalized Peace Agreement in August 2018. Her experience demonstrates that clarity of role conception is crucial to allow women to define their purpose and thereby navigate the complexities of unclear expectations.

Emmily Koiti served as the Youth Representative in the South Sudan peace process from December 2017 until the signing of the Revitalized Peace Agreement in August 2018. The process was mediated under the auspices of East African regional bloc IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development). Emmily was selected by the IGAD mediation team; she believes the invitation was the result of her preceding role as the youth representative in the Joint Monitoring & Evaluation Commission (JMEC) of the first peace agreement and her longstanding engagement in youth dialogue and civil society in South Sudan.

When Emmily was appointed, she was not provided with any formal or informal guidance or expectations about her contribution. She therefore inferred her purpose in the talks from her title of 'youth representative' and saw her role as being "to make sure that issues pertaining young people of South Sudan are addressed in the process and its outcome". She also wanted to "make her presence count", both on so called youth issues but also by contributing to broader agenda items, such as security arrangements.

As the only youth representative, Emmily took part in the formal peace talks and was a signatory to the subsequent agreement. Throughout the talks, she collaborated closely with a group of civil society delegates and formed part of the South Sudan Women's Coalition, which agreed on a range of shared negotiation positions. It seemed to Emmily that the mediators did not have rigid expectations for her contribution, but there were some differing expectations among other delegates. In particular, her identity as a young woman brought in additional layers of complexity and controversy, as she had to navigate both gendered expectations as well as those associated with her age. For instance, some of the South Sudanese women delegates did not see it fitting for her to be vocal about gender-related issues, which Emmily presumed to be due to her young age vis-á-vis cultural conceptions of womanhood, or competitive claims for relevance. Other tensions concerned the potential risk of seeming anti-government or being seen to be overly vocal as a young person among senior colleagues.

The expectations of South Sudanese youth were particularly difficult to grasp clearly, not least due to their heterogeneity. It seemed to Emmily that some youth expected her to focus on explicitly youth-related issues, while others wanted her to contribute on all agenda items. There was no exhaustive list of formal negotiation positions agreed among youth, though national youth groups had agreed some specific suggestions that Emmily then took forward. Such positions included calling for the Minister for Youth and Sports to be a young person, and provisions for youth inclusion in different governance mechanisms and implementation bodies. It was such areas of consensus that proved most helpful for Emmily in navigating the myriad competing expectations directed towards her.

In the absence of a clear Terms of Reference from the IGAD-led mediation, and with few precedents of having youth representatives in formal peace processes globally, it was challenging for Emmily to consolidate a broadly accepted conception of her role in the talks. The fact that she was also affiliated with the women's movement and civil society activism complicated the picture even further. In the end, it was up to Emmily to conceptualise her own role as well as she could, and proactively communicate this with her constituency of South Sudanese youth and other stakeholders in the process.

Emmily's experience demonstrates that the purpose of women's participation in peace talks is often understood differently by different groups. Be it the mediator and mediation team, other delegates, domestic communities or international partners – different stakeholders tend to have differing expectations for participation. It is not unusual for these expectations to be competing or at odds with one another, and such 'role conflicts' seem commonplace. While both men and women may face such role conflicts, the particular expectation for gender expertise that many woman delegates face alongside cultural codes for appropriate behavior often pose specific limitations for women's contribution.

As the resistance Emmily faced by some fellow delegates highlights, women's groups can be equally prescriptive in their expectations towards others, be it for cultural or political reasons.

The example also highlights the issue of intersectionality in how Emmily's identities relating to gender and age came into tension. At the same time, the fact that Emmily was not standing on a gender-specific mandate gave her some flexibility to contribute beyond gender issues in the negotiations. The ambiguity in Emmily's role definition also provided her a certain level of flexibility to use her multiple identities in finding allies and avenues to contribute to the talks process.

CASE STUDY 3 Where role conception is clear but role expectations are contradictory

Enas Al Arashi is a member of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) for the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Yemen (OSESGY). Her experience highlights the variety of role expectations faced by women participating in peace processes, and how clear communication by the mediator can help to clarify these expectations.

