



Wilton Park



Report

The Elders in conversation on women in mediation in the Arab world

Monday 5 - Wednesday 7 October 2020 | WP1778V

**In collaboration with The Elders, with support from UN Women and the UK Foreign
Commonwealth and Development Office**



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office





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Executive Summary

Marking the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (2000), Wilton Park, in partnership with The Elders, and with the support of UN Women and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, convened a high level virtual conference that brought together over 60 experienced peace practitioners, policy makers, women peacebuilders from the region and other regions and multilateral officials to discuss opportunities and challenges for women's meaningful inclusion in peace processes in the Arab world. Participants gathered virtually from 25 different countries including conflict-affected countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region such as Libya, Yemen, Iraq, Syria and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OpT). Four members of The Elders - Deputy Chair of The Elders & Former UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, Former President of Liberia & Nobel Peace Laureate, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Deputy Chair of The Elders & Founder of the Graça Machel Trust, Graça Machel and Former Algerian Foreign Minister, Former conflict mediator and senior UN diplomat, Lakhdar Brahimi - also attended the conference and shared their insights on women in mediation along with HRH The Countess of Wessex and the UK Government's Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa.

Discussions highlighted the importance of linking advances in women's inclusion in peacemaking to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda. The key issue being addressed was women's exclusion from high level mediation processes in the region. However, participants viewed this exclusion to be a symptom of a wider systemic problem, namely, an overall lack meaningful participation of women in peace processes, and in political life in the MENA, and inadequate multitrack efforts building on women's successful local mediation efforts at a track III grassroots level. Across the region, gendered horizontal and vertical inequalities persist and are exacerbated by violent conflict and the COVID 19 pandemic. The 2019 Arab Human Development report highlighted that sustainable conflict resolution should be a matter of top priority and urgency. The report found that if the conflicts are not resolved by 2030, 40% of the region's population will live in

crisis.¹ Institutional and strategic collaboration to meaningfully include women in peacemaking is a stepping stone therefore towards achieving inclusive and peaceful societies in the Arab world.

Key themes

Key themes arising from the discussion include:

“The increased inclusion of women from diverse backgrounds around the negotiating table is an integral part of achieving the SDGs and building inclusive societies.”

- Globally and in the Arab region, modest gains have been made in providing normative frameworks and initiatives to increase women’s participation in peace and security processes, but there are deficits in implementing, monitoring and ensuring the accountability of states to the commitments they have made. Normative commitment include regional initiatives such as the League of Arab States (LAS) newly founded Arab Women Mediators Network within the framework of the regional strategy and Executive action plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS).² The power, value and impact of women’s inclusion cannot be ignored by Arab and other governments and institutions facilitating peace processes in the Arab world. Women are a vital asset for peacemaking and overall societal development. Not only do they have a right to participate in high level mediation, they have an important contribution to make. Women bring excluded constituencies to the table and highlight key issues from a gender and civil rights perspective that produce more representative and comprehensive agreements, useful to sustaining peace in the long term. The increased inclusion of women from diverse backgrounds around the negotiating table is an integral part of achieving the SDGs and building inclusive societies. This is an agenda critical to durable peace in the Arab states.
- Conflicts in the region have exacerbated forces of exclusion that slow the Arab region’s progress towards achieving inclusive societies. There are manifestations of gender inequality in political and civic spaces in the Arab world, reinforced by patriarchal social norms and mindsets, that in turn underpin women’s exclusion from formal high-level mediation. These structural barriers must be addressed in order to meaningfully and sustainably increase women’s participation in mediation and peacemaking more broadly.
- Women’s qualitative and substantial contribution to local track III mediation in the Arab region is striking and in need of further recognition. Across the Arab world, women have been active as local peacebuilders, building trust with local communities and warring parties without access to official peace processes. Their work on the ground has brought about direct results such as the release of detainees and the delivery of humanitarian relief. This forms a resource for track I mediation.
- With restrictions on travel and mobility, COVID-19 has accelerated the digitalisation of peacemaking and opened up new virtual spaces with opportunities for new inclusion modalities. While this has brought some fresh opportunities, it has not fast-tracked women’s inclusion and has exposed new challenges such as inequalities in the digital gap. COVID-19 has also increased Violence against Women. This too urgently needs to be addressed.

¹ UNDP, “Arab Human Development Report Research Paper: Leaving no one behind Towards Inclusive Citizenship in Arab Countries”, 2019.

² Global Alliance of Women Mediator Networks, Arab Women Mediators Network, <https://globalwomenmediators.org/awmn/>.

“There is a need to redesign the traditional peace process to ensure inclusion and consider the substantive purpose of mediation whenever a process is initiated.”

- Investment is needed in the future generation of the region’s women mediators and women and gender advocates. Inclusion of young women and gender advocates can be a driver for positive change and increasing overall societal inclusion. Youth are equipped with new tools and young women mediators should be connected with experienced mediators through intergenerational dialogue in order to combine the power of both and make strides in both agendas.
- The wide array of gender specific challenges and barriers women face must be understood from an intersectional lens. Intersectionality is also an essential guiding theoretical framework for designing, implementing and evaluating inclusion mechanisms.
- Opportunities for increasing women’s meaningful inclusion lie in using levers for change such as collaborative strategic advocacy between inclusion proponents, building the capacity and sensitising male gatekeepers on the value of women’s inclusion, consolidating multitrack approaches in a conflict sensitive way, adopting gender sensitive due diligence when funding peacemaking initiatives and encouraging the UN as a key institutional peace broker to lead by example on inclusion.
- There is a need to redesign the traditional peace process to ensure inclusion and consider the substantive purpose of mediation whenever a process is initiated. External mediators and facilitators must acknowledge their responsibility and avoid confining women’s roles to ancillary ones as well as open the peace table to nonviolent actors and civil society voices. The UN and member states should ensure that all processes are gender inclusive.

