

# **GETTING A SEAT AT THE TABLE:**

## **A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF FEMALE INFLUENCE IN THE COLOMBIAN AND NEPALESE PEACE PROCESSES**

Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy Capstone Project

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August 10, 2019



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## Introduction

*“Women’s participation and inclusion makes humanitarian assistance more effective, strengthens the protection efforts of our peacekeepers, contributes to the conclusion of peace talks and the achievement of sustainable peace, accelerates economic recovery, and helps counter violent extremism.”*<sup>1</sup>

*“Continued failure to include women in peace processes ignores their demonstrated effectiveness and overlooks a potential strategy to respond effectively to security threats around the world.”*<sup>2</sup>

Women are 49% of the world’s total refugee population, and more than 40% of the global labor force. Women comprise 10% to 30% of armed forces and armed groups worldwide and they are an overwhelming majority of post-conflict civilian casualties. **Half of our entire world is female, yet nearly every single peace agreement signed between 1990 and today has not included a single female signatory.**<sup>3</sup>

Despite resounding evidence that women have a positive impact on the viability and sustainability of peace processes, they have struggled – and continue to struggle – to gain seats at

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<sup>1</sup> "Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace." UN Women, 2015, 5.

<sup>2</sup> "Women's Participation in Peace Processes." Council on Foreign Relations. January 20, 2019. <https://www.cfr.org/interactive/womens-participation-in-peace-processes>.

<sup>3</sup> “Women’s Participation in Peace Processes.”

male-dominated negotiation tables. When they are included in formal negotiations, women are more likely to raise “issues that are critical to long-term stability” than their male counterparts, such as those of human rights, security, and employment.<sup>4</sup> They also tend to be more successful at finding common ground between conflicting parties, and can more easily collaborate with others from different sectarian and cultural backgrounds.<sup>5</sup> A recent study by researchers at Georgetown University concluded that women *must have official roles* in a peace process in order for the process to be more comprehensive and durable: “Including women from civil society in official roles – such as negotiators, technical advisors, or on delegation teams – is critical to the creation of a sustainable peace.”<sup>6</sup>

In Northern Ireland, for example, women helped move parties to an agreement quickly in the 1996-1998 peace process by promoting cross-party collaboration. Although nearly all the members of the negotiating teams were men, several women who already held political office were appointed as delegates, and the subsequent swell of support from civil society helped amplify their voices at the table. Specifically, female negotiators served as “honest brokers” who collaborated across national party lines, even maintaining their relationship with a party who was banned from the negotiations after a ceasefire breach for the sake of inclusivity<sup>7</sup>. This was counterintuitive to the strict party divisions that existed in Northern Ireland at the time. They also

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<sup>4</sup> Vogelstein, Rachel B. "Building the Case on Women, Peace, and Security." Council on Foreign Relations. November 3, 2015.

<https://www.cfr.org/blog/building-case-women-peace-and-security>.

<sup>5</sup> Vogelstein, Rachel B. "Building the Case on Women, Peace, and Security."

<sup>6</sup> Chang, Patty, Mayesha Alam, Roslyn Warren, Rukmani Bhatia, and Rebecca Turkington. "Women Leading Peace." *Georgetown Institute of Women Peace and Security*. 2015.

<https://giwps.georgetown.edu/resource/women-leading-peace/>.

<sup>7</sup> Chang, Alam, Warren, Bhatia, and Turkington, 45.

succeeded in including voices from civil society in Northern Ireland's formal dialogues for the first time in history.

In Guatemala's peace process from 1994-1996, only one woman was appointed as a negotiator at the formal table: the former Finance Minister of the Guatemalan government.<sup>8</sup> While many female members of civil society were heavily involved in the peace process, they were not formal parties to the negotiations, and therefore their demands were only superficially integrated into the resulting accords. However, they did succeed in putting women's issues on the formal negotiating agenda, such as mechanisms around community reconciliation and justice. Luz Mendez, the sole female negotiator, used her access to the table to leverage these inputs from civil society and promote them as official proposals.<sup>9</sup> Although the final accords were not ideal, the actions of women ultimately facilitated a wider feminist movement in Guatemala and a more sustainable, long-term effort to promote gender equality.

These are just two examples of many. The potential consequences of minimal progress on female inclusion, as these cases suggest, are both tangible and concerning. When we exclude women from formal negotiations, we not only lose efficiency in the process itself, but we put the long-term sustainability of peace at risk.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in October 2000, was designed to respond to the inefficiencies, inequalities, and public outcry that had resulted from the repeated exclusion of women in these peace processes. Often considered a key turning point for

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<sup>8</sup> Chang, Alam, Warren, Bhatia, and Turkington, 57.

<sup>9</sup> Chang, Alam, Warren, Bhatia, and Turkington, 70.

increasing the impact of women in global peace processes, it was crucial for rousing unprecedented international attention around the unique and vital role that women play, both in armed conflicts and their aftermath. Prior to 2000, there had not been a formal mechanism that specifically addressed the impact that violent conflict has on women. Similarly, no prior resolution had mandated that parties involved in conflict must actively prevent violations of women's rights. UN delegates and the international community pushed for concrete change after past peace processes revealed 1) a staggering lack of female participation, 2) evidence suggesting the positive impact that women can have if included, and 3) a lack of provisions that sufficiently accounted for the unique impact that war has on women. Problems like these were what many hoped Resolution 1325 would solve. At the time, it certainly appeared to be a significant step forward for gender inclusion and equality in the international sphere.

Ironically, as illustrated in the Northern Ireland and Guatemalan cases, some of the most impactful examples of women's participation in peace processes to date have occurred *prior* to the adoption of Resolution 1325. El Salvador is yet another example: during the 1990s, women occupied seats at nearly all the tables at each phase of the negotiation process; there was even one technical table that had six women and only one man present.<sup>10</sup> Because of demands made by these women, the resulting packages for land distribution and reintegration designated women as one-third of total beneficiaries. This was not only proportional to the amount of women who fought in the war, but is atypical when compared to other land reform packages that have

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<sup>10</sup> "Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations: Connections between Presence and Influence." UN Women. August 2010.  
<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/03AWomenPeaceNeg.pdf>.

historically excluded women completely.<sup>11</sup> There is clear research showing that when women have access to peace negotiations, those processes are more efficient, sustainable, and inclusive.

