



A group of people walking in front of a peace mural in Herat, Afghanistan in August 2020. The writing on the wall translates as: 'People's Peace Movement', a group that has been involved in organizing several peace marches across Afghanistan. Photo: Elaha Sahel.

# BECAUSE SHE MATTERS

## Ensuring women's meaningful participation in peacebuilding in Afghanistan

While intra-Afghan talks have started, sustainable peace is still a distant reality in Afghanistan. Ongoing peace efforts ignore women's meaningful participation: women are included in only one in every five meetings. Evidence shows that when women have a meaningful role in negotiations, peace is more sustainable. Afghan and international actors must stress the importance of including women in all stages of formal and informal talks at national and local levels. This research paper uses the seven modalities of the Broadening Participation framework developed by InclusivePeace to identify practical ways to include Afghan women meaningfully in peacebuilding.

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# SUMMARY

Since the fall of the Taliban government, women in Afghanistan have made valuable strides in pushing for their rights and for their voices to be heard. Despite political rhetoric on inclusivity and women's contributions to local-level peacebuilding, women are still excluded from meaningful participation<sup>1</sup> in the country's peace processes – for example, the 11 rounds of US-Taliban talks in Doha in 2018-20. Where they are included, it is often only as part of informal civil society delegations, and often the same handful of women are involved.

The authors reviewed a total of 67 exploratory meetings, formal and informal negotiations and internationally backed consultations between 2005 and 2020, and found that women were present on only 15 occasions (22%). The COVID-19 pandemic poses additional challenges by delaying intra-Afghan peace talks and pushing women back into their homes.

Simply increasing the number of women involved in peace processes will not necessarily enhance their influence. Women must become an integral and indispensable part of each phase of negotiations, working shoulder to shoulder with other delegates.

This report analyses how women in Afghanistan have been involved in peace processes in the past and provides a practical overview of opportunities to enhance their meaningful participation in the future. It applies the seven modalities for inclusive peacebuilding identified by Thania Paffenholz and InclusivePeace in the Broadening Participation research project:

1. direct representation at the negotiation table;
2. observer status;
3. consultations;
4. inclusive commissions;
5. (high-level) problem-solving workshops;
6. public decision making;
7. mass action.

Many opportunities to increase women's participation in peacebuilding in Afghanistan remain underutilized. Trainings and discussion platforms build women's capacity and facilitate dialogue, but the lack of strong communication lines to decision makers limits their effectiveness. The roles women and women's organizations already play in domestic and local-level dispute management – including in areas controlled by the Taliban – are often overlooked by international support structures, which predominantly assist national-level women's organizations.

Women are not a homogenous group and do not speak with a single voice. They have varied needs, priorities and political views. A diverse range of women must be represented and included in decision making, rather than only a few well-known individuals.

Furthermore, women's participation in consultations is often limited to topics related to women's rights, gender, or workshops specifically designed for women. Women should be included in all audiences and discussions to increase their influence over sticking points in negotiations. We must move beyond advocating for women's integration in separate groups and entities and instead build common platforms in which a diverse range of men and women from across society can work together.

For women to participate effectively in peace negotiations, they need to be involved from an early stage and across all phases. The inclusion of a leading female voice in the 2016 peace talks with Hezb-e-Islami set an important precedent, and a standard to which civil society, the Afghan parliament and international donors should hold the Afghan government.

If Afghanistan is to permanently end its four-decade-long war, the process must include women. Research and experience from peace processes around the world show that when women are included, peace is more likely to be lasting. But peace processes will be positively impacted by women's inclusion only when women have real influence.

## **Recommendations for the Afghan government**

- **Insist on the use of quotas to include a diverse range of women at all stages and levels of the intra-Afghan peace talks and post-agreement implementation**, especially women's direct and meaningful participation at the negotiation table and in shaping post-conflict Afghanistan. The Afghan government should not settle for mere symbolic representation or limiting women's voices to a few well-known individuals. It should ensure that women are included fully and early on in decisions that will shape Afghanistan's future, beyond issues that are related to gender or women's rights.
- **Facilitate regular consultative forums with a diverse range of civil society – especially women's groups** – before, throughout and after the peace process to provide opportunities for additional inputs. The government should also facilitate these inputs being taken into consideration by decision-makers at the top level.
- **Ensure a diverse range of women among the workforce and leadership of the State Ministry of Peace**, which should play an active role in pushing for women's meaningful participation, influence and leadership in peace councils at national, provincial and local levels. The Ministry should further facilitate channels between district and national levels.
- Explore opportunities to **ensure and strengthen women's meaningful inclusion through the seven modalities** analysed in this report, such as the use of problem-solving workshops and formal commissions.

## Recommendations for international stakeholders, including civil society and donors

- Provide greater support to local peacebuilding initiatives, grassroots movements and civil society organizations that are led by Afghan women, including **long-term and flexible funding, facilitating alliance-building** among women's networks and **creating platforms** for Afghan women to connect and conduct joint advocacy work. International stakeholders should **support the lobbying and campaigning efforts of Afghan women and women's networks through capacity building and reinforcing their advocacy messages.**
- **Facilitate channels to connect** Afghan women to formal and informal peace processes, strengthen communication channels between local- and national-level processes, and establish linkages between informal movements and more formal, professionalized forums of civilian engagement. International stakeholders should provide support to **strengthen Peace Councils and women's leadership** in these councils.
- Contribute to creating enabling environments for civic engagement and support mass action movements in Afghanistan, especially women-led and inclusive movements, by **creating and protecting spaces for civic engagement and citizen's voices, providing diplomatic support and protection** against threats and attacks, **speaking out** when the voices of more marginalized movements are silenced, and providing **funding for risk management.** International actors should leverage their influence to **push for political support for civic mass action** – such as advocating for enabling laws and policies – and to **promote positive narratives about civic spaces.**



A woman in Herat, Afghanistan walking in front of a security brick wall. The writing on the wall translates as: 'We are tired of war. Peace is our right. We get mobilized for peace', August 2020. Photo: Elaha Sahel.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Since the fall of the Taliban government two decades ago, Afghan women have worked tirelessly to reinstate themselves as loud and present voices at all levels of society. In 2019, women made up 28% of the Afghan National Parliament – a higher proportion than in the United States Congress.<sup>2</sup> Yet the advances made for women's equality in recent years are coming under mounting pressure from conservative elements in Afghan society.<sup>3</sup> Attacks on female politicians, police officers and other public figures increasingly threaten women's ability to carry out high-level and public functions.

This report provides a practical overview of opportunities to enhance women's participation in Afghanistan's myriad peace processes. Drawing on lessons identified by Thania Paffenholz and InclusivePeace in the research project, Broadening Participation in Political Negotiations and Implementation (2010-2017),<sup>4</sup> it assesses women's involvement in peacebuilding according to seven modalities:

1. direct representation at the negotiation table;
2. observer status;
3. consultations;
4. inclusive commissions;

*'In 2003 women still lived in the shadows. They had tiny, squeaky voices. Now they speak out and their words carry far.'*

Mahbouba Seraj, January 2020.

<https://www.cordaid.org/en/news/women-frontline-defenders-afghan-democracy/>.

5. (high-level) problem-solving workshops;
6. public decision making; and
7. mass action.<sup>5</sup>

This theoretical framework was chosen for this report because of its broad empirical basis – it was built on 40 case studies of multi-stakeholder negotiations within peace and transition processes, covering 34 countries, between 1989 and 2014 – and because it highlights the important point that participation in peace goes far beyond a ‘seat at the table’ at formal peace negotiations. The report showcases examples of how these modalities have worked in other countries, which can serve as lessons for Afghanistan; it identifies opportunities to enhance women’s meaningful inclusion; and it provides recommendations to key stakeholders.

Before the launch of the much-anticipated intra-Afghan peace talks in Doha on 12 September 2020, there had been no officially designated peace process at national level in Afghanistan.<sup>6</sup> Instead, there was an ongoing series of often-disconnected meetings and consultations to discuss peace (see Box 1 below). Some are formal (‘Track I’) – official, government-level diplomacy, with a set agenda and often a timeframe or planned sequence (e.g. the negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban in Murree in 2015 and, more recently, the negotiations between the US and the Taliban in Doha); others are informal (‘Track II’), involving a broad range of non-state actors (e.g. private citizens or civil society groups), and sometimes unofficial contacts with Taliban or government representatives attending in a personal capacity.<sup>1</sup> Informal processes often connect with the formal track as they try to initiate, inform or influence official negotiations.

**Box 1: Disconnected peace efforts**

There has not been a single, sustained drive for peace in Afghanistan since 2001. Rather, there has been a myriad of initiatives to foster peace, often disconnected, discontinued or one-sided, and supported by many different countries and non-state actors. For example, Pakistan hosted the last formal round of peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government in Murree in 2015; the Quadrilateral Coordination Group of Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and the United States has met several times since 2016; the Afghan government launched the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation in 2017; Moscow has hosted four rounds of meetings since 2018; and the United States started negotiations with the Taliban in 2018, leading to a deal signed in February 2020. Annex 2 contains more details.

The Kabul Process declaration of 2018 stated that ‘women’s full and meaningful participation in reconciliation should be a cornerstone of any lasting peace’.<sup>7</sup> Yet women continue to be mostly absent from peace processes and structures set up to prepare talks, such as the recently dissolved High Peace Council (HPC).<sup>8</sup> Established in 2010 by former Afghan President Hamid Karzai, the HPC’s mandate was to engage with the Taliban and prepare for a formal peace process. It included women, but in low numbers (see Box 2 below).

<sup>1</sup> Annex 2 contains an overview of important developments in peace processes, though this report is not intended to analyze their content or direction – only their inclusion of women.