Background

This year marks the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council 1325 and the 25th anniversary of the Beijing platform for action (1995). UNSCR 1325 was unanimously adopted in 2000 as a global normative framework that stressed the importance of women’s meaningful inclusion in peace building, conflict resolution, prevention and security efforts. It consolidated the link between addressing gender specific grievances and mainstreaming women’s inclusion and prospects for a positive sustainable peace. UNSCR 1325 was followed by 9 WPS Resolutions: 1820 (2009); 1888 (2009); 1889 (2010); 1960 (2011); 2106 (2013); 2122 (2013); 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019), and 2493 (2019).³

When UNSCR 1325 was passed, the hope was that within 20 years women’s participation would be a norm rather than an exception. Now, 20 years on, it is essential to take stock of progress and identify obstacles ahead. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the vulnerability of disadvantaged segments of societies globally. With heavier restrictions on mobility and a higher dependency on accessibility to Information and Communications Technology (ICTs), the struggle for meaningful inclusion now includes the virtual space which presents new challenges. Experience has shown that undemocratic regions often take advantage of times of crisis to implement restrictive measures on social, economic and political spaces and reverse gains on human rights and gender equality. Graça Machel, Deputy Chair of The Elders, noted that the UN Secretary General warned that prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, the world was not on track to meet the SDGs by 2030. Following the pandemic, in some areas decades of progress in addressing horizontal inequalities that are inseparable from the women’s rights and the 1325 agenda have been reversed. If modest gains are to be built upon and women continue to claim and expand their rightful spaces, new creative modes of operation should be developed, and strategies strengthened.

³ Peace Women, The Resolutions, <http://www.peacewomen.org/why-WPS/solutions/resolutions>

The objectives of the Wilton Park conference were to:

- Take stock of the progress and shortcomings of women's meaningful inclusion in mediation and peace process in the Arab world.
- Examine the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic and digital transformation has had on mechanisms and spaces for inclusion, to re-strategise in times of crisis.
- Create a space for intergenerational exchanges, drawing on lessons learned from The Elders' experiences to inform pathways for positive change.
- Produce operational recommendations targeting key regional and international stakeholders as a global call for action on women's meaningful inclusion in conflict resolution and mediation in the Arab world.

The following sections include key points raised by participants throughout the virtual conference.

Modest but fragile gains

1. Globally, the movement for women's rights and meaningful inclusion in peace processes has gained prominence and recognition. Nonetheless, institutional exclusion of women persists, and the data does not indicate a substantial improvement in direct participation or gender mainstreaming peace agreements. UN Women has outlined that between 1992-2018 only 13% of negotiators, 3% mediators and 4% signatories were women. Less than 20% of peace agreements included provisions that addressed women or gender issues.⁴
2. Women across the Arab world have been at the forefront of political activism and social change, with dominant women's movements leading uprisings in Tunisia, Yemen, Sudan and Lebanon. Despite their active grassroots peace-building engagement, largely as drivers of peace rather than violence, women have been sidelined from meaningfully participating in formal track I negotiations. Regionally, small strides have been made, yet they are fragile and must be sustained and built upon. Women's direct political participation at a track I level is often unprecedented, but there have been extraordinary experiences of inclusion exemplified in 28% women's representation in the Syrian Constitutional Committee and 27% in the 2013-2014 Yemen's National Dialogue Conference (although this was an exception, as women had little to no representation in the multiple rounds of talks and agreements since 2011).
3. There are positive trends in the region and historical improvement in terms of women's educational attainment in the past two decades, particularly at the level of primary enrolment.⁵ Nonetheless, these upward trends are being reversed in conflict affected countries.⁶ Based on data from 2018, women's representation in parliament is also improving, reaching 19.4%.⁷ But despite such gains, on the legislative front, laws preventing workplace discrimination based on gender and other protective legal mechanisms are still lacking.

⁴ UN Women, Facts and Figures: Peace and Security, 2016, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures>

⁵ World Bank, 2019.

⁶ ESCWA, The Sustainable Development Goals in an Arab Region Affected by Conflict, 2018.

⁷ ESCWA, Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020.

4. Affirmative action has been taken at state and multilateral levels to ensure women's inclusion in executive bodies and structures, and such progress must be recognised. However, structural patriarchal gender norms that impact and define social beliefs and practices remain the key obstacle to the implementation of commitments and to mainstreaming efforts globally. Women's added value, with their specific experience of conflict and the societal values they bring to processes, must be highlighted.
5. Countries in the region have been pursuing efforts to adopt 1325 National Action Plans (NAPs), these include Yemen, Palestine, Iraq, Tunisia, Lebanon and Sudan. Further efforts need to be pursued by conflict countries such as Syria and Libya. The persistence of exclusion regionally is tied to the lack of implementation and monitoring mechanisms of commitments made and country specific 1325 NAPs. Commitments are essential but insufficient and Arab governments must work with civil society and other stakeholders to ensure that commitments are respected.
6. There is a need to amplify the voices of Arab women leaders. Some progress has been made on this front; in 2018, 6 civil society representatives from the Arab world briefed the UNSC, this increased to 14 in 2019, but more needs to be done.

Women build communal trust and bring excluded constituencies to the table

“The value of women is more than just their own voice, it is also of the voices they bring along to the negotiation table.”

7. Two members of The Elders, Former President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Deputy Chair of the Elders, Graça Machel reflected on their own experiences and involvement in peace efforts, highlighting the power of women's active participation. Ms. Machel emphasised that women not only bring their own gender-specific perspectives but also bring the perspectives of their constituencies and local communities to the table. The value of women is more than just their own voice, it is also of the voices they bring along to the negotiation table. Drawing examples from the bridge building work she led with a diverse group of women in parallel to the African Union (AU) and UN sponsored Kenya mediation processes, she stressed the importance of finding commonalities in women's experiences towards unifying a women's agenda that can apply pressure on conflict actors and mediators.
8. Reflecting on the Accra peace talks and women's roles in ending the war in Liberia, President Sirleaf noted that public buy in is necessary to ensure women's formal participation in the negotiation structures. Women in Liberia have a long history of communal engagement, nurturing social cohesion and dialogue through their active roles in Liberia's Palava peace huts. The unique value of women's active citizenship and participation was also evident during the Ebola outbreak as they helped build trust in the Ebola response and health facilities.
9. Studies and lessons learned from other experiences show that women bring a human security and civil perspective to the table, focusing on socio-economic communal issues rather than militaristic ones. Women's inclusion is therefore essential, and peacemaking must be acknowledged not solely as a moment for agreements to be made but as an opportunity for social transformation and gender equality towards the goal of inclusive egalitarian societies.
10. Women do not solely advocate for women's rights but as in the case of the first post-Taliban Afghan government, women fought for human rights, justice, dignity and good governance, against corruption and in support of larger inclusion in decision making bodies.

