

STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS IN AFRICA



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PROFILE Kevin Karlo Lakot is a passionate women's rights activist, politician, and businesswoman dedicated to advancing women's empowerment and rights across Africa. Currently, she serves as the Country Representative for the Young Women of Africa (YWOA) in Uganda and as the Country President of the African Diplomatic Organization (formerly known as the African Union Youth Assembly) in Uganda. Additionally, she holds the position of Deputy Speaker of the Global Youth Parliament in Uganda. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration from Makerere University. Kevin's career spans government, civil society, and the business sector, where she has worked with renowned organizations such as UN Women, UN OCHA, and the African Union. Her diverse experience has empowered her to champion policies and initiatives that support gender equality and the development of young women across Africa. She is an alumna of prestigious leadership programs including the Aspire Leaders Program at Harvard University and the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI). Kevin is an inspiring role model to many young girls and women, and her leadership continues to inspire change and progress within her community and beyond.

Executive Summary

Women in Africa continue to be systematically excluded from formal peace negotiations, despite their crucial roles in grassroots peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Between 1992 and 2019, women represented only 13% of negotiators, 6% of mediators, and 6% of signatories globally, with African cases reflecting similar gaps. This marginalization undermines the legitimacy and sustainability of peace agreements, as evidence shows accords are 35% more likely to endure when women participate meaningfully. This policy brief calls for urgent action to strengthen women's leadership in African peace processes by mandating gender quotas, building negotiation and mediation capacity, expanding women's roles in uniformed sectors, and institutionalizing women-led networks. Such measures are essential to move beyond token representation, ensure women's meaningful influence, and achieve durable, inclusive, and just peace across the continent.

Introduction

Human security and sustainable peace in Africa depend critically on the inclusion of women in peace and security processes. Women are deeply involved in conflict dynamics as combatants, peacebuilders, and community negotiators yet they remain marginalized in formal peace negotiations (O'Reilly, 2024). According to the Council on Foreign Relations, women constituted

only 14% of negotiators in African peace talks between 2015 and 2019, and just 13% of negotiators globally from 1992 to 2019, reflecting persistent underrepresentation despite international commitments (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019).

In South Sudan, women's minimal involvement in the 2018 updated peace agreement meant that gender-based violence and displacement issues received inadequate attention in the peace framework, illustrating how male-dominated negotiations often fail to address women's lived experiences and priorities (Osei, 2024).

Despite frameworks such as UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), the Maputo Protocol (2003), and various national and regional Women, Peace and Security (WPS) action plans, women's participation in peace processes remains largely symbolic. Discriminatory gender norms, weak institutional designs, and mediation frameworks that favour male leadership systematically exclude women from decision-making spaces. Gender-based violence, insecurity, and the lack of meaningful protection mechanisms further prevent women from engaging fully in peace efforts. Even where women are included, their roles are often symbolic rather than influential, with limited impact on outcomes. This persistent exclusion denies women their political rights and undermines the legitimacy, sustainability, and effectiveness of peace agreements. Evidence from Burundi and Mali demonstrates that when women are sidelined, agreements are less inclusive, less responsive to affected populations, and more prone to failure (Hanmer et al., 2024).

The marginalisation of women in peace negotiations is therefore not simply a matter of inequality but a fundamental weakness that threatens durable peace across Africa.

Policy options

- A growing body of evidence demonstrates that women’s involvement in peace processes is essential for achieving sustainable peace (Adjei, 2019; Nazary et al., 2020). According to UN Women, peace agreements are 35% more likely to last at least 15 years when women meaningfully participate (UN Women, 2015). Case studies from Liberia, Burundi, and Mali show that women’s inclusion strengthens peace frameworks by ensuring provisions for social welfare, justice, and reconciliation (Saiget, 2016). Conversely, male-dominated processes often fail to address the gendered impacts of conflict, leaving post-conflict societies vulnerable to recurring instability.
- Empirical research also shows that when women’s civil society groups are involved in peace talks, agreements are substantially less likely to collapse, illustrating the strategic value of women’s participation beyond ethical considerations (Krause et al., 2018).
- Despite this evidence, women’s participation in peace negotiations across Africa remains limited. Existing policies and initiatives have sought to improve inclusion but face persistent gaps, such as weak enforcement, limited funding, and tokenistic implementation. The following policy alternatives highlight possible pathways to address this challenge, along with their expected outcomes and limitations that inform the need for stronger recommendations.