## Box 2: The High Peace Council and its successors

The Afghan government established the High Peace Council (HPC) in September 2010 as part of the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program, following a jirga – a form of traditional assembly – attended by 1,600 people. Initially women comprised just nine out of the HPC’s 70 members.<sup>9</sup> Their role was mostly symbolic, with little decision-making authority. After reforms in 2016, their participation increased to 11 out of 30 members, and Habiba Sarabi became one of the deputy heads. In 2017, four prominent Afghan women were added to the Executive Advisory Board,<sup>10</sup> but women’s participation was diluted to 12 out of 72 members.<sup>11</sup> With offices in various provinces, the HPC was tasked to pave the way for formal peace talks. In practice, however, it was hampered by continuous institutional reforms and repeatedly sidelined: for example, in December 2018, President Ghani created a separate advisory board rather than call in the HPC. In December 2019, the HPC was dissolved and its functions integrated in the newly established State Ministry for Peace, which includes some senior women, such as Leila Jafari, Head of the Coordination of Civil Society Institutions. In May 2020 a new High Council for National Reconciliation was formed, headed by Abdullah Abdullah, the runner-up to President Ghani in the presidential elections. It is unclear whether the new Council or the Ministry will be more effective in preparing and guiding the intra-Afghan peace negotiations. In June 2020, an Advisory and Coordination Board of Civil Society Institutions for Peace was approved to provide input for the Ministry.<sup>12</sup>

The latest series of parallel peace consultations, which took place in Moscow and Doha between 2018 and 2020, included only a handful of women (in three rounds in Moscow) or completely excluded women (in the case of Doha).<sup>13</sup> This continued the wide gap between the political rhetoric on women’s inclusion and its implementation in practice.

The challenge is not only ideological, but pragmatic: how can women be meaningfully included in the various processes, structures and institutions that will determine how peace is built in Afghanistan? How can women’s participation be effective in an intra-Afghan peace process with the Taliban that has so far clearly been no champion of their participation?

The COVID-19 pandemic<sup>14</sup> put additional pressure on the intra-Afghan peace talks, which were scheduled to start in March 2020, but had to be delayed due to travel restrictions and political impasse.<sup>15</sup> The political uncertainty that reigned after the September 2019 presidential elections has added to justifications for delaying talks: the Taliban rejected the Afghan government’s call for a ceasefire.<sup>16</sup> It did, however, agree to a three-day ceasefire during Eid in May 2020,<sup>17</sup> and again in July.<sup>18</sup> There are concerns that pandemic restrictions will have long-term implications for women’s rights by exacerbating domestic violence, pushing women back into their homes and making it harder for them to reclaim hard-won gains for women’s rights in a society that is still predominantly conservative and patriarchal (see Box 3 below).<sup>19</sup>

*‘The Afghan government should not bargain sustainable peace for political gains or political peace. I request the government to push for 50 percent women’s inclusion in the peace agreement.’*

Masuma Jami, peace activist,  
Herat, August 2020

### Box 3: Patriarchy in relation to gender roles in Afghanistan

Similar to many other countries around the world, Afghanistan is still largely a conservative, patriarchal society. Despite progress on women's rights and empowerment, most government institutions and tribal bodies are still controlled or dominated by men and exclude women. Patriarchy preserves cultural norms, traditional taboos and stigmas related to gender roles.

The structural resistance to gender equality is reflected in Afghanistan's institutional culture, including ministries and peace bodies, and societal barriers that prevent many women from playing more roles in the public sphere. Breaking down such barriers depends partially on the incremental normalization and acceptance of women's participation, for example by reaching a critical mass in important institutions and processes and increasing the number of female role models who can showcase the value of women's leadership to the country, community and family. Men need to create and support spaces for women's voices and stand up for women and girls' rights.

When promoting the meaningful participation of women in peace processes, it is important not to lose sight of the longer-term objectives of dismantling harmful gender norms and other structural barriers to change.

## Methodology

This report seeks to increase understanding about the state of women's participation in peace processes in Afghanistan by using the Broadening Participation research's theoretical framework, which identifies seven modalities of engagement with peace processes. The report combines reviews of academic literature and news stories, in Afghan and international media, with a limited number of interviews conducted over the past two years with officials, politicians and representatives of civil society. The aim was to document the different processes taking place and identify the extent to which women were, or were not, involved in them.

The report describes each modality laid out by Paffenholz *et al.*, and the current array of activities taking place in Afghanistan as they pertain to each modality. It concludes with recommendations for advancing women's engagement in the peace processes.

The evidence across modalities is not uniform, with more common modalities having far more documentation than less common modalities. For example, there is significant data for modality 1, which concerns direct participation of women at the negotiation table, enabling the authors to create a (largely quantitative) database (see Annex 1). While the data collected is thought to provide a fair assessment of women's participation in the peace processes so far, it was not a systematic review and some data will be missing. Many peace-related meetings are secret, and others go unreported or are reported ambiguously, especially at local level. The risk of omissions and errors has been limited as much as possible through extensive internet searches and interviews.

*'We envision an Afghanistan free from violence, where every citizen – woman and man – has access to their rights without any discrimination on any basis, where there is rule of law, where justice is easily accessible and the judicial system is based on equity and justice.'*

Mary Akrami, Head of Afghan Women's Network, August 2020



Peace activist Masuma Jami and two men passing a peace mural in Herat, Afghanistan, which translates as: 'Our voice for peace; Sustainable peace guarantees women's basic rights', August 2020. Photo: Elaha Sahel.

## 2 EVIDENCE ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

Societies with higher levels of gender equality tend to be less prone to both intrastate armed conflict and conflict with other states.<sup>20</sup> The causal relationship is unclear, but evidence shows that peace is more inclusive and sustainable when women are included in peace processes: Laurel Stone (2014) studied 182 signed peace agreements between 1989 and 2011, comparing women's involvement – as negotiators, mediators, witnesses and signatories – with how well the agreement kept the peace. When women were included, the resulting agreements were 35% more likely to last beyond fifteen years.<sup>21</sup> The stronger the influence of women – in their ability to bring forward issues, perspectives, and proposals in a way that impacted decision making – the more likely an agreement was to be reached and implemented.<sup>22</sup>

The women, peace and security (WPS) agenda has increased attention to the importance of inclusive peace processes. Since the United Nations

adopted Security Council Resolution 1325 on WPS in 2000, 86 countries (as of August 2020) have made a National Action Plan on the issue.<sup>23</sup> Afghanistan adopted its first plan in June 2015.

Women do not speak with one voice. Like men and persons with non-binary gender identities, they represent a broad range of backgrounds and interests. Nonetheless, experience from various contexts including Northern Ireland, South Africa, Somalia, Sri Lanka and the Philippines suggests that women and women's groups can build coalitions and trust, and bridge divides to advocate for peace.<sup>24</sup> They are less likely than other societal groups to disrupt negotiations: an in-depth study of 40 peace processes found that not a single women's group attempted to derail any process (see Box 4 below).<sup>25</sup> Seen as less threatening, women are often perceived to be honest brokers by conflict parties in peace processes. This can give them unique access to and influence over belligerents, from community-level disputes to formal peace negotiations. Female participants are known for building trust between parties.<sup>26</sup>

Women's involvement in peace talks increases the likelihood of gender issues being included in agreements, according to research by Anderlini and Bouta et al.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Bell and O'Rourke show that UNSCR 1325 increased the number of references to women and gender in peace agreements.<sup>28</sup> However, women's meaningful participation goes far beyond this: despite the diverse backgrounds, interests and voices of women, experience from Northern Ireland and Sudan shows that women can raise issues that are vital for sustainable peace, expanding agendas and even the table by advocating for excluded groups and the need to address underlying causes of conflict such as development and human rights.<sup>29</sup> This also happened in Afghanistan during the Constitutional Loya Jirga in 2003 and 2004 when female members advocated for the rights of handicapped people and supported requests from the Uzbek minority to gain official recognition of their language.<sup>30</sup>

#### **Box 4: The Broadening Participation research framework**

The Broadening Participation research project began in 2011 to study women's roles in different phases of 40 peace processes since the 1990s. Under the leadership of Thania Paffenholz,<sup>31</sup> it aimed to develop understanding of women's roles and knowledge of what leads or could lead to meaningful participation.<sup>32</sup> Paffenholz examines the conditions that make women's participation possible, and enable that participation to have real influence in impacting the outcomes of talks.<sup>33</sup>

# 3 WAYS TO ENSURE WOMEN'S MEANINGFUL INCLUSION

Women<sup>34</sup> play diverse roles during different phases of peace processes, at various levels and distances from negotiation tables. This chapter works through seven modalities of official and non-official roles that women can play. These modalities should be seen as a starting point for including a diverse range of women, who may have different views and priorities depending on factors such as their gender, religious or ethnic identities, level of education, religious affiliation, age and rural or urban background.

## MODALITY 1: DIRECT PARTICIPATION AT THE NEGOTIATION TABLE

Direct presence at the negotiation table, as part of official delegations or women-only delegations, is the most straightforward way to include women in peace talks. This is often achieved through quotas, allocating a percentage of delegate places to women (see Box 5 below). While quotas can be a valuable starting point – especially where there is very little gender balance – they create the risk of an ‘add women and stir’ approach. Capacity building is also needed to ensure meaningful participation,<sup>35</sup> recognizing women’s diverse allegiances and abilities – some will prioritize party loyalties, for example, while others have experience building coalitions.

*‘There will be women’s representation in the upcoming intra-Afghan peace talks, and we will make it meaningful as we have the courage to defend our interests. We will make these talks result-oriented for Afghan women and Afghan society as a whole.’*

Mary Akrami, Head of Afghan Women’s Network, August 2020

### Box 5: Example of direct participation

#### **Nepal’s Constituent Assembly, 2008-2012<sup>36</sup>**

Through a quota system, Nepali women made up 33% of the delegates in the Constituent Assembly, the key mechanism for implementing the peace agreement. While this resulted in more women’s issues being raised, women’s influence remained limited – notably due to lack of independent female delegates, inability to build coalitions on women’s issues, and lack of experience.

## 1.1 Current reality in Afghanistan

Women are largely absent from direct participation in formal or informal peace processes at the national and international levels.

Oxfam’s 2014 study [\*Behind Closed Doors: The risk of denying women a voice in determining Afghanistan’s future\*](#) found that out of the 23 rounds of peace talks that were conducted from 2005 to 2014, women were included in only five – around 22%.<sup>37</sup> The situation has improved, but only slightly: since 2015, women have been involved in 10 out of 34 talks – around 29%. Annex 1 lists formal and informal meetings and consultations to discuss peace in Afghanistan between 2005 and 2020. As such, this Annex covers only modality 1.

The Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation, launched in June 2017, has so far had very limited participation of women. While the government's press release<sup>38</sup> about the Kabul Process mentioned 'building an inclusive peace', its objectives did not specify the inclusion of Afghan women.<sup>39</sup> Out of 47 Afghan and foreign participants, only two Afghan women were present.<sup>40</sup> The Kabul Process seems to have had no relation to the HPC, which means it could not benefit from the increase in women's meaningful participation in the HPC before it was dissolved.<sup>41</sup>

The former Deputy Chair of the HPC, Habiba Sarabi,<sup>42</sup> participated in the peace process with Hezb-e-Islami, an armed opposition group, in 2015-2016.<sup>43</sup> This set a positive precedent, but a rather limited one: when only one delegation includes women, their participation may be less effective as they cannot 'advance common interests'<sup>44</sup> across delegations. This could also be an important challenge in the upcoming intra-Afghan peace negotiations.

In February 2018, the Taliban published an open letter calling on the US to push for negotiations.<sup>45</sup> Separately, President Ghani presented an ambitious peace plan, which included an unconditional offer to start talks, recognizing the Taliban as a legitimate political party and removing Taliban commanders from international blacklists.<sup>46</sup> Although the peace proposal did not include details on women's participation, President Ghani mentioned that women were 'going to be engaged in every part of the peace process'.<sup>47</sup> However, this never happened as Ghani was unable to convince the Taliban to join his peace plan. Instead, the disconnected peace consultations that did take place show a dismal picture when it comes to women's engagement, with no participation of women in the 11 rounds of US-Taliban talks and only limited participation in the four rounds of talks in Moscow (see Annex 1).

At the national level, women did participate in events such as the four-day Loya Jirga organized by the government in 2019, a consultative grand assembly to discuss peace talks. However, such spaces address only a fraction of the conflict Afghans face in their daily lives.<sup>48</sup> **Local peacebuilding processes receive much less attention from the media and international community**, while they deal with community grievances that often serve as catalysts for national-level conflict. At the district and provincial levels, women are generally excluded from male-dominated peacebuilding mechanisms such as peace councils or local jirgas, and traditional councils of exclusively male elders with the purpose of conflict resolution.<sup>49</sup>

Women's participation is held back by patriarchal norms and attitudes, inequalities in education, violence and the low value placed on women as peacebuilders.<sup>50</sup> Recent efforts to address this imbalance, for example by increasing the participation of women in Provincial Peace Councils (PPCs),<sup>51</sup> have so far proven ineffective. These provincial-level bodies took a long time to set up, women continued to be underrepresented, and in recent years the councils were suspended due to various reform processes. Adding only a few women to male-dominated bodies like these councils – an example of 'adding women and stir' will likely keep their role and influence constrained.

*'Failure to engage in dialogue and consensus building at the local level often results in unachievable targets, overly ambitious objectives and inappropriate peacebuilding strategies.'*

Karim Merchant and Ghulam Rasoul Rasouli, 2014 (page 85).

## 1.2 Recommendations for direct participation

- The Afghan parliament, Afghan civil society, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and international donors should keep insisting on the meaningful inclusion of women in the intra-Afghan peace negotiations. **The Afghan parliament should request a quota for Afghan women in the formal negotiations**, but further steps will be needed to ensure their participation is meaningful.<sup>52</sup> President Ghani did not attach any conditions related to women's participation to his February 2018 offer to the Taliban. The US-Taliban deal about US troop withdrawal signed on 29 February 2020 did not even mention women's rights or participation.
- **The international community should provide more support to grassroots women and civil society organizations in rural areas.** Despite their exclusion from the traditional male-dominated jirgas and shuras, women are working at the local level to resolve disputes, address persisting grievances, foster reconciliation and contribute to other peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes: research conducted for Oxfam by The Liaison Office, an Afghan NGO, shows that women's roles include lobbying, building activist networks, and conducting outreach and dialogue.<sup>53</sup> However, international organizations and donors predominantly assist women and women's organizations at the national level, which means there are far fewer resources to build women's capacities, leadership and organizational structures to address the needs of local peacebuilding and conflict resolution. This leaves the biggest part of Afghanistan's conflicts unaddressed.
- In working to support local networks and Afghan civil society organizations, **international organizations need to account for the challenge that the typically short-term nature of external funding makes it hard to achieve sustainable and structural results in peacebuilding.**<sup>54</sup> Their discussions with donors should stress the importance of long-term financial commitment for local peacebuilding initiatives to be successful and sustainable.
- Projects to train women as mediators or peace advocates must be coupled with the **establishment of strong lines of communication with decision makers.**

## MODALITY 2: OBSERVER STATUS

In contrast to modality 1, observers play no official role in negotiations and do not have a voice at the table. Still, their direct presence gives them first-hand information and serves a watchdog function, and in some cases they informally advise the negotiators. Granting observer status is often used as a way to get women into negotiations without given them actual decision-making power: the influence women gain through this modality is often very limited. Nevertheless, where women are excluded from the official tracks, observer status might enable them to have indirect influence: formal peace processes are usually lengthy and include many conversations both on and off the negotiation table, so observers can reinforce buy-in. Experience from

*'Peace without women's meaningful participation is impossible.'*

Habiba Sarabi, Deputy Chair of the High Peace Council, March 2018.

([http://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/files/UNSC\\_Briefing\\_Afghanistan\\_Sarabi\\_03-2018.pdf](http://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/files/UNSC_Briefing_Afghanistan_Sarabi_03-2018.pdf)).

peace processes in other countries (see Box 6) shows that women in observer roles can sometimes exert influence on the mediators, the conflict parties or the negotiation agenda.

#### **Box 6: Example of observer status**

##### ***Burundi's Arusha peace talks, 2000***

Before the adoption of UNSCR 1325, seven women leaders participated as 'permanent observers' in the Arusha peace talks, which enabled them to access plenary sessions but did not grant them a role in formal decision making. An All-Party Burundi Women's Conference, involving the seven female observers and two women delegates from each of the 19 parties to the negotiations, drafted a list of gender-sensitive recommendations and presented it to Nelson Mandela, the facilitator. More than half the recommendations were incorporated into the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement.<sup>55</sup>

## **2.1 Current reality in Afghanistan**

During formal talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban in July 2015, the only observers present were officials from the United States and China. There were no observers during the 2016 peace process of the Afghan government with Hezb-e Islami, or the drawdown negotiations between the United States and the Taliban between 2018 and 2020.

In the absence of a formal peace process, there are currently no observer roles for Afghan men or women. Nonetheless, it is important to explore to what extent women (politicians or civil society representatives) could be involved as observers in the top-level preparatory mechanisms and informal processes that lead up to peace negotiations, both at the centre and the periphery.

## **2.2 Recommendations for observer status**

- Observer status for women will be important during the intra-Afghan peace process, as it can enable indirect influence. However, any such influence would be seriously limited without women's direct participation. **The Afghan parliament and international donors should not accept observer status for women as an alternative to direct participation, but rather as an additional avenue of influence.**



Freshta Yaqobi, a peace activist from Herat, taking a book from a bookstore shelf. The book is titled 'Minority Rights in International Law'.

Photo: Elaha Sahel.

## MODALITY 3: CONSULTATIONS

While modalities 1 and 2 tend to take place during the main negotiation process, there are other processes that prepare or feed into the negotiations, such as consultations. Formal and informal consultative forums are the most common way in which women are included in peace processes. When consultation processes are integrated into formal negotiations, women's roles can resemble direct participation (modality 1), but often consultation tends to be more indirect or informal. Consultations enable women to share topics, present demands, and propose agenda items. However, the influence exerted through such forums is highly dependent on how their results are communicated to mediators and negotiators. Research shows that establishing joint positions increases women's influence in consultations.<sup>56</sup> The most effective strategy has often been to accompany women's joint demands with advocacy strategies using the media and/or the international community (see Box 7).

### Box 7: Example of consultations

#### *Kenya's peace negotiations, 2008-2013*<sup>57</sup>

Kenyan women participated most notably in the country's peace negotiations through formal and informal consultations. The Kenya Women's Consultative Group collected and united the voices of local women's organizations, and effectively channelled their principal demand – investigation of gender-based violence – into the negotiation agenda through a media outreach strategy and the support of a female mediator, Graça Machel.

### 3.1 Current reality in Afghanistan

Civil society and government-led consultations, such as peace jirgas – not to be confused with regular jirgas and shuras, which are gatherings of male elders to resolve local or national conflicts – have generally included women since 2001, but their ability to exert influence is still limited. In Afghanistan women and women's networks are divided – reflecting divisions in civil society more generally – which limits opportunities for joint positioning. Nevertheless, women's repeated participation has had some positive effects over time, increasing their capacity and influence and enabling some women to become confident role models and champions for inclusive peacebuilding.

In 2001, the Afghanistan Consultative Forum was organized in Bonn, Germany, in parallel to the Bonn Agreement negotiations.<sup>58</sup> Women comprised 40% of the total of 150 civil society representatives.<sup>59</sup> This is an example of consultations that were highly integrated in the broader negotiation process: the forum had an official mandate to advise the Track 1 negotiations, giving the consultations greater influence. The women present successfully advocated for a quota for women in the legislature and explicit provisions on women's rights in the agreement. The main obstacle encountered was the short duration of the conference, which hampered the formulation of women's groups' joint positions.