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Capitalising on new tools and intergenerational dialogue

11. Since Beijing, women's voices have been amplified and their claimed spaces must be celebrated. However, the new tools that have emerged since 1995 must be capitalised on and deployed to not only show advances in the global women's movement and women's active presence but to also influence the mindset of decision makers in positions of power to instigate the structural changes needed.
12. Global solidarity and cooperation on the WPS agenda is needed, and youth are a valuable resource with their knowledge of digital tools and social media. UN Women is leading the Generation Equality campaign that seeks to enhance cooperation on women's rights between a variety of actors and represents an opportunity to integrate an interregional and intergenerational approach in the struggle for women's inclusion.
13. Efforts shouldn't solely revolve around supporting women today but also around how to ensure that the future flow of women peacebuilders and mediators continue. The YPS agenda emerged from the WPS agenda. Since both seek to foster inclusive societies, clear linkages should be made between both agendas. Intergenerational dialogue between women that have historical knowledge and experience with youth that have new skills and drive should be invested in, particularly as a way to address young women's marginalisation and disproportionate exclusion from peacemaking, as well as stimulate informed innovation to increase women's participation.
14. To build on existing coalitions, there are opportunities for women to be at the forefront of working in coalition with other excluded groups, such as youth and non-aligned minorities, forming inclusive bodies pushing for change.
15. Young women should not solely be included as observers but as direct stakeholders and active participants.
16. Mentorship and support systems for the younger generation of women peacemakers are needed. Their capacity must be built, and their power and knowledge invested in so that the next generation of leaders can emerge.

Digital diplomacy: opportunities and challenges for meaningful inclusion

17. COVID-19 revealed that grave global inequities exist. It exacerbated challenges that existed prior to the outbreak, stalling advances in gender equality and implementation of the 1325 agenda. But it also led to a virtual shift that made official processes more accessible to women and youth, COVID-19 is a storm in the call for change and we shouldn't let this moment of change slip by. President Sirleaf noted that the new challenges COVID-19 presents should be seized to re-imagine and redesign society into a vibrant and equitable one where women and women's leadership are at the core of the response and beyond.
18. The digitalisation of the peace table undermines the oft-repeated argument that there aren't enough seats around the table for women. The threshold for women's participation in virtual peace talks has ostensibly lowered as they are spared travel, long bureaucratic processes, and are able to overcome social barriers related to travel such as normative maternal duties, and permission from spouses or family members. However, it should not be assumed that overcoming barriers for women's physical engagement or digitalisation necessarily means that a higher number of participants will be included, or women's meaningful participation accelerated. So far, experience has shown that the impact of digitalisation on increasing women's inclusion has been shallow.

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“In virtual spaces, it is easier to involve people but harder to let their voices be heard and amplified.”

19. Digitalisation is not a panacea to inclusion. A prominent mediation practitioner reflected on the virtual transformation of peacemaking and noted that in virtual spaces, it is easier to involve people but harder to let their voices be heard and amplified. Virtual meetings risk that substantial discussions become more diluted if more people are involved merely because it is easier to involve them. Tokenism, structural barriers sidelining women’s contributions and continued dominance of male discourses persist in the virtual space.
20. Digital mediation and facilitation pose specific practical challenges such as trust-building among parties, lack of empathy and human interaction as well as the digital gap that challenge prospects for increased meaningful inclusion. ‘Coffee break’ informal mediation and other key mediation tools are difficult to reproduce online. There is also room for increased misunderstanding and confusion. All these factors make it harder to build new relationships. However, existing relationships between mediation actors and external stakeholders might be strengthened as continuing discussions in the virtual space reflects a commitment to their cause and an ability to be solution-orientated in their work.
21. Digital literacy and the availability of infrastructure need to be considered as an essential part of process design and inclusion strategies. Globally, more than 2 billion women are offline and access to ICT infrastructure is disproportionately lower for women. Mediators and facilitators should be conscious of the digital gender divide and approach virtual inclusion from a gendered lens with gender responsive solutions. Access to the digital tools adopted in mediation contexts should be enabled. This would democratise the virtual space and prevent digitalisation from solely serving urban educated women.
22. Hybrid models might be adopted in the future. However, it is essential that access is provided to both on a basis of equality and that civil society and women are not restricted to online spaces while men, due to lower travel risks, are chartered in to talks ‘in person’, as has been the case in some contexts.
23. There is a need to reflect on how leaders can gain legitimacy from the use of cyberspace, how women’s agency can be enhanced online and transferred offline.
24. Inclusive societies should remain the goal of building peace. Even as digitalisation potentially increases the number of invited women to virtual talks, a distinction needs to be made between claimed and invited spaces. Women need to be supported in claiming more spaces.
25. Digital tools are not new for underfunded women’s groups who have had to use innovative tools for some time. Women in Libya, Yemen and elsewhere have already been using social media where they can, because of existing limitations on mobility. Women have been eager to use these tools to continue their work and should be supported to do so but are also facing increased protection issues, particularly Women Human Rights Defenders.

“Change is nonetheless inevitable, particularly considering the region’s youth bulge, and the social and political change that young people envision and require will eventually be led by them.”

Security risks for women’s active engagement online and offline

26. The security risks and protection needs of women must be considered when engaging women as several women have been targeted such as the attack on Fawzia Koofi, one out of four women in the Afghan government’s 21 member delegation. Women’s digital security is also threatened, for example several Yemeni, Palestinian and Libyan female peacebuilders faced online harassment and security threats. Female activists, conveners and organisers of talks require training and tools in order to safely engage in peace processes. States should also be encouraged to sign up to the Protection Framework for women peacebuilders developed by the International Civil Society Network (ICAN) and funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.⁸
27. The pandemic also stimulated an increase in violence against women in confined spaces, accompanied by an increase in the level of impunity against perpetrators. Women activists and peacebuilders have also been subjected to increased surveillance, online abuse and manipulation as civil society actors have been moving their activities online. Authoritarian governments in the region and globally tend to abuse their power and situations of crisis to strengthen their grip on authority and exclusion of voices for change. Change is nonetheless inevitable, particularly considering the region’s youth bulge, and the social and political change that young people envision and require will eventually be led by them.