Enas Al Arashi was selected to be a member of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) by the OSESGY in October 2018. Her appointment followed an open application process. The TAG comprises eight Yemeni women and its purpose is to advise the UN Special Envoy, mainly though preparation of position papers concerning key issues and potential solutions to the Yemen crisis. Their advisory role covers all aspects of the peace processes, and appointments are made on the basis of thematic expertise in conflict related subject areas. Enas considers that her appointment can be attributed to her long history of engagement and activism in the women's movement, as a well as her military-security expertise and experience.

The TAG combines its advisory function with a broader consultative function. Members are expected to consult various stakeholders, particularly women in civil society, on key issues under discussion. "The TAG has formal terms of reference for its members", Enas notes, "though the working procedures have evolved over the years, not least due to staff changes in the mediation team".

The role of the TAG has not been without controversies, and it has faced criticism from some Yemeni groups and individuals. Alongside personal attacks on their character, the TAG members have been criticised for not being 'representative enough' or seen as opportunistically advancing their own interests. "Some civil society actors in Yemen also seem to think that the TAG is nearly omnipotent, though in reality our role in the peace process is rather limited", Enas says.

continued over

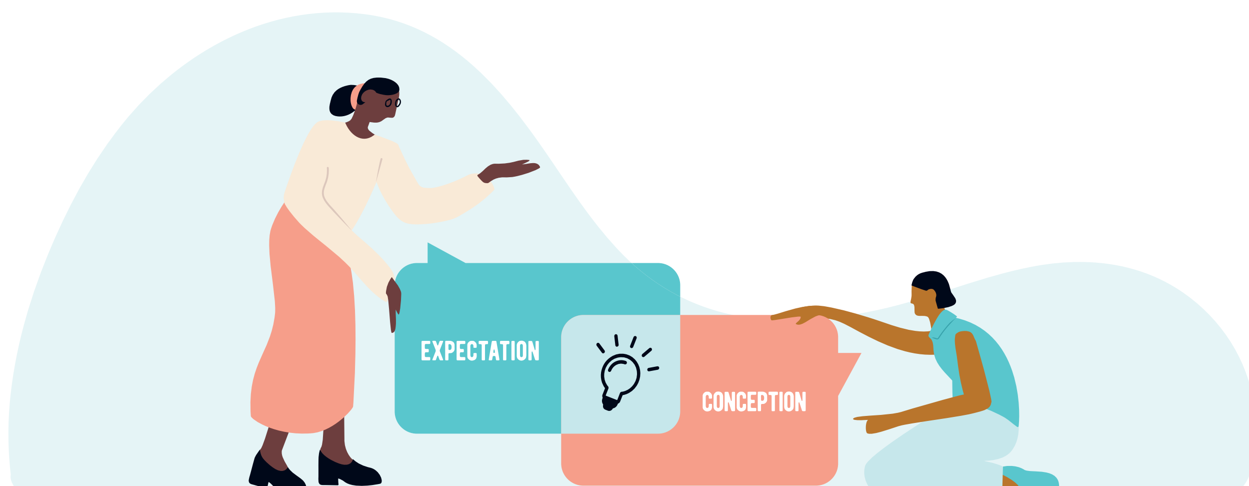
Enas notes that some of the tensions created by the poor alignment between role conception and role expectations have been alleviated by the Envoy's office taking a proactive approach – by introducing the TAG to different stakeholders, clarifying its role and making the work more transparent. According to Enas, these actions and the Special Envoy's concrete support for the TAG's outreach to national constituencies have been most helpful in addressing conflicting role expectations. She notes "[T]he Special Envoy and key international partners can play an important role in boosting the role and credibility of the TAG by making the members known, drawing on their support and sending a public message that women's participation is a priority".