In August 2007, the Afghan–Pakistan Joint Peace Jirga was convened in Kabul to promote cross-border dialogue on bringing sustainable peace to the region. Women lobbied successfully to participate in this consultative forum,<sup>60</sup> but the resulting Joint Declaration did not mention women’s participation or women’s rights.<sup>61</sup>

In June 2010, former Afghan President Hamid Karzai convened a three-day consultation – the National Consultative Peace Jirga – to discuss prospects for reconciliation and peace negotiations with the Taliban. Around 300 of the 1,600 delegates were women, and women’s rights activists described the working groups as ‘open’ and ‘democratic’. However, most discussions were led by men, and women delegates said they had little space to influence the agenda or outcomes.<sup>62</sup> The consultations had very little impact in terms of concrete next steps for a formal peace process.<sup>63</sup>

In October 2017, the High Peace Council stated an intention to set up three advisory boards at the national level, later to be replicated at the provincial level, one of which would consist entirely of women. It is not clear whether these advisory boards materialized, but the objective – reaching out to the Afghan people, not only at Kabul-level – seems to have laid the foundations for the Advisory and Coordination Board of Civil Society Institutions for Peace set up in June 2020, which includes members from the centre and seven zones of Afghanistan.<sup>64</sup>

More informal consultations have taken place through various conferences. For example, in May 2017, 300 participants attended a symposium in Kabul, ‘Afghan Women, Messengers of Peace’.<sup>65</sup> The event adopted a resolution urging the HPC to look beyond women’s role in the political peace process and also focus on women’s contribution to building social peace within their families and communities.<sup>66</sup>

With logistical support from United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, in 2018 the HPC completed the first phase of the ‘mothers of peace’ project to build a provincial network of women peace activists. So far, this project has organized meetings in Kabul, Bamiyan and Herat provinces.<sup>67</sup> Twelve women were selected from each province ‘to launch the message of peace first within their network of local families, and then broaden it to the community level through meetings.’<sup>68</sup> There was talk in 2019 about expanding the project to other provinces.<sup>69</sup> However, the success of such initiatives depends on effective ‘transfer strategies’ to communicate results to those in more formal or high-level negotiations.<sup>70</sup>

Most recently, women comprised around 30% of the 3,000 delegates at a four-day Consultative Peace Loya Jirga in April-May 2019, but this percentage again dropped in the Loya Jirga held in August 2020: on the latter occasion, around 700 out of 3,200 delegates were women (22%). Women were voted to chair 13 of 50 committees and fill four out of 10 positions on the administrative board.<sup>71</sup>

## 3.2 Recommendations for consultations

- **The outcomes of national or local peace jirgas or similar consultative forums can effectively serve as an outline for a more formal national peace strategy.** They offer great potential for the pre-negotiation phase to influence the agenda of peace talks. However, consultations in Afghanistan have so far suffered from including too many participants, not including the most relevant groups, and lack of meaningful participation for women, which should go beyond merely influencing aspects related to women's rights or gender.
- Afghan women do not speak with a single voice, so there is no need to press for joint positioning in consultations – but some women might have converging positions based around their regional, political, economic or social identities, and in these cases **joint statements could strengthen their influence. Civil society and women's groups should analyze such commonalities and translate them into national advocacy messages.** Donors should fund and support initiatives that allow women's networks to come together and develop joint statements where interests overlap.
- **Recommendations should be effectively transferred to decision makers.** The PPC's and the HPC's 'mothers of peace' initiative had potential to increase women's consultation at provincial level, but such initiatives can be effective only if recommendations are effectively transferred. Even where such initiatives are formally linked to upcoming peace negotiations, their input may be 'ignored, side-lined or dismissed'.<sup>72</sup> **Lobbying for recommendations to be taken up requires structural capacity building, constant follow-ups, and strong lines of communication with decision makers – all areas in which international organizations and donors should offer support.** The voices raised in such initiatives should be echoed by male and female champions for women's participation, such as First Lady Rula Ghani and influential members of parliament.
- **The Afghan parliament should facilitate regular consultative forums, in which the recommendations of women or women's networks are taken on board by top-level negotiators and mediators.** For instance, on 2 April 2019 the National Civil Society and Media Conference on Peace Negotiations took place in Kabul with representation of a broad range of civil society, from the centre and periphery, and recommendations were presented the following day directly to President Ghani.<sup>73</sup> Similar forums should be organized more regularly to create opportunities for Afghan civil society voices to come together and provide input into peace processes, as well as bringing more attention to women's needs.
- The experience of the US-Taliban drawdown talks in Doha shows how closed such political spaces can be for civil society,<sup>74</sup> let alone for women and women's organizations. **The US and other parties participating in similar talks should continuously push to open spaces for a diverse range of civil society and women's voices.**

*'Social peace is more important than political peace and that is why Afghanistan is still in conflict – peace comes after the political interests of the government of politicians.'*

Fresha Yaqobi, peace activist,  
Herat, August 2020

## MODALITY 4: INCLUSIVE COMMISSIONS

In addition to participation at the table, as an observer or through consultations, women may participate in bodies that are often set up around peace processes to work on the preparations of negotiations, the implementation of peace agreements (transitional justice, ceasefire monitoring, constitution drafting) or long-term oversight. Inclusive commissions are a common and effective way to include women in peace processes (see Box 8). In contrast to observer status, these commissions formally play an active role before, during or after negotiations. In contrast to peace jirgas and similar consultative forums, which are normally one-off events, the inclusive commissions are permanent or active over a longer period.

### Box 8: Example of inclusive commissions

#### ***Colombia's peace process with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), 2012-2016***

Commissions, sub-commissions, thematic working groups and a drafting commission facilitated Colombian women's participation in the peace process by engaging them in the various issues in its agenda. For example, 25% of the members of the Technical Sub-commission on Ending Conflict were female. The government and FARC also established a gender sub-commission, which was mandated 'to review and guarantee, with the support of national and international experts' any agreement reached to make sure it had an 'adequate gender focus'.<sup>75</sup>

### 4.1 Current reality in Afghanistan

The most important example of an inclusive commission was the High Peace Council (see Box 2 above). However, female participation in the HPC was often only symbolic and limited to public outreach,<sup>76</sup> and the HPC itself was often sidelined from important talks.<sup>77</sup> A diplomat in Kabul, who wanted to remain anonymous, told the authors: 'The elephant in the room has always been what actually the meaningful role of the HPC is.'

Less inclusive bodies – such as the National Security Council, in which women's participation has been minimal – seem to have been much more influential than the HPC in steering the peace process. The Afghan government constantly reformed the HPC and undermined it by setting up parallel structures, such as an advisory board for peace and a peace negotiation team.<sup>78</sup> In 2019 President Ghani dissolved the HPC and gave its functions to a newly-established State Ministry of Peace Affairs.<sup>79</sup> Unlike the HPC, whose members the Taliban did not consider as government employees, the State Ministry of Peace Affairs is a government entity so it is less likely to be perceived as neutral.

One exception to the generally marginal role of the HPC, as noted above, was its Deputy Head Habiba Sarabi's participation in the preparatory talks and subsequent negotiations with the armed group Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin in 2016. According to Sarabi, her participation allowed for effective representation of women in the peace talks.<sup>80</sup> She was the only

*'Peace at local and national level are interconnected. If there is no peace at local level, we cannot build a peace at national level. Only bottom-up approaches to peace can be considered as sustainable peace, but most efforts in Afghanistan are top-down and too little attention is being paid to local level peace building.'*

Freshta Yaqobi, peace activist, Herat, August 2020

woman in the five-member delegation of the HPC. The other two participating delegations, the Afghan government and Hezb-e-Islami, did not include any women.

**Efforts to include women still predominantly focus on the national level, even though most tensions, frictions and conflict in Afghanistan are at the local level – for example, over land or water allocation, poverty, unemployment, legal or religious affairs, or customary rights and obligations.**<sup>81</sup> The roles women are already playing in local peace processes are often not taken into account. In the peace efforts related to armed opposition groups such as the Taliban, the HPC tried to address this by setting up the PPCs to reinforce the national-level work of the HPC. As mentioned earlier, however, this had limited effect.

Women's involvement in PPCs had some potential for inclusive peacebuilding at sub-national levels, but the effects were very limited. Originally women were supposed to comprise about 9% of PPC members, with a minimum of three women among 25 to 35 members on each council.<sup>82</sup> Reforms in 2018 reduced the number of members and increased the target for female representation to about 22%. But interviews for this report show that many PPCs did not have the minimum participation of women. These bodies were often inactive during the various periods in which the HPC was being restructured, and it is unclear how PPCs or similar councils will function under the new government structures.

Overall, the HPC and PPCs seem to have been a missed opportunity, as the Afghan government underutilized their mandate. **Peacebuilding cannot effectively be inclusive if only a few women are involved – a diverse range of women with different identities and viewpoints needs to be represented.** The presence of leaders such as Habiba Sarabi is important, but does not immediately lead to a critical mass of diverse women. And the impact of provincial- and national-level councils will remain limited if they are involved only in the preparations of peace talks, and not in the subsequent negotiations and implementation of agreements.

Another possible route at local level is to work more with Community Development Councils (CDCs), which were introduced by the National Solidarity Program and now function within the Citizens Charter Afghanistan Project.<sup>83</sup> Democratically elected by communities, CDCs set priorities for economic and social development projects based on local challenges and needs, and assist with implementation. Half of the positions in the CDCs have been allocated to women, but reaching this number is still unrealistic in most provinces.<sup>84</sup>

The CDCs could become an important link between local communities and grassroots peacebuilding initiatives, as they are also involved in conflict resolution.<sup>85</sup> However, previous experience of connecting CDCs to reintegration efforts under the UNDP-supported Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme<sup>86</sup> showed there can be tensions between national peacebuilding efforts and local governance.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, bringing traditional dispute resolution mechanisms under the CDCs may create tensions with their other roles.<sup>88</sup> CDCs should focus primarily on their role in development, but use their local influence and connections as an entry point

to contribute indirectly to peacebuilding.

## 4.2 Recommendations for inclusive commissions

- For women to be able to participate in a peace process in meaningful ways, they have to be involved from an early stage and across all phases.<sup>89</sup> The precedent set by Habiba Sarabi's participation in the 2016 peace talks with Hezb-e-Islami is important as it established a standard to which civil society, the Afghan parliament and international donors should hold the Afghan government, the Taliban and other parties. They should push for the **inclusion of diverse women's voices in commissions that are preparing intra-Afghan peace talks, as well as post-agreement and permanent commissions.**
- **The newly established State Ministry of Peace Affairs should ensure a diverse range of women among its workforce and leadership,** taking forward gains made by the High Peace Council. It should play an active role in pushing for women's meaningful participation, influence and leadership in provincial- and local-level councils, and work to create stronger linkages between local peacebuilding initiatives and provincial- and national-level commissions.
- Lessons should also be drawn from the **bipartisan gender sub-commission** established early in the Colombian peace process to include women's voices and review the peace agreement from a gender perspective. Introducing such a formalized mechanism in Afghanistan could help mainstream gender in peace negotiations and build understanding that not only women delegates should not be safeguarding women's interests.

## MODALITY 5: PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHOPS

Separate from the formal process of peace negotiations, there are often informal spaces where representatives of the conflict parties meet to discuss particular issues and challenges. As problem-solving often entails giving advice on certain (technical) issues related to peace negotiations, this modality can be quite similar to consultations (modality 3) if they are one-off events or to inclusive commissions (modality 4) if they are standing workshops.