Challenges for women’s meaningful inclusion

Traditional process design as a barrier to inclusion: A new generation of peace processes

28. Women and youth must be viewed as equal to the men with guns from conflicting parties in the next generation of peace processes. Roles of civil society, youth and women are currently seen as ancillary, while they should be integral to both formal and informal peace processes. This exclusion is largely due to the structure and design of the peace process, often controlled by third party facilitators and external mediators. Such mediators restrict the seats at the table to warring parties and give them the upper hand rather than establishing mechanisms that provide access to the groups most affected by conflict such as civil society, youth and women and ensuring a power balance at the negotiating table.
29. Equality focused on equally meaningful participation should be the guiding principle when redesigning peace processes, where women and youth and other disenfranchised groups are not just added to the fringes of delegations but instead, serious efforts are undertaken to ensure that they have the right tools and knowledge to meaningfully engage. Women should not be shoehorned into the process; the table needs to be redesigned. Women should be facilitating, heading teams, mainstreamed into the process and included from the start of the process, not just as representatives of victims or in the margins.

⁸ <https://icanpeacework.org/2020/10/21/protecting-women-peacebuilders-the-front-lines-of-sustainable-peace/>

“External facilitators must deconstruct the peace process and increase awareness of who the peace serves and who the real peace stakeholders are.”

The facilitators themselves must be challenged

30. Women in their own right are part of political mobilisation and campaigning in several Arab countries. The obstacle to their inclusion in formal peace processes is not their lack of capacity or visibility but rather the lack of vision of external facilitators. External facilitators must deconstruct the peace process and increase awareness of who the peace serves and who the real peace stakeholders are. Facilitating institutions must reflect on the purpose of the peace they are trying to achieve in their selection criteria for stakeholders to bring to the table. A cessation of hostilities will merely bring about short-term fixes and legitimize armed actors if they are the only party around the table. When mediating peace, conveners should not accept a table solely with armed actors but seek to build foundations for durable peace and include actors that must disarm as well as actors that represent civilian voices.
31. In Yemen, former Special Envoy, Jamal Ben Omar, had a key role in encouraging the parties to accept the 30% quota in Yemen's National Dialogue Conference (NDC) later adopted in the drafting committee and other committees.
32. External stakeholders must refrain from homogenising Arab women and treating them as a monolithic group. Inter-regional, intra-state and individual differences in the experiences of women must be acknowledged and the diversity of their voices represented in the process. This commitment to diversity should guide the critical assessment of women selected to participate in formal track I talks. External stakeholders must reflect on who they are, who they represent, and whether their presence is representative of communal voices and grievances.
33. External stakeholders must also be wary of elitism in the selection of women and avoid inviting the same champions that are often in positions of privilege, but rather focus on diversifying the women engaged from an intersectional perspective with the aim of creating as inclusive a peace process as possible.
34. The mediator has a responsibility of neutrality. Too often the region has seen mediators that have vested interests in the conflicts they mediate and who do not leave their interests at the door of the negotiations. New criteria must be included for peace-making efforts to become more inclusive, requiring credibility, knowledge of the societies and root-causes of conflicts.
35. There are deep flaws in traditional peace-making systems and process design that make systemic changes and the integration of new proposals challenging. This is why it is essential to hold conveners that convene talks, along with the UN, peace practitioners and mediators accountable.

Activating women's political engagement

36. Lakhar Brahimi, Former Algerian Foreign Minister, Former conflict mediator and senior UN diplomat, reflected on three points that Arab states must work on addressing in order to increase women's inclusion in peacemaking. The first point is that the value of mediation itself must be acknowledged and harnessed more frequently to address social and political issues. The second point is the need for gender responsive and sensitive legislation codifying women's rights. The third point is that structures in support of the rule of law need to be in place to enable the implementation of legal frameworks for women's rights, women's participation and protection. Fundamental gaps in laws and legislation on women's rights in the region which curtail women's involvement in the formal political spaces are critical obstacles to their participation in decision making and in turn inclusion in peace processes and mediation.

Recognising and addressing Tokenism

37. Arguing for women to be included because of their gender identity rather than as competent individuals may be detrimental to their meaningful inclusion in certain patriarchal societies. When inclusivity advocates lobby male leaders in the Arab world for example, it might be useful to point out the suggested person is first and foremost an expert and then refer to their gender identity.
38. Both top down and grassroots efforts to ensure inclusion are important. When leaders are solely pushed at the top to include women this risks tokenism, as women can be included only to appease certain external actors without a real will to meaningfully ensure women's participation. Women's groups must therefore lobby decision makers, and likewise, women in positions of power or influence should encourage the participation of more women in political life.

Dismantling stereotypes of the Arab world

39. Leading female voices from the region reiterated that contrary to western misconceptions often used to justify women's exclusion from political and peace-making processes, women have had, and continue to have, an important role in public life. Their exclusion can therefore not be explained or tolerated by saying that women need to activate their roles in public life. They have been on the frontlines of the Arab Spring in both its waves, in some conflicts such as Yemen and in Libya they led successful local negotiations and are often more trusted than men when negotiating with conservative tribal actors since women are seen as having less personal interests and as being more community driven in their engagement.
40. Contrary to the beliefs of gatekeepers to peace processes, Middle Eastern and North African culture does not hinder women's meaningful inclusion. In reality, women peace-builders are using cultural practices, faith and tradition to challenge militarism and patriarchy. Outdated norms must be confronted if more women are to take part in peace negotiations.