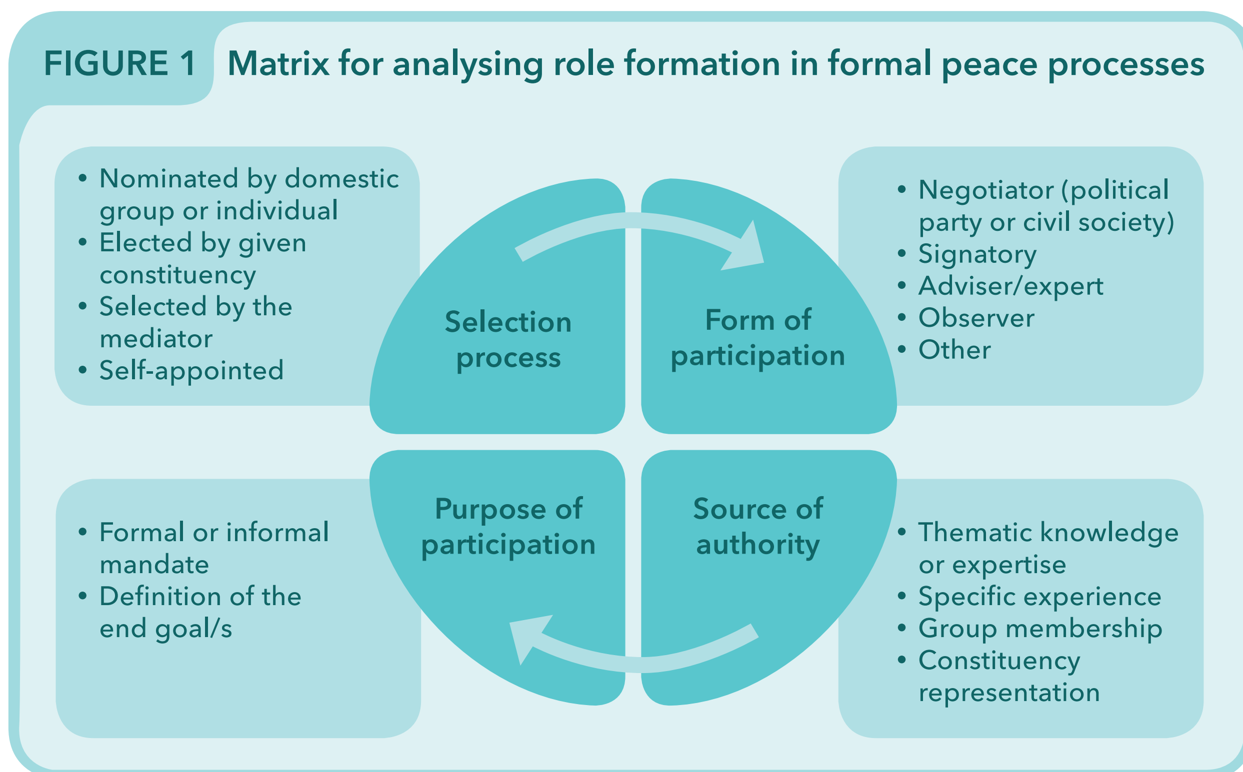
To enable women to navigate these expectations it is important that they are clear on the terms of their own participation and the role that they are elected or invited to fulfil in the talks. Without clarity on role conception it is difficult to make clear and effective interventions in the process. However, even where women themselves are clear on their own role conception, this does not mean that these conceptions will align neatly with all the role expectations that others have of them.

The three case studies demonstrate the importance of alignment between role conception and various role expectations. Women's participation will be most effective where there is strong alignment. Conversely, where alignment is poor, women will struggle to exert meaningful influence on the process. So how do we understand these competing roles and cultivate better alignment between role expectations and role conceptions?

Understanding role formation

It is clear that women cannot be treated as a single and unitary category when it comes to their participation in formal peace processes. Such generalisations undermine the clarity that is required for both women themselves and for mediation teams to define how different delegates are to influence and contribute to the process. A greater understanding of the purpose of women's participation would enable greater understanding of the type of contributions that they *should* be making to the process.