**Problem-solving workshops are underused as a way to increase women's ability to formulate joint positions, make their voices heard and influence sticking points in negotiations.** At the highest level, problem-solving workshops are often intended for conflict parties to pave the way to more formal negotiations, and work best when they address concrete strategies or goals. Women are often underrepresented in such workshops:<sup>90</sup> they tend to be included only in workshops that are specifically designed for women or deal with gender issues.

Colombia's peace process provides an interesting example of how this modality can be effective. Both guarantor countries, Cuba and Norway, selected gender experts who provided technical advice to the gender sub-

commission.<sup>91</sup> In the Democratic Republic of Congo, women took part in a high-level problem solving workshop, which was set up before the Track I negotiations took place (see Box 9).

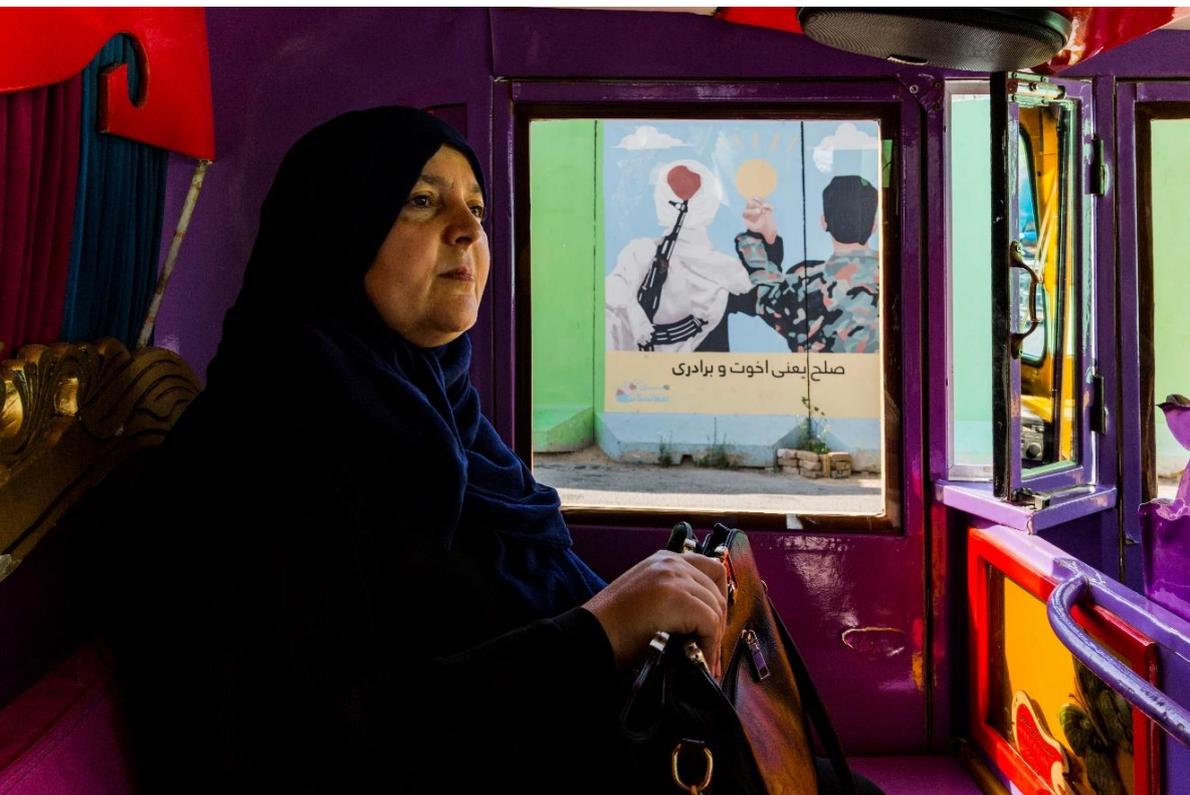
#### Box 9: Example of problem-solving workshops

##### *Democratic Republic of Congo's Political Negotiation, 2002*

At the start of the Inter-Congolese Political Negotiation in February 2002, UNIFEM and local NGOs organized a problem-solving workshop for the 64 women participating at the peace talks in Sun City in South Africa. During the workshop, UNIFEM held sessions on the gender dimensions of reforms and effective participation. The women delegates agreed on a joint declaration and plan of action, which, among other achievements, resulted in more female delegates.

## 5.1 Current reality in Afghanistan

It is difficult to identify problem-solving workshops, though they may have been used in some peace jirgas or in informal or clandestine meetings with the Taliban to discuss possible concessions. In 2005, for example, Germany's Federal Intelligence Service (*Bundesnachrichtendienst*) held secret talks with representatives of the Taliban to discuss whether they were prepared to distance themselves from Al-Qaeda – a key condition for peace talks to move forward.<sup>92</sup>



Masuma Jami, a peace activist from Herat, sitting in a Riksha taxi in front of a brick security wall. The text on the wall translates as: 'Peace means Brotherhood'.

Photo: Elaha Sahel.

## 5.2 Recommendations for problem-solving workshops

- The Broadening Participation research identified a type of problem-solving workshop that can be highly relevant for Afghanistan: those specifically designed by women and women’s groups to ‘overcome their own tensions and grievances’, building cohesion and cooperation between women of different socio-economic groups and backgrounds. **Parties involved in Afghanistan’s peace process should explore whether such women-led problem-solving workshops might be useful** and to what extent current initiatives – for instance, regional peace conferences such as the one in Kunar province in August 2017 – already fulfil this role.

## MODALITY 6: PUBLIC DECISION MAKING

Once peace negotiations are successfully concluded, there are several ways to gain public support or democratic legitimacy. Sometimes peace agreements are put to a binding public vote for ratification. This can give women voters the same influence as men over the final decision. In some countries, such as Northern Ireland, women successfully used such a democratic process to campaign for peace; in others, women were divided (see Box 10).

*‘The Afghan government should focus on both national and local peace, because most conflicts arise at the local level. Political peace is important, but the government should also focus on creating a culture of peace and engaging women and marginalized groups – for example through local peace committees and shoras.’*

Masuma Jami, peace activist, Herat, August 2020

### Box 10: Example of public decision making

#### **Colombia’s peace process with the FARC, 2016**

In the 2016 plebiscite on the peace agreement between the government and the FARC, women played an active role on both sides.<sup>93</sup> The Minister of Foreign Affairs, María Ángela Holguín, was part of the negotiation team in Havana and campaigned for the deal to be endorsed, as did several other female politicians and women outside of government. However, several women members of congress campaigned against, and voters narrowly rejected the agreement with a majority of 50.22%. The agreement was subsequently revised and ratified by Congress without another plebiscite. This case shows it is vital to build public backing for a peace process.

## 6.1 Current reality in Afghanistan

So far, peace agreements have not been put to a public vote. A possible alternative could be to have an agreement confirmed through a Loya Jirga, similar to the one that approved the Afghan constitution in 2003-2004. However, when then-President Karzai organized the National Consultative Peace Jirga in 2010 to build a national consensus on a peace plan ahead of talks, results were limited – in part because of the absence of representatives of the Taliban and Hezb-e-Islami. Similarly, the Loya Jirga, organized by President Ghani in 2019, tried to come to a common approach to peace talks with the Taliban. The Loya Jirga organized by president Ghani in August 2020 already offered the participants (more than 3,200, of which around 700 – or 22% – were women) the power to decide over one of the preconditions to an intra-Afghan peace process, as they approved the release of the remaining 400 Taliban prisoners.<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, the

authority of a Loya Jirga may also be challenged as members of the District Councils – also members of the Loya Jirga, according to the Constitution – have not been elected yet.

**Without a formal peace process, most opportunities for public decision making in Afghanistan can currently be found at the grassroots level, where women are increasingly involved in decision-making processes** such as through district and provincial councils, PPCs, other peace jirgas and the CDCs.

## 6.2 Recommendation for public decision making

- Local-level elections for bodies such as **district councils can offer an important route to more inclusion of women**. This would be enhanced if the importance and authority of district councils is reinforced through the ongoing Citizens' Charter Afghanistan Project, which aims to improve good governance. **International actors and the Afghan government should also strengthen channels between local- and national-level political debates.**

## MODALITY 7: MASS ACTION

The seventh modality of the framework pertains to mass action. This is interpreted to mean direct public engagement, such as marches and demonstrations. While the scale of such action is often relatively small, involving hundreds or dozens of women, we still classify it here as mass action on the basis of its direct and public character.

Outside of the formal frameworks of peace negotiations, citizens may mobilize in favour of or against (parts of) the process, often in the form of public demonstrations. Women's groups have organized mass campaigns to pressure parties to start negotiations (see Box 11) or sign negotiated agreements, and to push their way into official peace processes from which they were initially excluded. Mass action can be a 'powerful instrument of public pressure'<sup>95</sup> on politicians and informal power holders, offering great potential for Afghan women. Mass action can focus on inclusive peacebuilding directly (e.g. on the right of women to meaningfully participate in peace processes) or on the procedures and outcomes of peace processes. It is not a formal means of inclusion, and not necessarily exclusively pro-peace – though in the cases studied by Broadening Participation, women never used this modality to campaign against a peace agreement.

### Box 11: Example of mass action

#### *Liberia's peace process (2003-2011)*

Women were involved in Liberia's peace talks both as formal observers and through mass action. Women's groups' primary aim was to advocate for an end to armed conflict. The Women in Peacebuilding Network mobilized women to pressure the major armed actors to attend talks. Women from all sections of Liberian society rallied around the banner of Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, and the message 'We want peace, no more war'.

Hundreds of women, dressed in white, demanded peace on the streets of Monrovia and formed inter-faith (Christian and Muslim) congregations to pray for peace. Some Network members travelled to Ghana to mobilize Liberian women in refugee camps. This case shows there can be a connection between observers involved in a peace process and mass actions organized around it.

## 7.1 Current reality in Afghanistan

Peace marches and protests have been organized, with a strong presence of women and women's groups.

In the run-up to the 2010 Peace Jirga, Afghan women and activists jointly initiated the Afghanistan Women's 50% Campaign, highlighting that women represent half of society and offering recommendations to the Afghan government and Jirga participants.<sup>96</sup>

In March 2011, dozens of women participated in a march for peace in Kabul to launch a three-day civil society peace campaign.