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Opportunities for women's meaningful inclusion

Levers for change

41. Women and male allies alike must identify and engage with levers for change. In Iraq, women made use of the power of public protests that swept the streets to advocate for social change and women's rightful political space. Women's organisations also supported protesters logistically throughout the protests thus building legitimacy and buy-in for women's public roles. Examples of such levers for change include peaceful protests, such as in the case of Sudan, Algeria or Lebanon, but also strategic advocacy among women organisations that can build support among decision makers and male gatekeepers. Women mediators from Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan argue that they're not waiting for an invitation to talks- they are getting on with building peace.
42. The importance of regional women mediator networks has been recognised by several states and institutions. Such networks must be utilised as a resource for networking and sharing best practices among women and used as a recruitment pool for mediator appointment processes.
43. There is a need to recognise that women are already playing a different role at different tables. In the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OpT), women led popular mobilisations and non-violent resistance during the first intifada in 1987-1989. They were the voices that called for liberation and social change. They set up and led technical and strategic coordination committees on the ground where core grievances and issues of the conflict were addressed with substantial local buy-in. These women leaders were later excluded from the secretive backchannels that were male dominated and exclusive.

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“Patriarchal norms and the mentality of gatekeepers must be addressed: men need to be engaged on the merit of including women in peace processes.”

Male allies for the cause of inclusion

44. The significant challenge is men not wanting the contribution of women. Honesty is needed when addressing the exclusion of women in mediation and peacemaking and there is a need to address gender inequalities from a relational perspective that doesn't solely focus on women but adopts a gender-relational approach that look at men's roles in perpetuating power structures. Patriarchal norms and the mentality of gatekeepers must be addressed: men need to be engaged on the merit of including women in peace processes and in all spheres so that the structural barriers are addressed, and mindsets are changed. In Saudi Arabia, for example, progressive male parliamentarians backed the inclusion of women in the Shura Council that led to the historical appointment of 30 women to the Council.

Funding considerations

45. The role of donors and international governments supporting the political capacity development and participation of women in formal political life in the Arab world requires further exploration. There is a certain sensitivity in this respect as donors may seem partisan if certain women political leaders are supported which might in turn be seen as foreign political interference. However, alternative ways of supporting women political leaders, either through cross party capacity building or other programmes, should be considered.
46. Sustainable and flexible funding is required to support the protection needs of female refugee activists. Women refugees are particularly vulnerable as they have lost their livelihoods and rarely have durable economic fallbacks in host countries. If the diaspora is to meaningfully engage with peacebuilding, they require further support as women diaspora organisations often do not meet donor's strict funding criteria.
47. Donors must engender policy making and adopt gender-sensitive due diligence when they support peace processes. They must use their influence to hold third party mediators accountable to ensuring gender sensitivity throughout process design and implementation and should investigate whether the projects they fund are capable of incorporating gender perspectives.
48. Donors should not only hold mediators to account but should use their influence to encourage the parties to the conflict to lead inclusive delegations.

Consolidating multitrack approaches

49. Women's exclusion from formal political spaces and the peace table has confined many women in the region to tracks II and III processes. As needed as local mediation is, and as effective as women have been, it is essential not to relegate women's engagement in peace processes to lower tracks. Multitrack approaches conducted in a conflict sensitive way should be encouraged. Women's networks should be supported to ensure exchanges across tracks, share experiences and strategise.
50. Track I processes often start with exploratory track II or track I.5 dialogues. When taking this into consideration and in order to achieve women's meaningful inclusion at a track I level, women's groups and champions of inclusion must also seek to identify ways to include women in processes at these levels as well. A mapping of interactions between track I and track II processes might be useful in this respect. This needs to be accompanied with a recognition that the field of mediation has changed and actors such as the UN, the AU and governments are not the only players. For instance, there are several International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) conducting informal diplomacy that must also be engaged.

Leading by example to advance inclusion

51. It is important for the UN as an institution to lead by example and hire women, with conflict and context sensitive skill sets, as special envoys and senior mediators. UN member states championing the 1325 agenda should share practice and experience with others. Regionally, countries such as Tunisia that underwent a long historical struggle for women's inclusion in public life, guided by its political leaders and its women's movement, should also lead by example and bring countries together on a similar agenda.
52. The UN, the LAS, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and other multilateral institutions must ensure 50% women's participation in its leadership and at all levels.

Support for further Arab States engagement on 1325

53. Women in the Arab world face not just glass ceilings but brick walls. The time has come for women and their allies to strategise on breaking through those walls. Ban Ki-moon, Deputy Chair of The Elders, reflected on the hope that the Arab Spring pushed not only for political but also for transformative social change. Since then, he noted, that conflict led to the reversal of women's social and political gains in countries such as Yemen and Syria. The inclusion of women in high political office and in peacemaking in the region is essential as it is a vital human resource that the Arab world cannot risk wasting. The talents of women and youth are vital in the securing peace and stability in the region.
54. The LAS has reiterated its commitment to gender mainstreaming and ensuring women's representation in peace processes. Action is being taken by supporting member states in developing their NAPs, developing a 1325 regional strategy and 1325 action plan to strengthen regional mechanisms in support of women's meaningful roles in peace processes and by setting up the Arab Women Mediators Network composed of Arab female diplomats. The establishment of the Arab Women Mediators Network is a welcome step: it currently includes diplomats from 10 out of 22 member states.
55. More transparency and data are needed to identify where the gender gaps are in the region, what the models of inclusion are and what the mechanisms for direct participation are.

Rethinking modalities for direct and indirect inclusion mechanisms at track I level

56. The under representation of high-level women mediators is a serious issue. There is improvement in gender parity at a UN leadership level, but peace mediation seems to be an exception. Regional women's mediator networks – Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise-Africa); the Arab Women Mediators Network; the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network; the Nordic Women Mediators; and the Women Mediators across the Commonwealth Network - which are all now networked in a Global Alliance of Regional Women's Mediator Networks - have emerged as platforms that amplify women mediators' visibility and exposure. These can be used as resource hubs for the UN when seeking to allocate mediators at a track I level.

“Women in the Arab world face not just glass ceilings but brick walls. The time has come for women and their allies to strategise on breaking through those walls.”

“The inclusion of women in high political office and in peacemaking in the region is essential as it is a vital human resource that the Arab world cannot risk wasting.”

“Equality in direct participation is not solely about access to the table but is also about access to the process from its start”

“Track I processes seek to address elements of the social contract. However, post agreement, the social contract will still be negotiated and will remain fragile until inclusive societies are sought.”