Why is it, then, that progress in this area has been so limited despite the introduction of a formal UN resolution? 40% of UN member states have drafted National Action Plans to implement Resolution 1325 as of November 2018, yet the statistics since 2000 suggest that much more than just a written action plan is needed.<sup>12</sup> Peace agreements since 2000 have seen a 16% increase in terms of direct references to women – certainly a positive improvement – yet an analysis of major peace processes in the past two decades shows that women still constitute just 4% of signatories, 2.7% of mediators, and less than 9% of all negotiators.<sup>13</sup> The simple adoption of Resolution 1325, clearly, is insufficient to guarantee that women will have seats at the table in any official peace process. What else can be done?

As highlighted previously, much of the empirical research on the impact of female negotiators in peace processes has been focused on Guatemala, South Africa, Northern Ireland, and the Philippines. In many of these cases, women contributed to the negotiation process by broadening the agenda, communicating across party lines, and inspiring deeper feminist movements. However, there is less available data on the impact of female negotiators during the Colombian case, despite it being one of the most gender-inclusive peace processes to date – even resulting in the only peace agreement with a section specifically dedicated to gender issues. Additionally, there is a lack of data around the impact of *not* having any women at the official table, as was the

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<sup>11</sup> "Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations: Connections between Presence and Influence."

<sup>12</sup> Vogelstein, Rachel B. "Sixteen Years After the Adoption of UNSCR 1325." Council on Foreign Relations. October 31, 2016. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/sixteen-years-after-adoption-unscr-1325>.

<sup>13</sup> Vogelstein, Rachel B. "Building the Case on Women, Peace, and Security."

case during the Nepalese peace process. This paper attempts to address these gaps by providing a comparative study of the influence of female negotiators – or lack thereof – in the Nepalese and Colombian peace processes.

## Methodology

### I. Case selection

I chose to focus on the Nepalese and Colombian cases for two main reasons. First, they have similar background characteristics, but different outcomes regarding the presence of women at the table. In his criteria for case study selection, Van Evera encourages the selection of cases that are “well matched for controlled cross-case comparisons.”<sup>14</sup> That is, cases that share similar characteristics but have different values on the study variable allow for a stronger comparison. Colombia and Nepal are both deeply patriarchal cultures, with a long history of male domination in the political sphere. In both cases, a large number of women fought in the actual conflict, yet had trouble gaining access to the negotiation table. In Colombia, women were excluded initially, but were eventually granted seats later on after significant internal and external pressure. In Nepal, although women made up 40% of the Maoist combat force – comparable to the number of women in Colombia’s FARC – they were never present at the official table.

Second, despite the lack of empirical evidence on the *impact* of women in these cases (relative to other global peace processes), there is still ample data available through research that can inform

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<sup>14</sup> Evera, Stephen Van. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997, 84.

well-grounded theories. This reflects another of Van Evera's criteria for case selection: choosing data-rich cases allows us to learn more from them and answer more questions.<sup>15</sup> Years after the passing of Resolution 1325, the UN, other international organizations, and academic institutions made an effort to study these peace processes in order to measure progress toward the goals of the resolution. As a result, there are a number of briefings, research papers, and reports available that begin to address the role of female negotiators on a much deeper level. Additionally, there are many participants in both cases who are alive and available for interviews, several of which supplemented my initial literature review.

## **II. Data collection**

This paper is largely grounded in an analysis of secondary literature sources, including (but not limited to) official UN reports, academic research studies produced by both U.S. and international scholars, and NGO briefings. Using insights gained from this literature review, I provide background context on each peace process with a focus on women's involvement, addressing the impact of their presence at the negotiation table and key barriers they faced in obtaining access to those tables.

My analysis of available literature is supported by selected interviews conducted with three women, two of whom were directly involved in the peace processes, and another who is a world-renowned peacebuilding expert and policy advisor. I conducted semi-structured interviews via Skype and phone between January and March 2019. Each interview was conducted in English.

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<sup>15</sup> Van Evera, 84.



The following two sections provide background context on women's participation in the Nepalese and Colombian peace processes, analyzing the various levels at which they were involved and the factors that led to their presence at the table (Colombia) or lack thereof (Nepal). These sections are structured chronologically so as to more easily compare each case. I then offer a deeper analysis of women's impact on each peace process, and present three recommendations for increasing female inclusion in peace negotiations based on my findings.

## Nepal

### **I. Female participation in the Maoist army, 1996-2006**

Nepal's Maoist combat force included about 30-40% women during the civil war from 1996-2006, a figure similar to the percentage of women who fought in Colombia's FARC.<sup>16</sup> While the vast majority of these women came from rural and/or tribal areas of Nepal, there was a significant portion who joined from more urban zones and were considered the "upper caste."

Women were largely attracted to the Maoist cause due to its appealing promises regarding gender equality and female empowerment.<sup>17</sup> Traditionally, a Nepalese woman's position in the community is determined by her male family members; her father, husband, and brothers are the ones who make the major decisions and provide the necessary economic resources to support the

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<sup>16</sup> K.C., Luna, and Gemma Van Der Haar. "Living Maoist Gender Ideology: Experiences of Women Ex-combatants in Nepal." Taylor & Francis. November 19, 2018.  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14616742.2018.1521296>.

<sup>17</sup> K.C. and Van Der Haar.

family. This social norm is reflected in many national institutions, from the Nepalese inheritance process to patrilocal residence and the legal system.<sup>18</sup> Women's access to basic goods, job opportunities, and community networks is therefore often contingent on the men closest to them.

Additionally, lower-caste Dalit women – many of whom live in more rural areas of the country – face an especially high risk of sexual violence. The social caste system in Nepal designates female Dalits as impure and untouchable, making them more vulnerable to social exclusion and exploitation despite a constitutional ban on “untouchability.”<sup>19</sup> Political actors and other members of the dominant caste take advantage of this vulnerability to maintain their high social status, while squashing any resistance that might arise from the Dalit community.<sup>20</sup> On a daily basis, rural Dalit women are sexually harassed when accessing public resources, seeking justice for past assaults, or simply marrying a man from the dominant caste. Deep social and legal impunity also prevent many high-caste offenders from being charged in court.<sup>21</sup>

During the civil war, Maoist leaders made this gender-based oppression a core pillar of their movement to attract more female combatants. They vowed to eradicate inequality in land distribution, fight for equal wages, condemn physical exploitation of women, and end the dowry system, among other lofty promises.<sup>22</sup> Women saw the “People’s War” as an opportunity to raise

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<sup>18</sup> K.C. and Van Der Haar.

<sup>19</sup> “The Situation of Dalit Rural Women.” September 2013.

<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CEDAW/RuralWomen/FEDONavsarjanTrustIDS.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> “The Situation of Dalit Rural Women.”

<sup>21</sup> “The Situation of Dalit Rural Women.”