In 2014, the women of the High Peace Council initiated the Afghan Women's Call for Ceasefire and Peace campaign, collecting more than 300,000 signatures from Afghan women and girls. Hundreds of women volunteered to go door to door to collect signatures.<sup>97</sup> The petition was presented to then-President Hamid Karzai, armed opposition groups including the Taliban, and then-United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

In November 2015, Afghan women were prominently involved in a march following the decapitation of seven Afghan Hazara,<sup>98</sup> an ethnic group that has historically faced systematic discrimination and persecution. More recently, online campaigns have gained attention. For example, in #MyRedLine, initiated by the young journalist Farahnaz Forotan, women speak about the freedoms and rights they are not willing to give up in the intra-Afghan peace process with the Taliban.<sup>99</sup>

In addition to public campaigns, several local and regional conferences have brought together women and women's groups around peace. In August 2017, for example, hundreds of Afghan women gathered for a conference in Kunar province that led to a group of women reaching out to the Taliban to try to convince them to join the peace process.<sup>100</sup> Such events show how inclusive peacebuilding in Afghanistan goes beyond national-level peace negotiations.

Women are no longer silent in Afghan society when demonstrating or campaigning about peace and security. Creating critical mass will partly depend on whether women and women's groups can come together on certain issues, such as making sure peace negotiations will not jeopardize the gains women have made since 2001.

## 7.2 Recommendations for mass action

- The pro-peace demonstrations and marches that have sprung up around the country have shown that mass action gets attention from national

and international media. **News agencies, international civil society organizations, activists and social media influencers should create pressure on the Afghan government and parties to the conflict.**

From their various perspectives, these actors should support peacebuilding by providing channels to reinforce advocacy messages showcasing social movements in Afghanistan, especially those led by women.

- **Mass action initiatives for peace in Afghanistan should shift their focus from a general call for peace to the need for inclusive peacebuilding.** This also means that social movements, grassroots initiatives and civil society groups should be inclusive and open towards people of various gender, ethnic or religious identities.
- **International donors and civil society** can contribute to creating enabling environments for civic engagement. **They should support mass action movements in Afghanistan,** especially women-led and inclusive movements, by creating and protecting spaces for civic engagement and citizen's voices; providing diplomatic support and protection against threats and attacks; speaking out when the voices of marginalized movements are silenced; providing direct and flexible long-term funding, including for risk management; creating channels to reinforce movements' advocacy messages towards conflict parties; and establishing stronger linkages between informal movements and more professionalized forums of civilian engagement. International actors should push for political support for civic mass action – such as advocating for enabling laws and policies – while also promoting positive narratives about civic spaces.



## 4 CONCLUSIONS

Women's participation in peace processes, especially at the national level, remains very limited. Out of 67 formal and informal talks tracked by the researchers between 2005 and 2020, only on 15 occasions (22%) were women present. Women's participation remains an important source of contention for the Taliban, and there is a risk that including women in the intra-Afghan peace process is perceived by the Taliban as conditioning talks from the start.

There is also a tendency for donors, international actors and civil society to push for women's integration and meaningful participation in separate groups and entities, instead of building common platforms in which men and women work together.

The Broadening Participation research framework points towards ways to enhance Afghan women's meaningful inclusion and active participation in decision-making peace processes, notably creating and supporting platforms for Afghan women to connect and conduct joint advocacy work. Women's organizations, including those operating in Taliban-controlled areas, and women's local peacebuilding initiatives are valuable entry points and should receive greater support and recognition.

After a deal between the US and the Taliban in February 2020, the Afghan government announced in May 2020 that it would be willing to start negotiations with the Taliban.<sup>101</sup> The influence of civil society and women's groups in the US-Taliban talks was very limited. It should be a priority for the Afghan government to include a diverse range of women directly in all phases of the intra-Afghan negotiations (modality 1 of the seven discussed in this report). Although including women as observers or through consultations (modalities 2 and 3) enables them to have a watchdog function and could provide opportunities for input, research has shown that these modalities give women only limited influence over decisions.

Although the High Peace Council has been dissolved, opportunities for inclusive commissions (modality 4) remain. This is especially true at the local level, working with Community Development Councils and building on their influence to amplify the voices of women, communities and other civil society in peacebuilding.

Many other opportunities to increase women's participation in peacebuilding efforts remain underutilized. Problem-solving workshops (modality 5), for example, can be used to build social cohesion and facilitate connections between different women's groups.

In any modality it is essential to fully include women, not only in issues directly related to women's rights or gender equality, but in all initiatives and decisions related to Afghanistan's peace process. It is important for stakeholders to recognize that women are not a homogenous group, so it is not sufficient to restrict access to negotiation spaces to a small number of women. A diverse range of women needs to be represented and included in decision making, acknowledging women's varying needs, priorities and

*'In Afghanistan, peace must come without compromises to the hard-earned gains and progress on women's freedom of speech, political participation and women's rights in general. We want to get assurances that these rights, reflected in the Afghan constitution and international treaties, are guaranteed.'*

Mary Akrami, Head of Afghan Women's Network, August 2020

political views. Where possible and useful, these women should be provided with opportunities for developing joint positions.

Women's active participation in peace marches and (online) protests (modality 7) increasingly shows they do not accept being excluded from discussions on matters of peace, security and development. International organizations and diplomatic actors can help amplify their voices and should continue to support women's groups, women's activists and social movements around inclusive peace.

### **Recommendations for the Afghan government:**

- **Insist on the use of quotas to include a diverse range of women at all stages and levels of the intra-Afghan peace talks and post-agreement implementation**, especially women's direct and meaningful participation at the negotiation table and in shaping post-conflict Afghanistan. The Afghan government should not settle for mere symbolic representation or limiting women's voices to a few well-known individuals. It should ensure that women are included fully and early on in decisions that will shape Afghanistan's future, beyond issues that are related to gender or women's rights.
- **Facilitate regular consultative forums with a diverse range of civil society – especially women's groups –** before, throughout and after the peace process to provide opportunities for additional inputs. The government should also facilitate these inputs being taken into consideration by decision makers at the top level.
- **Ensure a diverse range of women among the workforce and leadership of the State Ministry of Peace**, which should play an active role in pushing for women's meaningful participation, influence and leadership in peace councils at national, provincial and local levels. The Ministry should further facilitate channels between district and national levels.
- Explore opportunities to **ensure and strengthen women's meaningful inclusion through the seven modalities** analysed in this report, such as the use of problem-solving workshops and formal commissions.

### **Recommendations for international stakeholders, including civil society and donors:**

- Provide greater support to local peacebuilding initiatives, grassroots movements and civil society organizations that are led by Afghan women, including **long-term and flexible funding, facilitating alliance-building** among women's networks and **creating platforms** for Afghan women to connect and conduct joint advocacy work. International stakeholders should **support lobby and campaigning efforts of Afghan women and women's networks through capacity-building and reinforcing their advocacy messages**.
- **Facilitate channels to connect** Afghan women to formal and informal peace processes, strengthen communication channels between local and national level processes, and establish linkages between informal movements and more formal, professionalized forums of civilian

engagement. International stakeholders should provide support to **strengthen Peace Councils and women's leadership** in these councils.

- Contribute to creating enabling environments for civic engagement and support mass action movements in Afghanistan, especially women-led and inclusive movements, by **creating and protecting spaces for civic engagement and citizen's voices, providing diplomatic support and protection** against threats and attacks, **speaking out** when the voices of more marginalized movements are silenced, and providing **funding for risk management**. International actors should leverage their influence to **push for political support for civic mass action** – such as advocating for enabling laws and policies – and to **promote positive narratives about civic spaces**.



A woman standing in front of wall art, in Herat, Afghanistan, August 2020. Photo: Elaha Sahel

## ANNEXES

Annex 1 below lists formal and informal meetings to discuss peace in Afghanistan between the beginning of 2005 and April 2020. This includes a broad range of exploratory meetings, informal and formal negotiations, and consultations. These meetings do not always include participation or representation of both the Taliban and the Afghan government: often one side is missing, or representatives are participating in a personal capacity. Sometimes the meetings bring together international actors and one of the conflict parties. Most of the meetings are informal.

We compiled the list using news stories and reports. Although we tried to be as comprehensive and accurate as possible, secrecy and contradictory reporting make it challenging to confirm all details. As we mostly used English sources, the Annex will undoubtedly include more national than provincial meetings: it is likely that many more meetings took place, particularly at local level, such as peace jirgas. While not exhaustive, the list nonetheless provides a rough indication of how many times women have been involved in such meetings. Even with the clear limitations involved in this research, we believe the emerging picture – of only very limited and sporadic participation of women between 2005 and 2020 – is indisputable.

We used the middle column of the below table to calculate the total of 67, though in some cases a reference is made to more than one meeting. If there are four rounds of talks, we calculated this as four instances. We used the final column to calculate the number of these occasions – 15 – on which women were present. Where we found the names of the women participating, we have included them. Again, the number may be higher, but as a percentage of the total meetings – 2% – it is probably a good estimate. If you know of other meetings, please inform us so we can improve the data set and keep tracking women’s participation in the future. You can email us at [suying.lai@oxfamnovib.nl](mailto:suying.lai@oxfamnovib.nl).

<b>Annex 1: Participation of women in informal and formal peace consultations since 2001</b>		
<i>Date</i>	<i>Meeting/process</i>	<i>Women involved?</i>
Summer 2005	The German foreign intelligence agency coordinates with the chancellery in Berlin to meet two Taliban representatives in a Zürich hotel for talks. These talks are said to be coordinated with the US intelligence agencies, and European countries such as France are in the know.	No.
April 2007	President Karzai reveals that he had been secretly negotiating with the Taliban. In September, the US, UK and UN clarify their stance in favour of negotiations with the Taliban, giving Karzai more room for manoeuvre.	No.
September 2008	Informal talks are held between 17 Afghan government and Taliban proxies in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.	No.
February 2009	Talks between Taliban-linked mediators, Western officials and the Afghan government are said to be underway. The talks apparently involve a proposal for the return to Afghanistan of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.	No.
Spring 2009	Exploratory meetings take place between representatives of the Afghan government and the Taliban in Dubai.	No.
September 2009	German officials, at the request of the Taliban, hold their first meeting with the Taliban in Dubai.	No.