To address this, we propose a matrix for analysing role formation in formal peace processes. The matrix highlights the separate but interconnected factors that shape a delegate's role and the extent to which she is able to influence the content, process or the outcome of the talks.

We identify four key factors that frame a participant's role formation in the context of formal peace negotiations: *selection process*, *form of participation*, *source of authority* and *purpose of participation*. For instance, how a delegate ends up in a given seat at the table makes a difference: whether one is nominated, elected, selected or puts herself forward ultimately shapes the direction of accountability for one's behavior in the process as well as the extent to which one can exert influence.

These factors are interrelated and illustrated in Figure 1 above. The matrix is not intended as a simplistic or prescriptive model of how all possible roles in a peace process are construed, but rather illustrates the complexity of factors that shape a given actor's place and agency in a peace process.

Supporting different roles

The matrix highlights the diversity of roles as well as the diversity of roadmaps for women to enter into formal peace talks. To provide a more differentiated understanding of women's participation we need to consider how these different roles and routes into peace talks fit into the bigger ecosystem of peace processes, and more importantly, what concrete steps need to be taken to ensure appropriate support is provided to women in their different roles.

One possibility to address this confusion and potential role conflicts would be to create more clearly defined terms of reference (TOR) for participation in formal peace negotiations. This concerns not only women but all the different categories of participants, such as youth and civil society, and is particularly relevant for cases where there is third party involvement in the identification of participants.

While making explicit TOR may not be feasible or fitting in all processes, conceptual clarity would be a step in the right direction. Establishing a clear and shared understanding of the purpose of participation and the different ways in which each form of participation enables influence within the talks could help to resolve many of the dilemmas described above.

For example, if women are selected to participate as a member of a gender technical advisory committee or advisory board, a terms of reference from the mediation team would set out the scope and mandate of the board and the thematic areas it is to advise on. This helps to create clarity on the source of authority, the form and the purpose of participation. It also helps to break the link between technical advisory committees and representation – ie. it makes a clear statement that the purpose of that body is to monitor and advise on gender sensitivity on the basis of technical expertise, not to represent all women. Making such TOR public would also help to steer and manage public expectations in this regard.

Distinguishing gender technical committees and boards from civil society more broadly defined also creates a distinct mechanism for oversight of the gendered aspects of the peace process, resting on a clearly defined source of authority and purpose for participation while still allowing space for broader civil society participation in the process. The current tendency to include women under the heading of 'civil society' creates exclusions where there are competing agendas or values that are not shared among women. This tendency is particularly visible in relation to advocacy for women's rights, which often becomes a source of tension during periods of negotiation.

This can lead to a strain between the role of technical bodies on the basis of expertise, a long term feminist commitment of some political representatives, and the general idea of representation of grassroots communities that may have competing views. Separating the gender technical role (focused on gender mainstreaming), and the rights-based discussions of political activists from the inclusion of civil society more generally opens up space for a more diverse range of civil society voices to be heard. Such separation would also remove the problematic link between expertise and representation for members of gender technical committees/boards.

For women negotiators with political affiliations, their selection and source of authority come from the political or armed group that they represent and are recognised as such by external parties. Separating the gender advisory aspect from the representation aspect enables women to participate meaningfully within the political structures of the negotiating parties without making them responsible for bringing a gender lens to all topics under discussion. At the same time, the space for women to bring in their gendered perspectives as female politicians or female fighters should be safeguarded, without confining their contribution therein.

Separating out roles opens up space for a wider range of mechanisms for inclusion, as well as pathways for more meaningful communication between them. For example, political parties could be encouraged to engage with the technical gender advisory body on key aspects of the negotiations, introducing a gendered perspective to the core issues without placing that burden on women who are there to represent a political constituency not defined by gender.