<sup>22</sup> Ramana, P.V. ““I Was Born in the Party”: Women in Maoist Ranks.” Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. December 15, 2015.

[https://idsa.in/idsacomments/women-in-maoist-ranks\\_pvramana\\_151215](https://idsa.in/idsacomments/women-in-maoist-ranks_pvramana_151215).

their voices against the daily discrimination and violence that plagued them and their families.<sup>23</sup>

For some women, this was the main instigator for their decision to join the Maoists. Others joined because of existing family loyalty to the movement or for self-defense reasons. Regardless of their initial motivation for joining the insurgency, studies show that women almost always *continued* fighting because of the strong Maoist rhetoric around gender equality.<sup>24</sup>

## II. Impact of women in the Nepalese peace process

*“At all the political negotiating tables I have seen in Nepal during the peace process, not once have I seen a woman at the table. So far in the peace process, decisions are being made by men for women...”*<sup>25</sup>

The above sentiment powerfully articulates an undeniable reality: despite their substantial presence on the battlefield, women were completely absent from the main decision-making mechanism during the Nepalese peace process. This contrasts sharply with the Colombian case, which, toward the end, included almost an equal percentage of women in the peace talks as fought in the conflict. Research has attributed the discrepancy in Nepal to several factors, namely the formal delegation’s utter lack of commitment to gender equality issues and the country’s rigid social caste system.<sup>26</sup> Although Colombia and Nepal both had deeply patriarchal cultures at

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<sup>23</sup> K.C. and Van Der Haar.

<sup>24</sup> K.C. and Van Der Haar.

<sup>25</sup> Villellas Ariño, María. “Nepal: A Gender View of the Armed Conflict and the Peace Process.” June 2008, 10.

[https://escolapau.uab.cat/img/qcp/nepal\\_conflict\\_peace.pdf](https://escolapau.uab.cat/img/qcp/nepal_conflict_peace.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> Baechler, Günther. “A Mediator’s Perspective: Women and the Nepali Peace Process.” August 2010, 4. [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/C500C109DD408070C12577880043B0EA-Full\\_report.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/C500C109DD408070C12577880043B0EA-Full_report.pdf).

the time of their peace processes, Colombian women enjoyed more legal rights in comparison, as they were not bound to a formal caste system. Therefore, they were at a slight advantage in terms of accessing the negotiations.

Another factor that limited the ability of women to reach the table in Nepal was the difference in interests between the Nepali Congress, Maoist leadership, and women's groups. GP Koirala, the Prime Minister of the Nepali Congress Party, was particularly concerned with "losing power and influence in the 'new Nepal.'"<sup>27</sup> Koirala's Congress was structured around traditional elitist, patriarchal values, and they feared that including dissonant voices in the process would put their political status at risk. The Maoist leaders wanted to completely overthrow the monarchy and establish a federal people's republic; this was their goal from the start of the conflict. The mass uprising of April 2006, which resulted in a nationwide economic standstill in protest of the king's monarchy, gave the Maoists the ideal environment with which to seize power. After realizing that this was the Maoists' sole intention, despite their initial rhetoric of promoting women's rights and gender inclusivity, women organized mass protests in front of ministerial buildings in Kathmandu.<sup>28</sup> Maoist leaders, then, did not invite women to the table out of fear that they might further interfere with their goals.<sup>29</sup> Women's groups were less interested in a technical ceasefire or who would fill which political position – they wanted a much more holistic peace that would fundamentally change many aspects of the country's traditional caste system and power structures. As Gunther Baechler noted, "the women related to genuine human security concerns while the male negotiators circled around a superficial peace in order to avoid hard

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<sup>27</sup> Baechler, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Baechler, 5.

<sup>29</sup> Baechler, 5.

compromises that would have been necessary.”<sup>30</sup> Therefore, it is likely that the interests of women versus those in charge at the time – male political elites – were simply too incompatible for women to secure lead decision-making roles. As I will show, this was not an insurmountable barrier in Colombia, because male political leaders were more responsive to human security concerns and recognized the need for a more comprehensive agreement.

That being said, it is difficult to determine how much of an impact women’s absence *from the table itself* had on the outcome of the Nepalese peace process. Were women’s voices still heard and their demands met in other ways?

It should be noted that the negotiations between the Maoists and the Nepalese government did not constitute the entire scope of the peace process. There were many female-led organizations that worked to bridge the communications gap between civil society and the political elites, leveraging Resolution 1325 to bring women’s interests to the agenda. They accomplished this by establishing strong inter-organizational networks, then using common platforms with which to pressure the government and the Maoist forces.<sup>31</sup>

One such organization is the Shanti Malika Women’s Network for Peace, which formed in 2003 after a consultation between 150 women’s rights activist groups.<sup>32</sup> Realizing that no women were present on either side of the negotiation table, and were largely ignored as influential

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<sup>30</sup> Baechler, 4.

<sup>31</sup> K.C. and Van Der Haar.

<sup>32</sup> RAOnline. "Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Children." RAOnline Nepal: Civil War - Human Rights and Women: Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Children - Organisations Working on Women and Peace in Nepal. 2006.  
[https://www.raonline.ch/pages/story/np/cw\\_womli01a.html](https://www.raonline.ch/pages/story/np/cw_womli01a.html).

peacemakers during the process, Shanti Malika rooted their work around the sole mission of advancing Resolution 1325 in Nepal. Through collaborative forums and conferences, they brought together women activists from many different backgrounds to strategize on the best ways to create a female-led peace process. They also played a key role in raising women's issues from the local grassroots level to a much more visible and compelling element of international attention.

Unfortunately, many female-led organizations like Shanti Malika did not form until the last two or three years of the peace process, after the formal delegations had been participating in the negotiations for quite some time. In many cases, they formed after more attention was brought to the fact that women's interests were not represented in the initial draft of the peace agreement. There was no mention of women's rights or measures to address the sexual violence that women faced on a daily basis.<sup>33</sup> Although these groups succeeded in putting women's issues on a more public platform, this delay may have hindered their efforts to influence the process.

Bandana Rana, a Nepalese women's rights activist and UN CEDAW committee member, spoke to this during my interview with her: "At first, women did not even think about participation...it was not prioritized as much because their focus was more on advocating for ending the conflict. The actual negotiations felt very distant."<sup>34</sup> She later spoke of the one woman who was invited to attend formal negotiations, but only as a notekeeper: "She was included as an afterthought. And because she had a position, she was a Minister. At the time, the concept of including more

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<sup>33</sup> Rana, Bandana. Telephone interview with author, February 17, 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Rana, Bandana. Telephone interview with author, February 17, 2019.

women was not internalized.”<sup>35</sup> My conversation with Juanita Millán supported this point as well. When asked what could have been done differently to bring even more women to the peace table in Colombia, she replied “We did it two years late. We needed the gender subcommission from the beginning...gender trainings and gender advisers from the beginning. It needed to be in the design of the peace process.”<sup>36</sup> If more women’s organizations had been active earlier on, they may have had a greater influence on the outcome of the peace talks - perhaps even opening up a seat or two for female appointees on the formal delegation.