23-24 January 2010	Informal talks between Afghan MPs and Taliban representatives take place in the Maldives, attended also by members of Hizb-e-Islami, apparently as observers. These are the first in a series of three talks in the Maldives.	No.
8 January 2010	Regional commanders on the Taliban's leadership council, the Quetta Shura, meet in Dubai with the UN special representative in Afghanistan, Kai Eide.	No.
Spring 2010	Bernd Mützelburg, Germany's special envoy to Afghanistan, meets Tayyab Agha, who is said to represent Mullah Omar.	No.
19-21 May 2010	Seven former Taliban leaders and 14 members of the Afghan government attend the second series of talks in the Maldives.	One (out of 40-45), a female MP.
6 October 2010	Although unconfirmed, several Pakistani and Afghan sources insist that CIA officials have held clandestine meetings with top Taliban leaders. At least two rounds of meetings were reportedly held in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province bordering Afghanistan.	No.
7 October 2010	Secret high-level negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban leadership are believed to have taken place in Dubai. The discussions are said to have centred on the conditions under which the Taliban would agree to call a ceasefire. They are insisting on an agreed timetable for the exit of NATO troops.	No.
Early October 2010	The US based East-West Institute organizes a round of meetings in Kabul under the banner of the 'Abu Dhabi process', as they were funded by the emirate of Abu Dhabi. No 'serving' Taliban take part in these meetings, but some 'reconciled' ones do, including Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef and former foreign minister Wakil Ahmed Mutawakil. These meetings can be considered as exploratory attempts, not as formal negotiations.	No.
Mid-October 2010	It is reported that Taliban commanders from the highest levels of the group's leadership are secretly leaving their sanctuaries in Pakistan for talks with President Karzai's inner circle. NATO member governments are helping to facilitate the discussions by providing air transport and securing roadways for leaders coming from Pakistan. It is reported that in at least one case, Taliban leaders crossed the border and boarded a NATO aircraft bound for Kabul. Taliban commanders reportedly include Maulvi Abdul Kabir, former governor of Nangarhar province and deputy prime minister during the Taliban rule, Mullah Sadre Azam and Anwar-ul-Haq Mujahed. The men were brought by helicopter from Peshawar.	No.
November 2010	US officials secretly meet with Tayyab Agha, a representative of Mullah Omar, in Munich, Germany. The meeting is arranged by Germany's foreign ministry and intelligence agency with support of Qatari royals.	No.
November 2010	NATO-supported talks with the Afghan government come to an end when it is revealed the man posing as the Taliban representative, Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour, one of the most senior commanders in the Taliban movement, is an imposter.	No.
November 2010	Representatives of various Afghan factions (including civil society activists and MPs) meet in the Maldives for the third series of talks.	Four (out of 47), all MPs.
February 2011	US and Taliban officials meet in Doha for a second round of talks, which is mainly about an exchange of prisoners.	No.
May 2011	US and Taliban representatives come face to face for a third round of meetings near Munich. The meetings last two days.	No.
29 November – 2 December 2011	The Foundation for Strategic Research, a think tank funded by the French government, hosts the first of a series of talks in Chantilly to promote intra-Afghan dialogue. The Taliban attends only the third meeting in Chantilly, in December 2012 (see below).	At least one, Farkhunda Zahra Naderi (MP).
December 2011	By the end of 2011, US and Taliban representatives have reportedly	No.

	met more than seven times.	
January 2012	The Taliban establish an office in Qatar. Marc Grossman, the Obama administration's special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, meets with the Taliban to discuss preliminary trust-building opportunities.	No.
20-24 June 2012	Former Taliban, Hizb-e-Islami and Afghan government officials, including High Peace Council members, attend a second series of meetings in Chantilly, organized by the Foundation for Strategic Research.	At least one, Farkhunda Zahra Naderi (MP).
June 2012	Another round of meetings takes place at an academic conference in Kyoto's Doshisha University, where former Taliban minister Qari Din Muhammad is present. The meeting is attended by Mohammad Masoom Stanekzai from the HPC.	No.
20-21 December 2012	Taliban representatives take part in a third series of consultations with representatives of the government and political opposition, organized in Chantilly by the Foundation for Strategic Study.	Some female MPs, including Farkhunda Zahra Naderi.
June 2013	Talks between the US and Taliban officials are scheduled to take place in Qatar. The talks are stalled immediately because of a diplomatic row following the opening of the Taliban's office.	No.
November 2013	Taliban are said to initiate contact with President Karzai.	No.
January/February 2014	The High Peace Council says it has held talks with Taliban leaders in the UAE. Afghan officials have also reportedly met with influential Taliban leaders in Saudi Arabia.	No.
2-3 May 2015	Informal discussion sponsored by the Pugwash Conferences, a private group attended by members of the Taliban political office in Qatar and representatives of the government. <sup>102</sup>	A few women were involved, according to the organizer, but apparently only civil society representatives. <sup>103</sup>
21-22 May 2015	China and Pakistan facilitate the so-called Ürümqi Talks in China between representatives of the Afghan government, headed by Mohammad Masoom Stanekzai with former Taliban officials.	No.
3-4 June 2015	Informal talks in Oslo between Taliban representatives and a delegation of seven female officials and parliamentarians, headed by Shukria Barakzai. <sup>104</sup>	Seven, including Hawa Alam Nuristani and Sediqa Balkhi from the HPC, and Fawzia Koofi and Shukria Barakzai from parliament.
16-17 June 2015	Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister, Hekmat Khalil Karzai, meets a Taliban delegation headed by Syed Tayeb Agha in Oslo.	No.
7-8 July 2015	First more formal <sup>105</sup> talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government in Murree, Pakistan. The 'Murree process' stalled after this initial meeting, largely due to the confirmation of the death of Mullah Omar at the end of July, and the subsequent leadership struggle within the Taliban.	No women were present at this meeting. <sup>106</sup> President Ghani had initially pushed for two women in a delegation of seven. <sup>107</sup> Had a second phase of this process taken place, the expectations were that women would have been involved. <sup>108</sup>
23-24 January 2016	Informal Pugwash meeting on 'Peace and Security in Afghanistan',	Women involved,

	Doha, Qatar, attended by participants in an 'academic' capacity.	according to the organizer.
23 June 2016	Peace jirga in Kabul takes place in which the participants stress the need for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process, and encourage a peace process with the Taliban.	At least two women involved.
Early September 2016	First series of meetings between the Taliban and representatives of the Afghan government in Doha. Allegedly there was a US diplomat present. This is the first known consultation between the Afghan government and the Taliban since the stalling of the 'Murree process' in 2015.	No.
September 2016	Peace deal between the Afghan government and armed group Hezb-e Islami.	One, Habiba Sarabi, as part of the delegation of the HPC; the other two delegations did not include women.
Early October 2016	Second series of meetings between the Taliban and representatives of the Afghan government in Doha, again allegedly with the presence of a US diplomat.	No.
July 2018	US diplomats meet secretly with Taliban representatives at their political office in Doha.	No.
12 October 2018	Zalmay Khalilzad, appointed one month earlier as Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, meets with the Taliban in Qatar, which is considered the first round of (still preliminary) US-Taliban talks.	No.
9 November 2018	First series of Moscow talks. The Afghan government is not represented, but the HPC meets with Taliban representatives.	One, Habiba Sarabi, as deputy head of the HPC.
13-15 November 2018	Second, more formal round of US-Taliban talks takes place and lasts three days.	No.
17-18 December 2018	The US-Taliban talks resume in Abu Dhabi for a third round.	No.
19 January 2019	Six days of talks in Qatar continue the US-Taliban process for a fourth round and result in a 'draft framework for Afghanistan peace', according to Zalmay Khalilzad.	No.
5-6 February 2019	Second series of Moscow talks. A five-man Taliban delegation meet with four members of the HPC. The Afghan government is not directly represented.	Two, Fawzia Koofi (MP) and Hawa Alam Nuristani (at the time a member of the HPC).
25 February-12 March 2019	The US-Taliban talks in Qatar resume for a fifth round, this time also with Mullah Baradar, who had been released from prison in October 2018, in the Taliban delegation.	No.
7 April 2019	Representatives of the People's Peace Movement meet with Khalilzad in Kabul.	No.
20 April 2019	After an inter-Afghan peace meeting in Doha is cancelled, 24 civil society representatives meet informally with 25 Taliban representatives for a six-hour conversation at a hotel in Doha.	Four, including Masuda Sultan.
30 April-9 May 2019	Sixth round of peace talks between the US and the Taliban in Qatar with 'some progress' made on a draft agreement about a US troop drawdown, a nationwide ceasefire and intra-Afghan peace talks.	No.
28-30 May 2019	Senior Afghan politicians meet a delegation of the Taliban in the third series of Moscow talks.	Two, Fawzia Koofi (MP) and Tajwar Kakar (former Deputy Minister of Women's

		Affairs).
29 June-9 July 2019	Seventh round of US-Taliban talks in Qatar, with 'substantive progress' on all four parts of the peace agreement (counter-terrorism assurances, troop withdrawal, intra-Afghan peace negotiations, and a permanent ceasefire). The talks are paused on 6 July to allow space for the intra-Afghan dialogue on 7-8 July.	No.
7-8 July 2019	Qatar and Germany sponsor a two-day intra-Afghan dialogue in Doha which is attended by Taliban representatives and around 50 politicians and civil society activists.	11 female delegates: Jamila Afghani, Mary Akrami, Laila Jafari, Zainab Movahid, Aziza Watanwall Azizi, Habiba Sarabi, Fawzia Koofi, Asila Wardak, Shaharзад Akbar, Anarkali Kaur Honaryar and Shah Gul Rezai.
4-12 August 2019	Eighth round of talks between the US and the Taliban takes place in Doha.	No.
22 August-2 September 2019	Ninth round of talks between the US and the Taliban takes place in Doha.	No.
13 September 2019	Fourth series of Moscow talks: Russia's special envoy for Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, meets with the leaders of the Afghan Taliban in Moscow.	No.
3 October 2019	A Taliban delegation meets unofficially with Khalilzad in Islamabad, Pakistan.	No.
7 December 2019	Tenth round of talks between the US and the Taliban takes place in Doha. The talks are paused on 12 December following an attack on the Bagram air base.	No.
16-17 January 2020	Although without a formal announcement, talks between the US and the Taliban resume in Doha continue for an eleventh round, discussing a possible ceasefire and the signing of an agreement between the US and Taliban.	No.
20-21 January 2020	US-Taliban negotiations continue in Doha, now also with the presence of General Austin Scott Miller, the US and NATO commander in Afghanistan.	No.
9 February 2020	US-Taliban negotiations resume in Doha.	No.
31 March-7 April 2020	Taliban and the Afghan government start face-to-face negotiations about the implementation of the prisoner exchange part of the deal. Conversations started a few days earlier through video conference.	Unknown.
13 April 2020	US-Taliban talks continue in Doha about the implementation of the agreement. General Austin Scott Miller is also part of the meetings.	No.
13 April 2020	The government's official negotiating team holds a consultative meeting with female members of parliament.	14: Habiba Sarabi, Fawzia Koofi, Sharifa Zurmati and 11 female MPs.