Table 1: Institutional roles and policy options for inclusive peace negotiation

POLICY ALTERNATIVE Voluntary Inclusion Policies RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTION United Nations DESCRIPTION Encourage member states to include women in peace processes through global guidelines, advocacy campaigns, and technical support EXPECTED OUTCOME / LINE OF SOLUTIONS Increased visibility of women in negotiations and mediation; states adopt inclusive practices without waiting for enforcement
POLICY ALTERNATIVE Targeted Capacity Building RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTION African Union DESCRIPTION Mandate minimum representation of women in negotiation teams, mediation groups, and post-conflict governance EXPECTED OUTCOME / LINE OF SOLUTIONS Measurable increase in women’s participation; enforceable regional compliance mechanisms
POLICY ALTERNATIVE Comprehensive Gender Mainstreaming RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTION National Governments DESCRIPTION Integrate gender perspectives in all stages of peace processes, including conflict analysis, negotiation strategies, and monitoring EXPECTED OUTCOME / LINE OF SOLUTIONS Peace agreements become more inclusive, responsive, and sustainable

POLICY ALTERNATIVE

Binding Regional Frameworks

RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTION

RECs / AU

DESCRIPTION

Ratify enforceable protocols or treaties requiring member states to include women in peace processes, with penalties for non-compliance

EXPECTED OUTCOME / LINE OF SOLUTIONS

Regional accountability ensures consistent inclusion of women in negotiations

POLICY ALTERNATIVE

Women-Led Mediation Networks

RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTION

National Governments / AU

DESCRIPTION

Establish and fund independent networks of women mediators and advisors to operate alongside formal peace processes

EXPECTED OUTCOME / LINE OF SOLUTIONS

Women's grassroots perspectives and expertise directly influence negotiations, even if state-level commitment.

The above options highlights a range of strategies already promoted at global, continental, and national levels. However, gaps remain across all approaches. Voluntary inclusion policies raise visibility but lack enforcement, while capacity-building initiatives expand the pool of skilled women yet fail to guarantee their inclusion in actual negotiations. Legal quotas create representation but risk tokenism if women's voices are not empowered. Gender mainstreaming promises inclusivity but is often underfunded and poorly implemented. Binding frameworks could create accountability, but political resistance from member states limits enforcement. Finally, women-led mediation networks offer grassroots perspectives but risk being sidelined without institutional linkage to formal processes.

Table 2: Actions Needed by Institutions

LEVEL OF ACTION

United Nations (UN)

CURRENT GAPS

Women make up less than 25% of delegates in UN-led peace negotiations. Limited representation of women in senior peacekeeping positions.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish a minimum quota of 50–70% women in all UN mediation teams and delegations.

Increase deployment of women in uniformed roles (military, police, corrections).

Allocate specific funding for women's peace networks.

PROPOSED TARGETS

50–70% women in delegations by 2030.

30% women in uniformed UN peacekeeping by 2030.

LEVEL OF ACTION

African Union (AU)

CURRENT GAPS

Only 5 out of 55 AU Member States have legislated gender quotas in peace processes. Limited women mediators in AU panels.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Adopt a continental gender quota policy requiring 50% women in all AU peace missions and delegations.

Establish an AU Women Mediators Roster for rapid deployment.

Strengthen AU Peace and Security Council gender mainstreaming.

PROPOSED TARGETS

50% women in AU mediation and peace missions by 2030.

All AU-led delegations to include at least 1 woman mediator by 2027.

LEVEL OF ACTION

Regional Economic Communities (RECs)

CURRENT GAPS

Women underrepresented in regional conflict prevention and mediation teams. Lack of harmonized gender standards.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop regional action plans to operationalize UNSCR 1325.
Harmonize gender quotas across RECs to ensure minimum 50% women representation.
Fund women-led CSOs in peacebuilding at the regional level.

PROPOSED TARGETS

50% women in REC mediation teams by 2030.
Regional standby forces to have 30% women in uniform by 2030.

LEVEL OF ACTION

National Governments

CURRENT GAPS

Few countries have legislated quotas for peacebuilding roles.
Women underrepresented in defense, police, and security sectors.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Legislate gender quotas of 50–70% for peace negotiation delegations.
Scale up recruitment of women in uniform across defense, police, and security forces.
Fund national action plans on WPS (Women, Peace, Security).

PROPOSED TARGETS

50–70% women in negotiation delegations by 2030.
At least 30% women in security and defense forces by 2030.

Conclusion

Sustainable peace in Africa depends on women's leadership at every stage of negotiations, agreements, and implementation. Mandated representation, negotiation training, stronger roles in security and reintegration, and support for women-led networks are critical. Without these measures, peace processes will remain incomplete. Women's participation is not only a rights issue but also a strategic necessity for building peace that is inclusive, durable, and just.

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