57. The lack of appointed women mediators is a critical issue and can be detrimental to processes. Experts have suggested temporary special measures to directly address male dominance within the field, including co-mediation. This implies that two or more people are appointed on an equal basis and if conducted in a context sensitive way, this has the ability to deliver immediate specific results and quantitatively increase the number of women mediators, as well as other forms of diversity. On the one hand, it is a single and straightforward mechanism that is easy to mandate and monitor. On the other, it cannot be a standalone measure as it needs to be coupled with a transition to inclusive leadership and an understanding of the value that gender diversity in leadership has more broadly. Practical steps for implementation include: Transparency of the process, Terms of Reference (TORs) need to be aligned with inclusive leadership and both candidates should be selected from a pool of qualified candidates such as those from mediator networks.
58. As much as co leadership mechanisms make use of wider skill sets and greater networks, they cannot be a standalone measure. Unless structural barriers are addressed, and the value of inclusion is recognised at a top level, inclusion of women will remain difficult. There are also concerns that this measure might add another layer of complexity and risk international actors avoiding addressing the core issue of women's structural marginalisation in mediation. Indeed, a lack of commitment to meaningful inclusion could also lead to sidelining women in a co-mediation arrangement where the woman mediator isn't given the same access to the process or is left in a supportive rather than equal role.
59. Equality in direct participation is not solely about access to the table but is also about access to the process from its start and an overall equal regard for views being considered. Donors can ensure that this is done by making this a condition of funding to facilitators or through strict quotas and monitoring mechanisms that ensure that women's perspectives are being mainstreamed.
60. When it comes to women's direct participation in peace delegations, modalities of direct participation are process, time and context specific. Direct participation can mean a seat at the table if direct negotiations take place or that mediators have an intermediary role and travel back and forth between key parties if they refuse to meet. Both need to enable women's direct participation and champions of inclusion must first and foremost insist on direct participation. However, when direct participation is not possible, indirect tools can be an option for women to influence peace processes.
61. Facilitators may enable and require specific independent women's delegations.
62. Setting up mechanisms such as Women Advisory Boards and Gender Commissions composed of gender experts and women that are given equal access to the talks may be a useful additional inclusion mechanism. Women's inputs can be solicited on the various social, economic and political topics discussed from a gendered lens in addition to the opportunity to raise women's rights and gender issues. Lessons learned and evidence drawn from gender commissions in Sri Lanka and Colombia show that these mechanisms can contribute to a successful outcome. Currently, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General for Yemen (OSESGY) and the Office of the Special Envoy for Syria (OSE-Syria) have Women's technical advisory boards.
63. There is a need to re-conceptualize the function and understanding of track I processes. The table may be where agreements are codified but not necessarily where agreements are made. Coordinated and strategic efforts must be led to create multiple pathways for influence through multitrack approaches and cohesive efforts that seek to address societal horizontal grievances. Track I processes seek to address elements of the social contract. However, post agreement, the social contract will still be negotiated and will remain fragile until inclusive societies are sought.

Recommendations and conclusion

Arab governments and regional organisations

64. Regional organisations such as the LAS and the GCC should support countries in their development of 1325 NAPs. Lessons learned should be drawn from the implementation of NAPs in the region and collaboration with civil society must be strengthened to advance the 1325 agenda. The LAS and other multilateral institutions should further institutionalise their commitment to human rights and gender equality linking the LAS Charter, the founding Treaty of the Arab League that specifies areas for joint Arab action, to other relevant international conventions.
65. Regional organisations, in partnership with international organisations such as ESCWA and UN Women Regional Office for Arab States (ROAS), should develop transparent monitoring systems for the implementation of NAPs, the appointment of women across state institutions and political organisations.
66. Arab governments should nominate women mediators to join the Arab Women Mediators Network and expand the Network to representation of all countries in the region. Governments should consider enlarging membership to include civil society and not solely the political elite. More funding should also be allocated to support women mediators from civil society.
67. Arab governments should lead gender sensitive legislative reform and address gender disparities in access to decision making positions across the judiciary, executive and legislative levels. Ensuring women's representation in the security sector and high ministerial and diplomatic posts is also key to bringing about change.
68. In order to support and enable women's political leadership and engagement, special measures such as quotas can be used. quotas on national political parties (50% women representation) should be enforced and monitored.
69. Invest in the power of women and youth for local peacebuilding, conflict mitigation and prevention and use women and youth as a resource for dialogue and diplomacy. Support intergenerational exchanges in the field of mediation and peacebuilding and ensure the security and protection of women peace builders from all forms of violence.
70. Arab governments should destigmatise dialogue and strengthen mediation and dialogue capacities at a local and national level.
71. Invest in a WPS regional Centre that studies the advancement in women's participation in regional peace and security, identifies gaps and entry points. The Centre could link with the YPS agenda.

The United Nations

72. The UN should lead by example in increasing women's meaningful participation in peacemaking and high-level mediation, ensuring that they prioritise women's participation and representation, critically including, young women. They must recognise women's diversity and refrain from stereotyping Arab women through cultural misconceptions preventing the UN from fully pursuing the inclusion agenda in the region. UN sponsored processes must hold state and non-state actors accountable on this agenda.
73. Make the direct participation of women in all peace processes a mandatory requirement for participating parties and make use of a pool of competent female mediators from the global networks for the appointment of women mediators. Ensure that agreements and negotiations are gender sensitive and, if lacking, bring in gender expertise.

74. Continue supporting women in senior positions including special envoys in the UN System through quotas. Where the quota is not met, enforce other temporary special measures such as co-mediation but ensure that they take charge of different aspects of the negotiation on a footing of equal authority.
75. Promote transparency and invite women peace builders to influence the process directly through briefings or papers submitted to the parties and the mediator, and by setting up technical advisory boards from the beginning and throughout the peace process.
76. If meetings are held digitally, enable youth and women's virtual participation in peace processes and consultations, with representation across socioeconomic backgrounds and geographies considering and addressing the digital divide.
77. Ensure local ownership of the peace table during process design, consult civil society and women peace builders and support a process that delivers inclusive society outcomes rather than a negative peace. Broaden the peace table to include marginalised communities, civil society and main peace stakeholders, through formal or informal mechanisms such as Civil Society Support Rooms or briefings.
78. Avoid homogenising women and refrain from enforcing principles of neutrality and consensus during consultations.
79. Ensure that Special Envoys and other senior UN officials mainstream gender in their plans and have a real understanding of gender issues. Monitor the implementation of the targets related to the WPS agenda that they set in their annual plans.