#### **Annex 2: Recent steps towards peace in Afghanistan (2017-2020)**

14 April 2017	Russia-backed six-party talks are held in Moscow between Afghanistan and the five Central Asian republics with the aim of reviving peace efforts. Senior officials of Pakistan, China, India and Iran attend but the Taliban are not included.
June 2017	President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah relaunch the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation to ensure an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned, inclusive peace process.

August 2017	President Trump lays out a revised strategy for Afghanistan in which he states: 'Someday, after an effective military effort, perhaps it will be possible to have a political settlement that includes elements of the Taliban and Afghanistan, but nobody knows if or when that will ever happen.' It can be seen as the starting point of a shift in policy towards direct negotiation with the Taliban.
14 February 2018	The Taliban publishes a letter on their website in which they welcome talks with the US.
28 February/1 March 2018	Second Kabul Process meeting. President Ghani offers peace talks to the Taliban without preconditions.
26-27 March 2018	During the Tashkent Conference, more than 20 countries back the Afghan government's offer to launch direct talks with the Taliban. The declaration stresses the 'importance of women's full and meaningful participation in Afghan reconciliation, security and economy'.
May and June 2018	A peace march (of men) takes place from Helmand to Kabul, reflecting grassroots demands to end the war.
7 June 2018	President Ghani declares a unilateral ceasefire to commemorate the Eid festivities (12-19 June).
9 June 2018	The Taliban announce their own unilateral ceasefire (15-17 June).
20 June 2018	Saudi Arabia's King Salman supports the ceasefires and expresses his hope that they can be built upon to reach a lasting peace.
22 June 2018	Abdul Rahman Ibn Abdul Aziz as-Sudais, the Imam of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, prays for lasting peace in Afghanistan during his Friday sermon.
10 July 2018	During a conference on Afghanistan in Saudi Arabia, the chief of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) pledges full and unwavering support to efforts for peace in Afghanistan.
Mid July 2018	US diplomats including Alice Wells, the US envoy for South Asia, meet with Taliban officials in Doha.
22 August 2018	The Taliban confirm they will attend peace talks in Moscow, planned for September but postponed to November 2018 and followed by three more consultations, in February, May and September 2019 (see Annex 1).
September 2018	Zalmay Khalilzad is appointed by President Trump as Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation. From October 2018, he starts to meet with the Taliban. After 11 rounds (see Annex 1), a final agreement is reached on 29 February 2020.
27 November 2018	President Ghani presents a roadmap for peace negotiations at the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan in Switzerland, based on several months of intense consultations with Afghan citizens.
February 2019	In the run-up to a February 2019 meeting in Moscow, the Afghan Women's Network (AWN) publishes a six-point statement. <sup>109</sup>
28 February 2019	Around 3,000 women participate in the National Women's Consensus for Peace to reiterate their demand for meaningful participation in any upcoming peace negotiation.
2 April 2019	A National Civil Society and Media Conference on Peace Negotiations takes place in Kabul, organized by the Salah Peace Consortium and attended by President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah. About 400 Afghan men and women attend from across Afghanistan. The 19-Point Joint Declaration states 'women shall comprise 40 to 50 percent of any peace negotiation team'.
April 2019	A Reconciliation Leadership Council is formed by the Afghan government.
7-8 July 2019	Intra-Afghan dialogue takes place in Doha where officials meet in a personal capacity. In addition to the Taliban, there is participation of a broad range of civil society activists, journalists, politicians, and several individuals associated with the Afghan government.
27 July 2019	President Ghani dissolves the secretariat of the HPC and transfers its portfolio to a newly established State Ministry for Peace.
7 September 2019	A few days after the conclusion of the ninth round of talks between the US and the Taliban, president Trump announces that talks are dead and that he has cancelled secret plans to host a Taliban delegation, and separately president Ghani, at Camp David. One of the reasons is that the Taliban claimed responsibility for an attack in Kabul that killed 12 people, including a US soldier, on 5 September.

21 February 2020	A seven-day reduction in violence starts, negotiated by the US and the Taliban as a prelude to the signing of an agreement on 29 February 2020.
29 February 2020	The US and the Taliban sign an agreement, which includes provisions about the drawdown of US troops, assurances against international terrorism and a prisoner exchange. The deal is signed in Doha. US secretary of state Mike Pompeo is present – the first time a US cabinet member meets members of the Taliban.
10 March 2020	The United Nations Security Council unanimously backs the US-Taliban deal.
27 March 2020	The Afghan government releases a list of delegates who will be part of the negotiation team for intra-Afghan talks. On 26 March, it had released a list of 20 members. This new list includes 21 members, including five women: Fatema Gilani, Fawzia Koofi, Habiba Sarabi, Shahla Fareed and Sharifa Zurmati.
31 March 2020	The Taliban and Afghan government start talks about the exchange of prisoners, which had been set as a precondition for intra-Afghan peace talks to take place: 5,000 Taliban prisoners are to be exchanged for 1,000 Afghan security forces.
7 April 2020	The Taliban stop talks about the prisoner swap, claiming the government is dragging out the process.
4 June 2020	Several European countries and the delegation of the EU in Kabul release a statement: 'The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban must actively include women in all dimensions of the peace process; leadership councils, negotiating teams, consultative shuras, technical and advisory team. We urge both sides to redouble efforts to appoint a greater number of qualified women to these bodies.'
14 June 2020	It is confirmed that the first meeting of the intra-Afghan peace talks will take place in Doha, but no date is mentioned.
19 July 2020	The prisoner swap has not been completed yet. The government says it has released 4,400 Taliban prisoners, while the Taliban claim to have released 845 Afghan security force captives. <sup>110</sup>
28 July 2020	The Taliban announce a three-day ceasefire during Eid al-Adha.
9 August 2020	In a final declaration, the participants of a Loya Jirga organized in Kabul between 7-9 August call for an immediate and long-lasting ceasefire and approve the release of the remaining 400 Taliban prisoners. Among around 3,200 delegates, 700 women participated in the Loya Jirga.
13 August 2020	President Ghani issues a decree to establish a Women's High Council to support the the economic, social, and political empowerment of women. Two days later, civil society institutions and women's rights activists call this Council 'symbolic'.
14 August 2020	Fawzia Koofi, a member of the government's negotiation team survives an assassination attempt when her car is attacked by gunmen in Qarabagh district in Kabul province.
26 August 2020	The Taliban announce a new 20-member department responsible for their representation in both the intra-Afghan peace process and further negotiations with the United States. No women were reported to be part of this department.
29 August 2020	President Ghani issues a decree to appoint 46 members to the High Council for National Reconciliation, including senior government officials, politicians, former mujahideen leaders and civil society representatives. The list includes eight women: civil society activists Mary Akrami, Najiba Ayubi, Zia Gul Rezaee, Safia Sediqqi, Zarqa Yaftali and Alia Yulmaz; former Minister of Higher Education, Farida Mohmand; and former Minister of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled, Nasrin Oryakhil. However, a day later, Abdullah, the Chair of the Council, opposes the decree and claims he has the authority to appoint members. Several appointees, including former President Karzai, also reject their membership of the Council.
3 September 2020	The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Deborah Lyons, calls for a humanitarian ceasefire.
12 September 2020	The intra-Afghan peace process is launched in Doha with an official opening ceremony. The first face-to-face talks between the two delegations started on 14 September.

# NOTES

- 1 Meaningful participation is understood here as a broad concept that combines four elements to a varying but substantial degree: 1. The ability to exert influence over the process and outcomes; 2. being present to be able to seize opportunities to inform, influence and make decisions; 3. deploying agency through agenda-setting and coalition building; and 4. self-efficacy, knowledge and confidence to effectively represent women's interests. This conceptualization is taken from the Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Women's Meaningful Participation in Negotiating Peace and the Implementation of Peace Agreements, a meeting convened by UN Women in preparation for the UN Secretary-General's 2018 report on Women, Peace and Security (16-17 May 2018). Retrieved 2 September from <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/egm-womens-meaningful-participation-in-negotiating-peace-en.pdf?la=en&vs=3047>.
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For numbers on women's representation in different sectors, see: B. Ahmadi. (2019). Afghanistan Talks – No Women, No Peace. United States Institute of Peace. Retrieved 15 July, 2020 from <https://www.usip.org/publications/2019/03/afghanistan-talks-no-women-no-peace>.
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- 4 The research project 'Broadening Participation in Political Negotiations and Implementation' focused on inclusion in peace processes and political transitions. The overall research objective was to establish how and under what conditions included actors may participate in and/or influence complex peacemaking and political transition processes, including consideration of eventual implementation of negotiated agreements. For further information, please see: <http://www.inclusivepeace.org/content/broadening-participation>.
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- 25 Ibid., p. 11.
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- 34 When considering inclusive peacebuilding in the analysis of this paper, only the participation of cisgender women has been taken into account, and not the inclusion of other groups such as gender non-binary people, ethnic or religious minorities, or civil society representatives. While this research paper focuses only on cisgender women, the authors realize that the inclusiveness of peace processes should go beyond the mere inclusion of cisgender women.
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#IMatter is an intersectional worldwide solidarity campaign working with women and girls in crisis and post-crisis contexts, recognizing the universality of the struggle and women's experience. It seeks to build bridges between networks and to strengthen the women's movement. Their struggle is our struggle and vice versa.

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Cordaid works to end poverty and exclusion in the world's most fragile and conflict-affected areas as well as in the Netherlands. Cordaid engages communities to rebuild trust and resilience and increase people's self-reliance.

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InclusivePeace supports local actors and their supporters in times of political transitions, opening up spaces for exchange on sustaining peace and inclusive societies at both the local and global levels. We do this by providing advice, facilitation, and convening linking short-term problem-solving with a more holistic strategic view of pathways to inclusive societies.