

Theory of Change –

For Strengthening the Leadership of Women and Youth

*Developed by the Inclusivity
Community of Practice*

Summary

The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers seeks to enhance the effectiveness of efforts towards peaceful and inclusive societies by increasing the active collaboration between religious and traditional actors and other key stakeholders in conflict transformation. The Network's mission is advanced through its objectives geared towards contributing to Sustainable Development Goals 5, 16, and 17, and the UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security. Through the work of its membership and its overall strategic focus in mainstreaming and advancing inclusivity within its collective programming, working groups and other modalities of engagement, the Network contributes to strengthening the leadership of women, youth, and other marginalized groups in all of their diversities, within peacemaking and broader peacebuilding processes.

Through the expertise of the Network's 75+ global membership, the Network has developed a theory of change hypothesis that outlines the areas of action that need to be addressed to achieve the meaningful participation and leadership of women, youth, and other marginalized populations as a necessary step towards long-term sustainable peace. The hypothesis is that when women and youth design, lead, and implement peace processes at all levels, when their role in peacemaking is well understood at the individual, institutional, and socio-cultural levels; then the results of those processes are more likely to be sustainable. Therefore, program and policy interventions need to be designed and implemented to address barriers on these three levels.

Background

In its work to mainstream and advance inclusivity within its membership and programs, as well as to prepare for its five-year strategic plan, the Network evaluated its past engagements and programs to build on lessons learned on what has or has not been successful in advancing the leadership of women, youth, and other marginalized populations.

In 2014, the Network established its Gender Working Group to progressively ensure robust gender inclusion. The Working Group organized a series of action-oriented and collaborative consultations on gendered responses to violent extremism. The working group expanded into an Inclusivity Working Group to also address the inclusion of youth and other marginalized groups in peacebuilding. In 2018, the Network decided to review its overall progress and hired an external evaluator to review the developmental performance of the Network. In the evaluator's report, inclusivity was acknowledged as a great challenge because most religious and traditional leaders are older men. The evaluation revealed a dire need for the Network to strengthen its approach to inclusivity, incorporating it as a cross-cutting issue in all its work going forward. Specifically, it was concluded that inclusivity needed to be mainstreamed both externally within programs but also internally within its membership and Advisory Group Meetings. These recommendations were then incorporated into the Network's Five Year Strategy, both through mainstreaming inclusivity into each priority area, but also giving inclusivity its own priority focus on advancing the leadership of women and girls within peacemaking and broader peacebuilding processes.

The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers

Through its work, the Network has most notably found there is a lack of analysis and focus on the intersection of women, youth, religion, conflict, and peace within the international community that has led to not only a gap in understanding the nature of conflicts, but has impeded the full potential of resolving conflicts, promoting healing after conflict, and consolidating and building sustainable peace. In order to address this gap, the Network will need to continue designing interventions not only focused on research and building the capacity of individuals, but will also need to address the institutional and socio-cultural barriers to women and youth's inclusion within peace processes. The Network's interventions will also need to continue to fully integrate inclusivity throughout all aspects of its programming, Network membership and its functions, including how the Network approaches and structures its funding mechanisms. Since the evaluation, the Network has been making great strides in changing its approach to advancing inclusivity. The Network has implemented youth-led research projects, conducted capacity-building trainings specifically for women and youth, given small grants to 50 youth and women-led and focused organizations, and ensured its Membership is made up of more than 30% of women and youth-led or focused organizations. Most recently in June of 2021, the Network made a Generation Equality Commitment to transform how it commits its funding to advancing its inclusivity work, through making the commitment to allocate 30% of its future programmatic funding specifically to women and youth-led and focused organizations.

The Network's Theory of Change to Advance Inclusivity

The Individual Level

Women and youth face many barriers in their personal capacities, which prevents them from participating and leading in peacebuilding processes. Women make up more than two-thirds of the world's 796 million illiterate people and just 39% of rural girls attend secondary school compared

to their male counterparts at 45%.¹ Women also face time constraints to engage, as they do three times more unpaid care work than men as well.² Youth also face unique individual barriers, including high employment rates, which currently stands globally at 13.6% according to the International Labour Organization.³ Both women and youth are vulnerable to financial insecurity, with less access to paid work in both the formal and informal labor markets, and lower wages for equal work in comparison to their male counterparts. Women and youth who have multiple intersecting identities, such as being an individual with a disability, being an ethnic or religious minority, or identifying as LGBTQ++, face further barriers and obstacles to their active participation and leadership. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these barriers, including increasing the level of gender-based violence against women and girls, as well as increasing the rates of early child marriage and school drop out because of school closures due to the pandemic.⁴

Due to these individual constraints, Network programming and interventions should focus on women and youth's active participation and leadership skills and competencies in order to address these inequalities. Programming on the individual level tailored to intersectional identities can build the women and girls' confidence, capacity, and connections in order to better participate and lead in conflict resolution.