Despite their absence in the early stages of the Nepalese peace process, women’s organizations did succeed in securing a historical percentage of seats in the political body that would eventually determine the future of their country: the Constituent Assembly. The section below addresses the formation and impact of the Assembly in further detail.

### **A. Representation in the Constituent Assembly**

A frequently-cited explanation for the absence of women in Nepal’s peace negotiations is the fact that they were already severely underrepresented in the political sphere. This theory is supported by research about other peace processes. For example, during the Philippines’ peace negotiations from 2008-2012, a female was president and women occupied several major political roles in the Cabinet. The Philippines went on to achieve one of the most gender-inclusive peace processes to date; a quarter of signatories on the final accord were women.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Rana, Bandana. Telephone interview with author, February 17, 2019.

<sup>36</sup> Millán, Juanita. Telephone interview with author, January 30, 2019.

<sup>37</sup> Santiago, Irene M. “The Participation of Women in the Mindanao Peace Process.” October 2015, 3. <http://www.unwomen.org/>

Thania Paffenholz, Director of the Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative at the Graduate Institute Geneva, echoed this sentiment during our interview: “The problem is not that they are not at the table, the problem is that they’re not in political decision making at the highest ranks and files. I could imagine it’s a very different picture in Western countries, because you’d already have many more women in Parliament, for example.”<sup>38</sup> Because women were not given a voice in major political decisions even before the civil war, it would have been extremely difficult for them to then occupy seats at the negotiating table in a time of crisis.

In 2006, when the peace process concluded, the Assembly was comprised of 100% men.<sup>39</sup> Recognizing this discrepancy in Nepal, female leaders demanded a 33% seat quota for women in the Constituent Assembly, the body charged with drafting a new constitution for the country. Women used human rights frameworks – mainly citing Nepal’s commitments under Resolution 1325 – to justify their advocacy. They also pointed to the obvious lack of gender-focused measures in the first draft of the peace accord to further strengthen their case for better inclusion, drawing a link between women’s political participation and a more sustainable and equitable peace.<sup>40</sup> If the Assembly failed to honor the requested 33% quota, they vowed to occupy the streets of Nepal until their demands were met.

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/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2017/participation-of-women-in-mindanao-peace-process.pdf?la=en&vs=3030.

<sup>38</sup> Paffenholz, Thania. Telephone interview with author, March 13, 2019.

<sup>39</sup> Hewitt, Sarah. "Money, Power and Muscles: Women in Nepalese Politics." Australian Institute of International Affairs. May 8, 2017.

<https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/local-elections-womens-participation-nepal/>

<sup>40</sup> Cottrell, Jill. “The Constituent Assembly of Nepal: An Agenda for Women.” June 2, 2008.

<https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/the-constituent-assembly-of-nepal-an-agenda-for-women.pdf>.



Fortunately, people listened. For the first time in Nepal's history, women's representation reached a "critical mass" as they took over a total of 197 out of 575 Assembly seats in 2008. Not only was this the first time Nepal had been able to elect representatives to write their constitution, it was historic in that women and minorities had never before occupied such a large number of seats in a state organization.<sup>41</sup> Civil society was hopeful that this milestone would lead to more space for gender-related issues in the resulting constitution, ultimately creating more appropriate and sustainable policy outcomes for women.

However, having a critical mass of women is not sufficient to place women's issues on the policy agenda in a deeply patriarchal society. Decisions made by the Constituent Assembly reflect this argument. Female members advocated strongly for a number of women's rights issues, such as gender quotas in all state bodies, eradicating citizenship discrimination on the basis of gender, and enforcing legal consequences for perpetrators of sexual violence. Despite their efforts, they were often ignored by male CA members in leadership roles, who, through majority vote, could override their proposal drafts in favor of less equitable laws.<sup>42</sup> For example, a female committee member proposed a provision that would instate equal citizenship rights for both men and women, yet she was outvoted by male leaders who proposed an even more discriminatory law than what was currently in place. Members also rejected women's attempts to grant constitutional status to the Women's Commission within the CA, stating that it would open the door for other minority groups – like Dalits or Janajatis – to then claim the same formal

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<sup>41</sup> Kanel, Tara. "Women's Political Representation in Nepal: An Experience from the 2008 Constituent Assembly." *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 20, no. 4 (2014): 41. doi:10.1080/12259276.2014.11666197.

<sup>42</sup> Kanel, 52.

status.<sup>43</sup> These examples show that while pure representation in influential institutions is important, it is not enough to just meet a designated quota of women – especially if they are not in formal decision-making roles.

This section has highlighted several major obstacles that kept women from accessing the negotiation table in Nepal: incompatible interests between different parties, the delayed formation of women-led organizations, and the lack of female representation in politics. Despite their absence from the formal negotiations, women did secure a significant number of seats in the Constituent Assembly, but even there their impact remained limited even there. This case suggests that simply achieving a “critical mass” of female bodies is not sufficient to guarantee women a meaningful voice. As the Colombian case below illustrates, other factors, such as level of institutional support, the presence of critical female “champions,” and party ideology, have an even greater impact on the outcome than simply achieving a particular quota.<sup>44</sup> Women must participate in multiple capacities, from civil society groups to the negotiation table, in order to form the crucial support network they need to have a strong impact.

## Colombia

### **I. Female participation in peace accords, 1990-2016**

#### **A. Early peace talks, 1990-1994**

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<sup>43</sup> Kanel, 53.

<sup>44</sup> Kanel, 50.