Similarly, diverse avenues for civil society organisations to engage and exchange with political parties can help bring key issues of concern to civil society to the negotiating agenda, without placing unreasonable expectations on them to represent all women at once or limiting their contribution to introducing a gender perspective. Last but not least, tasking gender analysis in the negotiations to a technical expert can help frame agenda items and key questions in a manner that allows all participants to substantively contribute to gendered dimensions of issues discussed, without placing this burden on one group only.

However, while the use of TOR can help clarify the form and purpose of women's participation in certain cases, particularly with regards to specific auxiliary bodies and technical experts, it is crucial to note that not all roles can or should be specified in detail. To do so would risk limiting the scope for participation in other ways. The purpose and form of participation tend to be multi-dimensional and continuously evolving; at times, such ambiguity provides an opportunity to expand or adjust one's role according to one's strengths. This flexibility should be protected and conceptually appreciated.

Finally, providing support that enables women to participate meaningfully in talks requires clarity on the purpose and form of participation – namely *why* they are participating and *how* they are to engage with the process. This must then be translated into role-specific support, which may look rather different for political party representatives when they have a background in pushing for equality and when not, gender mainstreaming experts and civil society activists. For instance, while gender mainstreaming experts may benefit the most from comparative expertise or opportunities to discuss their views with negotiating delegations, delegates who base their authority on representation should first and foremost have the opportunity to report back to their constituencies.

The policy discussions and argumentation around peace processes also matter, as that is where broader expectations of roles are generated and aligned. For instance, the narratives that are used to advocate for women's inclusion tend to create somewhat generalised expectations for women's roles at formal peace negotiations. Women, peace and security advocates calling for gender equality in negotiations and accountability for existing commitments may, in doing so, unintentionally create unrealistic expectations for those women who take a seat at the table. Women's inclusion in formal peace processes is commonly justified with the need to have a gender perspective – it is no wonder, then, that expectation of gender expertise falls on the women. With greater conceptual clarity, national and international partners to any mediation process can help to dispel such generalisations and move us beyond essentialist understandings of women's agency.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEDIATORS:

- **Design processes and provide support for women's diverse roles**
  The mediation process design should incorporate differentiated understandings of participation and highlight different routes for inclusion depending on the specific needs of the process and context. Mediators and their teams need to be particularly conscious of the different forms of participation vis-à-vis related role expectations, and create support mechanisms to enable full and meaningful contribution through each avenue. When women's participation is challenged on the basis of representation or expertise, it is important for the mediator to clarify the different roles, assert their value and protect the political space for participation.

- **Terms of reference can help establish clarity on roles and expectations**
  Ambiguous understanding of the objectives pursued through women's participation leads to a lack of clarity and conflicting expectations about inclusion. Terms of reference that spells out the expectations of the mediator and parties regarding how each stakeholder engages in the mediation process can help to alleviate conflicting and confused expectations.

- **Prioritise women's engagement on substantive issues**
  To avoid tokenistic participation and the perception that women participate on a narrow platform of gender, the mediation team should identify substantive agenda items that would benefit from broader participation or inclusive engagement with specific constituencies. There should be clear mechanisms for participation in defining the scope of the issues on the table as well as for influencing the process and outcome of the talks on those issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENTS SUPPORTING A PEACE PROCESS:

- **Provide political backing and draw on national frameworks**
  Visibility and recognition by international partners can grant legitimacy and credibility to women's participation. Political messaging, especially from leadership figures , can help to ensure protection and open space for participation. At the same time, it is crucial to align this support with national and regional frameworks for women's empowerment, not least to avoid accusations of an imported agenda.

- **Target tailored financial and technical support to women**
  Availability of concrete resources for women is vital, including through logistics, meeting arrangements and travel support. Technical support by international partners can be very helpful in strengthening the role of civil society, particularly in the form of issue-specific expertise, logistical support for convening and consultations, strategic advocacy and communications training. Women in political party delegations may not have similar resources for networking and secretariat support as their male colleagues, and addressing such needs can be instrumental in levelling the playing field among delegates.