Donors and other governments

80. Provide flexible funding to women peace builders to substantively engage in peace processes, ensure financial support to their advocacy efforts on the margins of peace talks and provide rapid response grants to women's peace-building organisations to increase the flexibility of their work and overall influence on peace processes.
81. Third party governments and donors need to support efforts to tackle the structural causes of barriers to women and youth's meaningful participation, including through girls' education, transition into the workplace, improving access to sexual and reproductive health services and tackling sexual and gender-based violence. These inclusion efforts need to be supported by sustainable, long term funding with a high-risk appetite and protection for women and youth in these roles, e.g. through ICAN's Protection Framework for Women Peacebuilders. Funding should be conditional to ensure women and youth's public participation.
82. Push the UN and regional bodies to impose quotas for political delegations to advocate for direct participation and representation of women in all peace processes. Ensure the use of a variety of approaches to influence the representation of women and civil society (women quota across delegations, independent women's delegation, gender commissions, advisory boards, civic formally attached spaces).
83. Require gender due diligence audits before funding any peace process or implementation process and include monitoring of the recommendations. These should be undertaken by the UN and also INGO support organisations.
84. Support programmes to address the digital divide and enable women's safe access to digital spaces.
85. Support for women's political participation in political parties through capacity building programmes. More reflection is necessary to consider how to provide this support in a way that is sensitive to context and state sovereignty concerns.
86. Support women and youth in developing their own initiatives and drafting their own proposals.

Women mediators

87. Strengthen collaboration between the Arab women diplomats appointed to the Arab Women Mediators Network and local women and youth peace builders in the region. Develop consultation mechanisms between the Arab Women Mediators Network and civil society actors, particularly women and youth.
88. Be more specific in inclusion demands made to the UN and other facilitating INGOs and governments. Make it clear what kind of inclusion is demanded with what kind of tools. Advocate for inclusion at multiple tracks, not solely track I but track II and I.5 as well, and for clear coordination between tracks and consultation across tracks.
89. Develop channels for exchanging best practices, knowledge and lessons learned from other experiences between the Arab Women Mediators Network and other regional and international women mediator networks such as Women Mediators across the Commonwealth and the Global Alliance.

Civil Society

90. Facilitate intergenerational dialogue on conflict prevention and mediation and enhance women and youth's strategic and collaborative participation. Work on strengthening the role of young women as partners alongside adult women through training and mentorship programmes.
91. Provide capacity building on strategic advocacy to peace actors and delegations advocating for meaningful inclusion.
92. Develop women's political capacity and work on dismantling stereotypes that restrict political engagement to men.
93. Assist in developing platforms and databases that amplify the region's women mediators and the impact of the work of local women peace-builders. An example can be taken from the expert database developed by the Yemeni Women's Solidarity Network.

General

94. Contextualise inclusion mediation tools such as Women Advisory Boards, Co-mediation and gender commissions and adapt them to the specificities of each peace process and each local context.
95. Conflicts in the region today are primarily civil wars, albeit often with international intervention, meaning it is even more vital to approach peace in terms of the social contract and societal relations. Mediators need to draw on expertise from sociologists and anthropologists, not just from international relations experts.
96. Develop and ensure linkages between track I, track II and track III, to ensure that women's and young people's concerns and their contributions to peace on the ground can be woven into the peace processes and talks.
97. Women's participation needs to be mainstreamed into all areas and not confined simply to so-called "women's issues". Ensure that male mediators talk about "women issues" to develop, support and mainstream a gender lens.
98. Need for recognition of the wider role women are playing informally within communities – the knowledge and experiences they have is valuable and should not be overlooked.

Conclusion

Strategic coordination is needed to sustain and prevent a reversal of gains in women's meaningful inclusion in high level peacemaking. Women's grassroots peacebuilding efforts must be recognised and intergenerational dialogue invested in. Regional political will must be strengthened to address structural barriers to women's inclusion and strengthen women's representation in senior political leadership. External facilitators must also assume their responsibility on this agenda and creatively engage with women and youth on the next generation of peace processes. If concerted efforts are taken to advance meaningful inclusion in peacemaking, the impact can be transformative in the region's path to building inclusive, peaceful and prosperous societies.

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Annex

Two discussion papers were developed for this Wilton Park virtual conference: (discussion paper 1) The model of co-mediation; (discussion paper 2) Increasing the influence of civil society in mediation. These papers were commissioned by UN Women and co-authored by Prof Christine Bell, Executive Director of the Global Justice Academy and Head of the Political Settlements Research Programme, University of Edinburgh and Dr Catherine Turner, Associate Professor of International Law at Durham University and Deputy Director of the Durham Global Security Institute.

The following recommendations are taken from these discussion papers.

Discussion Paper 1: The model of co-mediation

Recommendations

- 1. Commit to support for ongoing efforts to reach gender parity in high-level mediation appointments**
 - a. Continue to build on successful parity initiatives to date, including commitments to target dates for achieving parity in high-level mediators
 - b. Seek to limit State influence in seeking to appoint 'preferred' candidates over ones with the best skills for the job, and who best reflect the diversity of the populations served by the international organisations
 - c. Commit to transparency in the appointment process
 - d. Challenge States and conflict parties where they are unwilling to engage with women mediators.
- 2. Have clear and publicly available Terms of Reference for all mediator positions across all organisations.**
 - a. Ensure that these Terms of Reference include a mandate to include women in the negotiation and ensure that they adopt a gender perspective (as required by UNSCR 1325), including, if possible, a reference to implementation on UNSCR 1325.
 - b. Ensure an integrated approach to gender inclusive mediation, including not only women mediators but expert gender advisors (with gender expertise and process design skills) and institutional commitments to women's representation and participation in peace processes, and in effective and high-quality consultation mechanisms and processes.
 - c. Ensure that responsibility for gender sensitivity does not *a priori* fall on women mediators but is shared equally by the mediation team.
- 3. Have clear and transparent skills requirements of mediators, which, where appropriate, can be met by 'non-traditional' entrants.**
 - a. Review skills and competencies for recruitment to all mediation positions to remove exclusionary criteria and ensure diversity of experience.
 - b. Include commitment to women's equality as a core competence in the selection process.
 - c. Ensure that periodic performance review tracks against the Terms of Reference for the mediation position.