Until the passing of Resolution 1325, and even for years afterwards, women were virtually absent from the negotiation table in Colombian peace processes. Between 1990-1994, the government of Colombia signed peace accords with the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), the Workers Revolutionary Party (PRT), the Quintin Lame Armed Movement (MAQL) and the Socialist Renovation Movement (CRS), all of which were armed groups that conducted smaller-scale operations throughout rural parts of the country. Despite many women having an active role as guerilla fighters in these groups, only one female guerilla was included as a signatory throughout each of the four sets of peace talks.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, when exploratory talks occurred between the government and the National Liberation Army (ELN) between 2005-2007, women held no visible roles.<sup>46</sup>

### **B. Peace talks with the FARC, 1998-2002**

Over the course of four sets of peace talks with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), women gradually became more involved in the negotiation process. María Emma Mejía, now Permanent Representative of Colombia to the UN, was one of the first women named as a principal negotiator in the peace talks with the FARC, and therefore one of the first to get a seat at the table.<sup>47</sup> Mejía's prior political career, during which she held the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs, aptly positioned her to join the negotiating team, as only individuals with a high-ranking political role were typically given a seat. It was also extremely rare for a

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<sup>45</sup> Bouvier, Virginia M. "Gender and the Role of Women in Colombia's Peace Process." New York: UN Women, March 4, 2016, 17. <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Gender-and-the-Role-of-Women-in-Colombia-s-Peace-Process-English.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> Bouvier, 17.

<sup>47</sup> Bouvier, 17.

woman to hold such an office in Colombian politics; Mejía was the first (and only) woman to become Minister Delegate with Presidential Duties in 1998, right before she joined the peace talks.<sup>48</sup> Ana Teresa Bernal, founder of The National Network of Citizen Initiatives Against War (Redepaz), was subsequently tasked with coordinating civil society input during the negotiations. Bernal was granted a seat following significant advocacy efforts from female civil society members, who had repeatedly demanded a woman representative be included on their behalf. With one woman at the table and another speaking up on behalf of the Colombian people, momentum was generated around the inclusion and participation of women in the process as a whole.

Yet, even with the significant internal push after the additions of Mejía and Bernal, there remained a lack of awareness and motivation among senior authorities to radically change how they were doing business. The women's movement was just getting started – for example, hundreds joined together in 2000 via public hearings and meetings on gender inequality in the peace process – but virtually no high level government officials were in attendance.<sup>49</sup> Women would have to get their voices heard in order to enact any kind of sustainable change, especially as the situation between the government and the FARC grew more dire.

### **C. Havana talks, 2012-2016**

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<sup>48</sup> Bwm-Admin. "Her Excellency María Emma Mejía." Washington Diplomat. [https://washdiplomat.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=12128&Itemid=74](https://washdiplomat.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=12128&Itemid=74).

<sup>49</sup> Bouvier, 17.

After the passage of Resolution 1325 in 2000, the Colombian government adopted a key three-fold commitment from the resolution as they prepared to enter another round of talks in Havana: “the *prevention* of violent conflict, the *protection* of all civilians, and the *participation* of women in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding.”<sup>50</sup> While the mere commitment was a step forward, it was mainly Colombian women’s efforts to increase government accountability that created promising conditions for greater female inclusion in the Havana talks. For example, women-led groups such as the Women’s Initiative for Peace and the 1325 Coalition helped secure a provision in the National Development Plan that required “the promotion of direct and autonomous participation of women’s organizations in...political negotiation processes related to social and armed conflicts.”<sup>51</sup> Additionally, Piedad Córdoba, one of the few female Colombian senators, was uniquely responsible for opening up communication lines between the government, the FARC, and civil society. She secured the release of over a dozen hostages, building confidence across all parties that was necessary to begin and sustain talks in Havana.

Due to the increasing pressure and advocacy from women’s groups, as well as momentum following Córdoba’s success, two females were appointed as “alternate negotiators” on the government side and two were designated “collaborators” on the FARC side. However, all principal negotiators were men with ties to either Colombia’s defense sector or armed forces, including two retired generals and a former advisor for Colombia’s Ministry of Defense.<sup>52</sup>

According to analysis by researchers Céspedes-Báez and Ruiz, this reflects the idea at the time

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<sup>50</sup> Bouvier, 18.

<sup>51</sup> Bouvier, 18.

<sup>52</sup> Céspedes-Báez, Lina M., and Felipe Jaramillo Ruiz. "Peace Without Women Does Not Go! Women's Struggle for Inclusion in Colombia's Peace Process with the FARC." Colombia Internacional. October 15, 2017. <https://revistas.uniandes.edu.co/doi/full/10.7440/colombiaint94.2018.04>.

that war was strictly a men's purview, and negotiations designed to end war should therefore be conducted by men only.<sup>53</sup> Rodrigo Londoño Echeverri, the former main leader of the FARC, summed up the general sentiment with the following statement: "The debate between men who know war makes things easier."<sup>54</sup> In fact, women comprised an estimated 45% of the FARC ranks by 2004<sup>55</sup> – revealing the irony and inaccuracy behind this sentiment.

The lack of female participation in Havana came as a shock to women's rights groups, the international community, and Colombian civil society. After all the progress made via Resolution 1325 globally, and the momentum created by women on a national and international level since then, it seemed that in 2012 such a critical peace process would almost *necessarily* include more women at the table. The Colombian government, under the resolution and their stated commitment, was supposedly accountable to "the *participation* of women in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding."<sup>56</sup> It would undoubtedly require more than just a UN resolution – but a great deal more time and support – to see the kind of change that women expected and desired. One year after formal talks began in Havana, however, women successfully leveraged the peace process to promote greater women's rights on a much more public platform.

## **I. National Summit of Women for Peace, October 2013**

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<sup>53</sup> Céspedes-Báez and Ruiz.

<sup>54</sup> Céspedes-Báez and Ruiz.

<sup>55</sup> "Women and the Conflict in Colombia." Wikigender. <https://www.wikigender.org/wiki/women-and-the-conflict-in-colombia/>.

<sup>56</sup> Bouvier, 18.

Often cited as a major turning point for the role of women in peace processes, the National Summit of Women for Peace in October 2013 brought together almost 500 Colombian women from diverse political, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. With backing from UN Women and several other international organizations, they gathered in Bogotá for three days to demand gender equality and the inclusion of more women's voices in the negotiations. The summit's main goal was to call upon Colombian society to actively participate in the peace process, as well as develop specific recommendations around women's participation. It was the first time that such a large number of women – from all facets of Colombian society – had gathered together in one location with this purpose.

Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, a grassroots organization dedicated to quelling violence against women through diverse mass mobilizations, was one of the larger groups in attendance. Its lead coordinator, Marina Gallego, explained how the women managed to get President Santos' attention: "As the organizations convening the Summit, we told the negotiators in Havana that we did not want peace to be made for us, but to be the peacemakers."<sup>57</sup> After generating over 800 suggestions from participants and gaining strong support from international media outlets, including UN Women, their mobilization finally gained the public recognition that it needed.<sup>58</sup> It was the unprecedented wave of international support that put their concerns on President Santos' radar – as well as bringing them to the attention of the FARC – and it paid off.