- **Enable cross-cutting cooperation without requiring a neat consensus**
  Governments should provide Track II level support for exchange among different stakeholders on key issues (e.g. between 'technical' panel members and political parties) both in the margins of established processes and independently. Track II dialogue is vital in broadening understanding on key issues, conflict drivers and possible solutions, and to underpin any kind of inclusive official process. At the same time, cross-cutting cooperation should not be geared towards masking or overriding political diversity. For instance, women's groups are often expected to have only one shared agenda, an expectation that significantly undermines women's political agency and identities. Rather than all-encompassing consensus, cross-cutting cooperation and coalition building should strive to be issue-based and focused on specific policy concerns.

REFERENCES

1. See Christine Bell and Catherine Turner, *Models for Women's Inclusion in Track One Peace and Transition Processes* (Cairo: UN Women, 2020)
2. The role of identities in mediation is an underdeveloped but emerging strand of research. To date, questions of roles and identities in mediation have been studied primarily in the context of the third party mediator: for example, in their review of mediation scholarship, Wallensteen & Svensson (2014) note how much of the focus has revolved around specific qualities and actions of the third party and how these may affect mediation success. A limited number of studies examine identity and culture as variables in the success of mediation. See e.g. Ray Block and David Siegel. 'Identity, Bargaining, and Third Party Mediation', *International Theory*, Vol. 3, Iss. 3 (2011): 416-49. There are virtually no notable studies focused on role dynamics vis-à-vis peace process participation. With few notable exceptions (such as Turner's research on women mediators in Northern Ireland), few of these studies have paid closer attention to gender as a variable. See Catherine Turner, 'Soft Ways of Doing Hard Things: Women Mediators and the Question of Gender in Mediation', *Peacebuilding*, Vol. 8, Iss. 4 (2020): 383
3. See UN Women. *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325.* (New York: UN Women, 2015)
4. Bell and Turner, *Models for Women's Inclusion in Track One Peace and Transition Processes*
5. See for example Jane Mansbridge, 'Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent "Yes"', *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 61, No. 3 (1999), 637
6. Dan Smith, 'The problem of essentialism' in Inger Skjelsbæk & Dan Smith (eds.), *Gender, peace and conflict* (SAGE Publications Ltd, 2001), 34
7. Hilary Charlesworth, 'Are Women Peaceful? Reflections on the Role of Women in Peacebuilding', *Feminist Legal Studies*, Vol. 16 (2008), 347; Judy El Bushra, 'Feminism, Gender and Women's Peace Activism', *Development and Change*, Vol. 38, Iss. 1 (2007), 131, 142; Sanam Anderlini, *Women Building Peace: What they do and why it matters* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner Publishers, 2007)
8. Mansbridge, 'Should Blacks Represent Blacks', 637
9. Thania Paffenholz, Nick Ross, Steven Dixon et al, *Making Women Count - Not Just Counting Women: Assessing Women's Inclusion and Influence on Peace Negotiations* (Geneva: Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative and UN Women, 2016)
10. Catherine Turner, *Women in Mediation: Connecting the Local and the Global.* Strategic Security Analysis No. 5 (Geneva Centre for Security Policy, 2017)
11. Mansbridge, 638
12. Our examination focuses on formal peace processes broadly understood, encompassing the negotiations between disputants and direct representation of other delegates, as well as auxiliary bodies linked to the formal process (such as commissions and advisory groups feeding into the negotiations). While many of the insights may be equally relevant to peace negotiations without third party involvement, the examples referred herewith all included international mediators.
13. See Paffenholz et al, *Making Women Count*; Bell and Turner, *Models for Women's Inclusion*
14. Jana Krause et al, 'Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace', *International Interactions*, Vol.44, No. 6 (2018), 985-1016
15. Ralph Turner, 'Role theory' in J. H. Turner (ed.), *Handbook of sociological theory* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum, 2002), 233-254; B.J. Biddle, 'Recent Developments in Role Theory', *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 12 (1986), 67-92
16. D.T. Hall, 'A model of coping with role conflict: The role behavior of college educated women', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 17, Iss.4 (1972), 471–486