- 4. Adopt Temporary Special Measures, including where necessary co-mediation, or Panels of mediators, to ensure rapid gender parity in senior mediation roles**
 - a. Use Temporary Special Measures to appoint senior mediators with complementary leadership skills and experience (building on UN Secretary General's Human Rights call).
 - b. Require equal nominations from Member States, and balance on short-lists
 - c. Engage with mechanisms such as regional Women's Mediator Networks to identify external candidates for positions, and ensure that candidates selected from the Networks are given clear political support for their nomination from the nominating State and regional organisations.
 - d. Include gender experts in the selection panel for senior mediation appointments to interview each candidate with a view to (a) informing them of the spectrum of the job, to be sure that they are willing (b) test their credentials (c) test their commitment to values such as gender equality. This could be re-enforced by a 'pre-screening' panel, to push candidates on their commitment to the role.
- 5. Invest in gender parity for the future across the mediation system, developing a more equal new generation of mediators**
 - a. Review recruitment and promotion criteria to remove exclusionary requirements and practices, and place an emphasis on transferable insights and experiences, diverse work and life histories.
 - b. Invest in a 'mediator' training track within international organisations, which targets in particular, under-represented groups such as women.
- 6. Commit to sharing data on women in senior mediation positions from 2011 to 2020 to ensure that from 2021 onwards a contemporary baseline is in place from which to gauge progress.**
 - a. Encourage private and non-governmental bodies involved in mediation to adopt public codes of practice which include gender diversity in mediation, and to publish statistics on women in their organisations
- 7. Review whether existing rosters and women's mediator networks could have a more formal role in proposals, interview and selection processes for international or regional mediators.**
 - a. Ensure that the establishment of women's mediator networks is tied to clear mechanisms for improving gender representation in mediation by the supporting State and/or regional organisations.

Discussion Paper 2: Increasing the influence of civil society in mediation

Recommendations

- 1. Recognise and increase the visibility of the work that women are already doing in mediation and conflict prevention. It is critical that mediators consider not only who is at the table, but who is missing and create process mechanisms to ensure that those voices are heard.**
 - a. Women's participation in peace processes is not limited to the limited mechanisms for inclusion in Track 1 talks. Women are engaged in mediation and conflict prevention work across the spectrum of conflict resolution. This work must be recognised and adequately supported.

- b. Initiatives created by women can meaningfully enhance peace processes in a range of different ways. Formal pathways in and out of the process must be created to enable women's organisations to feed into the process through the parties or the mediator and their team.
 - c. Focus on building mid-level support that can bridge the traditional Track 3 and Track 1 divide.
 - d. Provide appropriate and sustainable funding for women in different mediation spaces.
- 2. All parties to the negotiating process and international mediator teams should be required to include women from diverse backgrounds in their delegations. Delegations, and women who participate in them, should be offered clear support from international actors to enable that participation.**
- a. International organisations and non-governmental organisations can provide technical and logistical support to women to enable their participation, though ideally their participation would be fully embedded in the logistical arrangements of the talks more broadly
 - b. Those parties who do include sufficient numbers of women should be offered backing by international and non-governmental organisations to withstand challenge from their own constituencies.
 - c. Where voluntary measures are insufficient, and wider political dynamics permit, access to the process can be made conditional on including women in delegations.
 - d. Quotas for the number of women in each delegation can be introduced in the context of agreed numerical representation of parties before negotiations begin.
- 3. All efforts should be made to include a specific mechanism for full access to the drafting process, for gender and women's advocates.**
- 4. Where some voices are clearly excluded from the process, the mediator /facilitator should create dedicated mechanisms to enhance the breadth of democratic representation, including of women; this may include special forms of selection process and election.**
- a. Where there is resistance to the inclusion of women in negotiating parties mechanisms such as special forms of election should be created to enable the democratic selection of women and other non-dominant minorities to participate in the process, creating a link between representation and participation
 - b. Support should be offered to women leaders to build a platform from which to engage in these mechanisms.
- 5. To enhance the gender expertise available at the talks, drafting and advice mechanisms such as Gender Commissions or sub-commissions can also be created. To be successful, these bodies should have a direct line of communication into the negotiating process.**
- a. The creation of a commission or sub-commission should be agreed with the conflict parties, and a direct line of communication into the talks should be maintained through direct negotiating parties.
 - b. The body should be representative of all sides of the political negotiations and society broadly, and be appointed on the basis of gender equality expertise including practical experience of gender and women rights advocacy.
 - c. The body should be consulted on all aspects of the negotiations, including commenting on draft agreements.

- d. The body should have a clear thematic mandate to advise on: (a) the gender sensitivity of the agenda, (b) the equality issues relating to the modalities of the process, and (c) all substantive content of negotiations.

6. Indirect bodies for inclusion such as Advisory Boards can be used where necessary to supplement other measures. Where such bodies are created, there should be a clear mandate, and have transparent mechanisms for selection. Bodies should be appointed on the basis of gender and women's rights expertise and experience.

- a. The mandate should make clear the basis on which women are selected to participate, and the thematic remit of their advisory role.
- b. The Board should be given equal access to draft/proposed agreements and clauses and have meaningful opportunities to influence the substance of the draft.
- c. Formalised mechanisms should be created for ongoing communication between women's civil society and the Advisory Board.
- d. Such boards should not replace the need for expert gender advisors to the process, or the need for the parties to the talks to include women.

7. The modality of inclusion chosen should be suitable for the type of talks.

- a. A 'blueprint' model of participation must not remove the need for gendered conflict analysis and process design that incorporates a strong understanding of how women have been differently affected by conflict and what the specific barriers to participation in that context are likely to be in context.
- b. Single models of inclusion are usually insufficient. Where appropriate, a number of different models should be pursued together.
- c. Audits should be carried out to identify where women are political and socially active with a view to incorporating that work into the process through innovative bridging mechanisms