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<sup>57</sup> "Women Build Peace in Colombia." HuffPost. December 07, 2017.

[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/women-build-peace-in-colo\\_b\\_7502056](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/women-build-peace-in-colo_b_7502056).

<sup>58</sup> "Women Are Vital Peacebuilders in Colombia." Vital Voices. March 03, 2017.

<https://www.vitalvoices.org/2016/09/women-are-vital-peacebuilders-in-colombia/>.

Shortly thereafter, the gender dynamic slowly began to shift. Santos answered the Summit's demands several weeks later by appointing two women as lead decision makers on the government's negotiating team. There were times when women comprised one-third of the total delegates in Havana, surpassing the global average.<sup>59</sup> As a response to these changes, a group of FARC women created their own website in 2013 containing interviews, multimedia presentations, and articles detailing their lives and experiences as female guerilla fighters.<sup>60</sup> The website aimed to promote gender equality in Colombia while destroying the myth that female FARC members were victims of their male counterparts in the conflict.<sup>61</sup> This created more visibility around the realities of life as a female combatant, and helped inform the recommendations of the gender subcommission that I discuss in the section below.

## **II. Impact of women in the Colombian peace process**

### **A. At the table**

One critical factor that allowed women to access the table in Colombia versus Nepal was the timing of the two peace processes. The Nepalese peace process ended with the signing of the peace accord in 2006, just six years after Resolution 1325 came into effect, while the Havana talks in Colombia occurred from 2012-2016. During the Nepalese peace talks, there was no national action plan in place that addressed the participation of women in peacemaking efforts. This only happened in 2011, after other countries around the world began ramping up their

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<sup>59</sup> "Women's Role in the Colombian Peace Process." Nobel Women's Initiative. October 06, 2016. <https://nobelwomensinitiative.org/womens-role-in-the-colombian-peace-process/>.

<sup>60</sup> Bouvier, 20.

<sup>61</sup> "Colombia Farc Rebels Launch Website of the Female Rebel." BBC News. October 13, 2013. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-24510335>.



efforts.<sup>62</sup> Additionally, the Peace Support Working Group (PSWG) – a UN affiliated body that was responsible for promoting the participation of women in peacemaking efforts – was not created until July 2006, after it became clear that women’s interests were not being sufficiently reflected in the draft agreement. At this point, the peace process was already well underway. In Colombia, however, the government had already expressed a public commitment to Resolution 1325 prior to the Havana talks. The international community also served as a stronger accountability mechanism in the Colombian case: with the prevalence of social media and other technology in 2012, the activities, successes, and struggles of women’s groups were much more visible and garnered significant international support.

With Colombian women occupying even more seats at the table by 2015 – 43% of FARC delegates and 20% of the government’s negotiating team<sup>63</sup> – the peace agenda began to broaden. Female negotiators advocated for and secured crucial reforms around land distribution, victims’ right to justice and reparations, and political participation.<sup>64</sup> They included gender-specific provisions in the peace agreement, ensuring equal access to rural land for women and harsher punishments for perpetrators of sexual violence during the conflict.<sup>65</sup> Women also helped the peace deal progress at a faster pace by pushing for increased accountability from both the FARC and the government. For example, as a result of demands by female negotiators, the FARC initiated confidence-building measures such as a formal apology process and the release of child

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<sup>62</sup> "A Time for Peace: Nepal Adopts National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security." UN Women. February 17, 2011. <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2011/2/a-time-for-peace-nepal-adopts-national-action-plan-on-women-peace-and-security>.

<sup>63</sup> Vogelstein, Rachel B., and Jamille Bigio. "Women's Participation in Peace Processes: Colombia." Council on Foreign Relations. December 15, 2017. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/womens-participation-peace-processes-colombia>.

<sup>64</sup> Vogelstein and Bigio.

<sup>65</sup> Vogelstein and Bigio.

soldiers. These actions made the Colombian government more amenable to further negotiations, ultimately increasing the likelihood of a signed peace deal.<sup>66</sup>

Without females at the table, several critical issues would not have been properly addressed during the negotiations. For example, Alexandra Tenny, former chief of the Eradication, Narcotics Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy in Bogota, was brought in as a peacekeeper after being requested by female delegates. Tenny suggested that the Ministry of the Interior engage mothers in local communities to identify the location of IEDs, an idea that no man in the Ministry had thought of previously. Her suggestion directly improved the efficiency and speed at which they could locate and disarm IEDs, presenting a strong case for why we should include more women at the negotiation table.<sup>67</sup>

### **B. In the gender subcommission**

Perhaps one of the most notable achievements of the Colombian peace process was the creation of a gender subcommission in 2014, the first of its kind, intended to advise the negotiating team on incorporating gender-specific provisions into the final peace agreement. The subcommission was initially comprised of two five-person teams, each led by FARC negotiator Victoria Sandino and the government's Human Rights Director, María-Paulina Riveros.<sup>68</sup> Gender experts from

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<sup>66</sup> Bouvier, 18.

<sup>67</sup> Silk, Emily. "Pathways for Peace: Case Studies of Women's Leadership in Peace Processes." Women Deliver. March 10, 2019. <https://womendeliver.org/2019/pathways-for-peace-case-studies-of-womens-leadership-in-peace-processes/>.

<sup>68</sup> Winstanley, Louise. "Women's Participation in the Colombian Peace Process." May 2018, 2. <https://www.abcolombia.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/ABColumbia-LatinNews-Women-Participation-Peace-Process-.pdf>.

Cuba and Norway also provided input. Multiple delegations of women from different ethnic and political backgrounds were invited to participate in the formal negotiations, including a group of over 60 female victims who offered testimony on their experiences to inform the process.<sup>69</sup> These included female farmers, indigenous women, former combatants and sexual violence survivors.<sup>70</sup> The subcommission did not have formal decision-making power, but did receive strong support from the government and FARC delegates as well as the international community.

The gender subcommission helped to improve the inclusivity of the resulting peace agreement. For example, transitional justice mechanisms were updated to address gender-specific cases, women were given priority for land subsidies and credits, and sections were added detailing rights of the LGBTI community.<sup>71</sup> The Truth Commission, which served as a way for victims to communicate their stories and receive reparations for human rights abuses, added special hearings for women that focused on their unique experience in the war. Additionally, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace mandated that there would be no more amnesty for perpetrators of sexual violence.<sup>72</sup>

It is undeniable that the subcommission had a strong positive influence on the peace accord, but it is also important to note that there were also numerous women *sitting at the table*, with

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<sup>69</sup> Salvesen, Hilde, and Dag Nylander. "Towards an Inclusive Peace: Women and the Gender Approach in the Colombian Peace Process." July 2017, 3. [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Salvesen\\_Nylander\\_Towards an inclusive peace\\_July2017\\_final.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Salvesen_Nylander_Towards%20an%20inclusive%20peace_July2017_final.pdf).