¹ UN Nations. "The World's Women: Trends and Statistics." 2015. https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/downloads/worldswomen2015_report.pdf

² OECD. "Enabling Women's Economic Empowerment." June 3, 2019. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/4d0229cd-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/4d0229cd-en>

³ International Labour Organization. "Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020: Technology and the future of jobs." 2020. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-dgreports/-dcomm/-publ/documents/publication/wcms_737648.pdf

⁴ United Nations: "UN Secretary General's Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women." 2020. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women>



Network Theory of Change: Advancing Inclusivity and Sustainable Peace

Vision: increase the active collaboration between religious and traditional actors and other key stakeholders in conflict transformation.

The 3 Levels of Peacebuilding

The Institutional Level

Problem: social institutions, such as forced marriage and barriers to quality education limit opportunities for women and young women.

Initiative: act as facilitators between religious and traditional leaders, women, youth, and upon multilateral and government levels to create space for their voices to be heard.

The Individual Level

Problem: women and youth are more financially insecure due to the lack of employment opportunities.

Initiative: conduct capacity-sharing and training opportunities, facilitating mentorship networks, and granting fellowship and direct funding.

The Socio-Cultural Level

Problem: social norms due to inequality and power imbalances, such as bias and stereotypes against women and youth, which hinders their ability to lead within their societies.

Initiative: raising awareness about the importance of inclusivity through print, social media, or workshops to decrease discriminatory social norms.

The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers

The Institutional Level

Women and youth face many structural exclusions that limit their opportunities to lead and participate in peacemaking and broader peacebuilding processes at the institutional level. These exclusions can result from financial, political, religious, cultural, or legal restrictions; however, these restrictions are often interconnected and are built upon each other. Social institutions, such as early and forced marriage and barriers to quality education, further limit opportunities for women and young women. According to the World Bank, women have just three-quarters of the legal rights afforded to men.¹ Without these same afforded rights, women and young women face challenges when addressing for example, gender-based violence related crimes within peacebuilding efforts or when there are legal restrictions on women and young women's freedom of movement. The same discriminatory laws can be applied to youth in many cases. The rules within a country's political institutional framework, such as the rules for young people to be able to run for office also can be discriminatory based on their age and perceived lack of experience. Again, intersecting identities can create further hindrances to access, such as when religious institutions prevent those who identify as LGBTQ++ to attend their services.

¹ World Bank. "Women, Business and the Law: 2021." 2021. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/35094/9781464816529.pdf>

To address these institutional barriers, Network programming and interventions should focus on working with women and youth to reform these discriminatory practices, policies, and laws. From the discriminatory policies and practices within houses of worship, to the discriminatory laws within political peacemaking and peacebuilding structures, including judicial and transitional justice processes, all of these institutional barriers prevent the full and active participation and leadership of women and youth. The Network should act as a facilitator between religious and traditional leaders and understanding, and to strengthen structural mechanisms that organize women and youth, including through social movements and organizations focused on advancing inclusivity within peace-building processes. The Network should also act as a facilitator on the multilateral and governmental levels to raise and amplify the voices and concerns of women, youth, and other marginalized populations.

The Socio-Cultural Level

Women and youth also face discriminatory social norms that negatively impact and hinder their ability to participate and lead in peacemaking and broader peacebuilding efforts. These social norms are often due to inequality and power imbalances. Examples can include: perceptions that youth lack the experience or expertise to be effective leaders or son bias that a woman is an ineffective leader and whose place is in the home. Both of these examples can impede a woman or youth from wanting to participate or lead within their society. Women and youth often simultaneously have to calculate whether the perspectives, influence, and power of their own families will also allow them to participate and lead without fear of private or public reprisal. This lack of support is notable for women and young women who often fear the consequences of becoming active within peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts. This can be compounded further for women and youth with intersecting identities, such as societies having the perception that people with disabilities cannot be active leaders because they view disabilities as a sign of weakness.





To address these discriminatory social norms, Network programming and interventions should focus on raising awareness about the positive influence and impact that women and youth have on peacemaking and peacebuilding processes, as well as the unique barriers that they face within their communities and broader society. For example, explaining that women’s participation in peace agreements increased the probability of the agreement lasting 15 years.² The Network should help to shift an enabling environment where women and youth can equally participate and lead within peacemaking and peacebuilding processes. This may include through raising awareness about the importance of inclusivity within peace processes through print, online or social media campaigns, helping to develop and disseminate educational materials for school children, or hosting community workshops. Equally as important, the Network should inform and partner with male religious and traditional leaders to leverage their moral authority to transform discriminatory social norms.

² UN Women. “Women’s Participation and a Better Understanding of the Political.” 2000. <https://wps.unwomen.org/participation/>

Strengthening Peacemaking and Broader Peacebuilding Efforts

The Network’s mission is to enhance the effectiveness of efforts towards peaceful and inclusive societies by increasing the active collaboration between religious and traditional actors and other key stakeholders in conflict transformation.

The theory of change for women and youth’s participation and leadership within these same efforts aims to contribute to this mission through addressing the barriers they face within these peacemaking and broader peacebuilding spaces. Peace processes are strengthened when women and youth equally and actively participate and lead in these decision-making efforts that affect their lives.