<sup>70</sup> Elston, Cherilyn. "'There Is No Peace without Women!': Gender and the Colombian Peace Process." Fawcett Society. September 23, 2016. <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/blog/no-peace-without-women-gender-colombian-peace-process>.

<sup>71</sup> Salvesen and Nylander, 4.

<sup>72</sup> Salvesen and Nylander, 4.

decision-making power, when the subcommission presented their recommendations. The group was not active from the beginning of the process, but formed two years after peace talks had begun. Most of the formal delegation initially considered the subcommission an “afterthought”<sup>73</sup> – it was created only as a way to quell pressure from international organizations, and its work and purpose were not taken seriously for quite some time. For example, members of the subcommission were not assigned formal meeting times or spaces, being forced to work in any available space they could find – often early in the morning.<sup>74</sup> Their legitimacy, therefore, was dependent on the female negotiators who could support their ideas at the table. If it weren’t for women’s efforts in the first place, the gender subcommission would never have formed – and the fact that women were also included as negotiators during this time allowed them to have a greater impact on the peace agreement.

Juanita Millán, the only female member of the Colombian military delegation to Havana, echoed this line of reasoning during our interview. She emphasized the importance of international media coverage on women’s ability to impact the peace talks, and the need to have women working in multiple capacities: “Everything was a chain of women. The women in the gender subcommission were doing good work and making progress, but this only made it to the news if another woman supported them and brought it to the media.”<sup>75</sup> As was demonstrated during the National Summit of Women for Peace, which received significant media attention due to the number of high-profile women who attended, international actors can make all the difference in terms of putting an issue on the government’s agenda. Salvesen and Nylander also support the

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<sup>73</sup> Salvesen and Nylander, 4.

<sup>74</sup> Salvesen and Nylander, 4.

<sup>75</sup> Juanita Millán, telephone interview with author, January 30, 2019.

case for women in a much more visible role, arguing that “Women must be able to influence the decision-making process....it is not sufficient to establish a gender commission where women meet to discuss issues of gender equality.”<sup>76</sup> Instead, as demonstrated in both Nepal and Colombia, women must be present at multiple levels – including the formal negotiation table – in order to 1) have their interests included in a peace agreement, and 2) to have a significant, sustainable impact on peace.

## Conclusion and recommendations

The motivation behind this study was twofold: selfishly, I simply wanted to learn more about these two countries and their respective conflicts, as I have had a long-time interest in both regions. More importantly, as a female student of negotiation strategy, I hoped to shed light on some of the underlying factors that might explain why we don’t see more female faces making important political decisions – despite 19 years of work following the landmark UN resolution 1325. I wanted to better understand the obstacles that women faced when attempting to access the table in Colombia and Nepal, and what could have been done differently to ensure more female signatures on the peace accords. Through the lens of the Colombian and Nepalese cases, I have demonstrated that including women at the peace table is not just “the right thing to do” – it also tends to result in a more equitable, sustainable, and efficient outcome for the peace process. The following three recommendations are based on this conclusion.

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<sup>76</sup> Salvesen and Nylander, 5.

**I. Designate specific female “champions” to represent the interests of women at multiple levels – *before* peace talks begin**

Ideally, a female champion is an individual who has the ability, knowledge, and cross-sector relationships necessary to be a spokesperson for a particular group of women in peace negotiations. As my interviews with both Thania Paffenholz and Juanita Millán demonstrated, female champions can help change the rhetoric around female participation at the table by providing a direct link between women’s interests and the different actors in the international community. If a woman is the negotiating team’s media liaison, for example, she will have a very visible platform available to communicate women’s actions on a local and international level. More people watching means greater momentum around issues that affect both men and women alike, leading to greater accountability – and hopefully greater incentives for those in leadership roles to act on women’s demands.

Women could also act as “female champions” by leveraging their political status and connections to elevate the concerns of civil society. This was relatively effective in Colombia’s gender subcommission. María-Paulina Riveros, one of its two appointed leaders, was also the Human Rights Director for the Colombian government. Riveros used her political status to form strong alliances with her FARC counterparts, then was able to bring the ideas they agreed on to the negotiation table.<sup>77</sup> She therefore provided a crucial link between the members of the gender subcommission, who did not have decision-making power, and the rest of the formal delegation

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<sup>77</sup> Winstanley, Louise. “Women’s Participation in the Colombian Peace Process.” May 2018, 2. <https://www.abcolombia.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/ABColumbia-LatinNews-Women-Participation-Peace-Process-.pdf>.

to ensure that their concerns were incorporated into the peace agreement. Women in other political roles, such as parliamentarians or presidential advisees, or even local gender experts, could also serve as champions for civil society. For example, in the Colombian case, both Norway and Cuba provided international gender experts to advise the gender subcommission when needed. Including more *Colombian* gender experts – women with deep connections to the local community – would have given female members of civil society a local advocate they could trust with their concerns and ideas.

In Nepal, strong female champions didn't emerge until later on in the peace process, once women realized that the first draft of the constitution did not include sections on gender-related issues. They participated in the Constituent Assembly, but even then, struggled to get their interests on the political agenda. In Colombia, after several failed iterations of the peace talks, significant pressure from the UN and other international actors, and women's participation at multiple levels, female champions were eventually able to affect the process in a more meaningful way. This points to the importance of identifying female representatives early on who have direct access to multiple levels of influence in the peace talks.

## **II. Include a mechanism for engaging civil society when *designing* the peace process**

As my interview with Bandana Rana revealed, sometimes women are not necessarily concerned with getting to the negotiation table; they simply want an end to the conflict and to feel safe in their communities. They may not know the best way to actually influence the process, and they

may not have access to resources that can help them do that successfully. Additionally, people may not know what “gender” really means; often it is assumed that the term only refers to women and women’s issues.<sup>78</sup> Engaging civil society early on in the peace process can help contribute to a more holistic exchange of ideas and information about what actually needs to be on the agenda, as well as educating them on the best ways to articulate their needs to decision makers.

Additionally, early and active participation of civil society organizations can enhance the sustainability of peace agreements.<sup>79</sup> Because they are typically the main stakeholders that implement the accord on the ground after the peace deal has been signed, these organizations tend to have a close relationship with local communities.<sup>80</sup> Civil society leaders speak up on behalf of those who don’t have access to political spaces – the rural farmer, the single mother, victims of sexual violence. There is a greater sense of local ownership when communities are informed and involved in the political decision-making process, and civil society can help to bridge that gap. In Guatemala, for example, several civil society organizations served as independent monitors of the implementation of the 1996 peace deal, and are credited as playing a significant role in its sustainability.<sup>81</sup> These Guatemalan think tanks produced rigorous studies

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<sup>78</sup> Bandana Rana, telephone interview with author, February 17, 2019.

<sup>79</sup> "Civil Society: Civil Society & Peacebuilding Processes." Peace Building Initiative - Civil Society & Peacebuilding Processes.

<http://www.peacebuildinginitiative.org/index0ecb.html?pageId=1754>.

<sup>80</sup> Sanchez-Garzoli, Gimena. “Civil Society Is Colombia's Best Bet for Constructing Peace.” WOLA, April 4, 2016.

<https://www.wola.org/analysis/civil-society-is-colombias-best-bet-for-constructing-peace/>.

<sup>81</sup> Ross, Nick. “Civil Society’s Role in Monitoring and Verifying Peace Agreements: Seven Lessons from International Experiences” Geneva: Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative (The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies). January 2017, 11.

<https://www.inclusivepeace.org/sites/default/files/Civil-Society-Monitoring-Peace-Agreements.pdf>



and data analyses, allowing for continuous evaluation of the peace agreement to ensure that it remained accountable to the people it most affected.<sup>82</sup>

If civil society had been involved earlier on in Colombia's peace process, the gender subcommission might have taken shape much sooner. As Juanita Millán noted, it was the delay in action that really hindered the subcommission's efforts – that is, until they gained access to the formal table via the few female delegates that had already been appointed.<sup>83</sup> In Nepal, civil society was also extremely active, but they were missing that crucial link to the formal talks that would have made their interests and demands much more visible. This mechanism should not be an afterthought, or a reluctant reaction to events on the ground, but a deliberate process that is woven into the very design of the peace process.

### **III. Create better access to resources and education for young women who wish to pursue political careers**

It seems that the most significant barrier for women in both Colombia and Nepal, in terms of getting to the table, was their lack of prior political participation – all male negotiators held top leadership roles in either the government or the rebel forces. As Thania Paffenholz stressed, “This is the only way to get to the table.”<sup>84</sup> The few women that did join the delegation in Colombia were also high-ranking government officials with close ties to the president and/or Congress. Even the designated female “notekeeper” in Nepal was a presidential advisor. If we

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<sup>82</sup> Ross, 11.

<sup>83</sup> Juanita Millán, telephone interview with author, January 30, 2019.

<sup>84</sup> Thania Paffenholz, telephone interview with author, March 13, 2019.

want to see more women negotiating, we need to first ensure that more women actively participate in politics.

Irene Santiago, one of the female negotiators for the Philippine government during the 2001-2004 peace process, also believes that this political barrier largely prevents women's inclusion in negotiations – and it is the most difficult barrier to overcome.<sup>85</sup> Because of their limited experience in the public sphere, women still have to prove that their inclusion is a valuable tool rather than simply a necessary quota to achieve.<sup>86</sup> Holding political office not only puts women at the forefront of government decision making, increasing their public visibility, but also demonstrates the credibility and technical expertise that is required of a negotiator.

The problem is, although female representation in politics has undoubtedly improved since both the Nepalese and Colombian peace processes, there are still too few women pursuing political careers. This is due to a number of reasons, from fear of public scrutiny to concerns about having children while holding political office.<sup>87</sup> One of the most common concerns, however, is that women simply don't think they would make good politicians.<sup>88</sup> There needs to be a greater effort, on both a local and international level, to engage women in politics from a younger age. This could take many different forms: grassroots organizations that hold workshops for girls in elementary schools, meet-and-greets with female political leaders from their own country, or

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<sup>85</sup> O'Reilly, Marie, Andrea Ó Súilleabháin, and Thania Paffenholz. *Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes*. Report. 2015, 22. <https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/IPI-E-pub-Reimagining-Peacemaking.pdf>.

<sup>86</sup> O'Reilly, Súilleabháin, and Paffenholz, 22.

<sup>87</sup> Landsbaum, Claire. "How to Get More Women Involved in Politics." *The Cut*. November 16, 2016. <https://www.thecut.com/2016/11/how-to-get-more-women-involved-in-politics.html>.

<sup>88</sup> Landsbaum, 2016.

mock debates held by all-female teams. If we show young women that they can lead in politics, and provide them with better resources to do so, we might just start to see the gender dynamic shift.

## Looking ahead

In October 2020, just over a year from now, the UN will mark the 20-year anniversary of Resolution 1325. A group will convene to assess global progress towards the goals of the resolution, considering everything from female participation at the peace table to gender-sensitive language in peace agreements. Since the Nepalese and Colombian peace deals were signed, women remain significantly underrepresented in formal negotiations around the world, but progress is visible. Women's civil society organizations were consulted in every single peace process in 2017, and networks of female mediators are growing and collaborating across different regions.<sup>89</sup> Also in 2017, a record 14,000 women were elected to public office in Nepal following three rounds of elections.<sup>90</sup> Meanwhile, Colombia "shattered the glass ceiling" by achieving gender equality in its cabinet for the first time in history, and welcomed its first female vice president.<sup>91</sup> While these are all positive steps, there is much more work to be done to implement the goals of Resolution 1325. As this paper has shown, women must be present in multiple capacities to have a meaningful impact on peace processes. They need to be mediators,

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<sup>89</sup> "Report of the Secretary-General on Women and Peace and Security." October 9, 2018, 9. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1831325.pdf>.

<sup>90</sup> Akseer, Tabasum, Richard Batcheler, and Lesley Wynn. "Nepal Elections: More Women Have a Seat at the Table, But Will They Have a Voice?" The Asia Foundation. December 13, 2017. <https://asiafoundation.org/2017/12/13/nepal-elections-women-seat-table-will-voice/>.

<sup>91</sup> Moloney, Anastasia. "Colombia Shatters Glass Ceiling with Gender-equal Cabinet." Reuters. July 26, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-colombia-women-politics/colombia-shatters-glass-ceiling-with-gender-equal-cabinet-idUSKBN1KG2HM>.

advisors, negotiators, and champions for others who can't make it to the table. Hopefully – with lessons learned from the Nepalese and Colombian peace processes – we will see the ongoing effort, due diligence, and international support needed to ensure that women are not just filling a quota anymore, but lending a real voice for change.

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