

Women, Peace and Security

Advanced Consortium on Cooperation, Conflict and Complexity
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Peace and Social
Change Fellowship
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Most of all, we would like to thank the 2020 Peace and Social Change Fellowship participants, for their thoughtful and generative contributions to this program. Now and always, we are grateful for their leadership and expertise, as well as their ongoing commitments to creating a more peaceful and just world for all people.

On cover, clockwise: (1) *Members from MANSAM (Sudan), Omima Alfadil, Afkar Nasser, Rasha Abubaker and Mazahir Ali, join in on an energizer;* (2) *Executive Director Leymah Gbowee leads a group discussion on mobilization techniques;* (3) *Mamello Makhele (Barali Foundation) and Kaltume Abubaker (FOMWAN) participate in a energizer activity;* (4) *Limpho Matlakala (Barali Foundation) gestures during a small group discussion.* Photo: Natalia Mroz.

About the Women, Peace and Security Program

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) program is an education and research hub spearheading a transformative approach to understanding the diverse roles that women play to successfully influence sustainable peace and promote human security through everyday activism.

Through education, public outreach and research, the WPS program advances the visibility of, and knowledge exchanges among, women changemakers around the world, domestically and internationally.

Our basic hypothesis is that the **work done by grassroots women change makers is critical to strengthening and expanding democracy and reducing structural violence, and therefore to creating and maintaining peace and security for all.** Through an integrated academic, policy and practice-based understanding, the WPS program believes that:

1. Grassroots women peacebuilders and frontline activists around the globe employ a diverse range of strategies and practices to forward and sustain peace, justice and security in their communities. Often, such work is not recognized or named as peace work.
2. Security is more than armed conflict and war. It includes issues of everyday safety like access to clean water, affordable housing, and bodily autonomy.
3. Expanded recognition of peace and security requires that we must not look only to war zones, but also to a range of contexts, places and spaces – including the United States.
4. New analytical tools are needed to understand what “counts” as women’s participation in advancing peace efforts across the globe.



Mamello Makhele (*Barali Foundation*), Kaltume Abubaker (*FOMWAN*), and Sylvia Katooko (*Suubi Center*) pose together at the *Peace & Social Change Workshop in Nairobi, Kenya*. Photo: Natalia Mroz.

Peace and Social Change Fellowship Program

The Peace and Social Change Fellowship program is designed to generate knowledges, build skills, advance solidarity, and facilitate knowledge exchange amongst frontline advocates and organizers working on various issues of justice and security for all people. The Fellowship program creates a collaborative space for participants to learn from one another and to increase the visibility of the diverse nature of grassroots women's peace activism. Placing the expertise of participants at the forefront of learning, the Fellowship program enables participants to determine the support they need, be revitalized by one another and establish connections through a participatory engagement process.

The Fellowship program is bookended by two in-person workshops, organized in collaboration with the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY) and the Columbia Global Center in Nairobi. The program takes an innovative approach to the very concept of 'fellowship,' acknowledging that positive social change is not forged by individuals alone, but rather happens through coordination with partners, networks and coalitions. As such, the selected applicants were invited to bring a team of collaborators from their respective organizations to the workshop. This enabled the workshop to facilitate cross-learning within and across the various teams, as well as to build a transnational critical learning community of peacebuilders. This year's cohort also for the first time included two networks, in addition to individual organizations, in order to recognize the contributions of regional collectives to driving peace and social change.

Throughout the 6-month fellowship period, the WPS program facilitates sustained engagement across organizations through webinars, scheduled calls, and continued email exchanges to maintain a critical learning community. During this period, students at Columbia University and the Graduate Center at CUNY support the organizations on collaboratively-designed projects to strengthen and enhance the visibility of the organizations' peace and security work.

Peace and Social Change Fellowship Design



Monitoring, Learning, and Evaluation (MLE)

The WPS program is designing and piloting Monitoring, Learning and Evaluation (MLE) approaches that are participatory and equitable, in line the WPS program’s paradigm of ethical engagement with women changemakers from around the world. The MLE process will enable the WPS program to understand:

1. How participants experience the program as a whole—including the package of ‘live’ workshops and webinars;
2. How they think we can improve the design; and
3. Changes they are observing in themselves, their organizations and their communities.

Through the MLE process, the WPS program will learn about how the Fellowship program enables participants to determine the support they need, facilitate the support and learning they share amongst themselves, and create opportunities to establish connections and build stronger coalitions. The MLE approach is also aimed at helping the WPS program learn about the longer-term sustainability of the benefits participants experience through participation in the program.

Our MLE approach engages the women peacebuilders who participate in the program to generate information and insight in a systematic, transparent and equitable way. The MLE processes we use prioritize respect, building trust, and demonstrating that we value the contributions of participants and their communities. We also integrate equity considerations in measures and processes.

About the 2020 Fellowship Cohort

In January 2020, the second cohort of the fellowship program convened for the first workshop in Nairobi, Kenya. This convening marked the beginning of the fellowship period and brought together women peacebuilders engaged in various forms of peace and security work across **Nigeria, Uganda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho, and Sudan**. Selected from a large and diverse pool of applicants, the five participating organizations hail from different political contexts in Africa, many affected by various levels of conflict and insecurity, and are unified by their focus on **various gendered dimensions of peace and security** issues.

Réseau des Femmes en Action pour le Développement Social (REFEADES)

Network of Women in Action for Social Development

Democratic Republic of Congo

Founded by five displaced Congolese women in 2009, REFEADES seeks to advocate around women and girls' rights, with particular focus on addressing sexual- and gender-based violence in eastern DRC. They also focus on several other areas including poverty, environmental protection, and public health and sanitation. They are experienced in working with survivors of GBV in conflict contexts, and have focused on reintegration and skills-building, such as craft making.

Barali Foundation

Lesotho

The Barali Foundation was created to address disparities in sexual and reproductive health and rights in Lesotho's rural populations. They work to engage their community in dialogue around LGBTQ+ rights and abortion rights. Their work also includes addressing issues of domestic violence and child marriage, and facilitating skills-building and financial independence through agriculture for women and girls.



Peace and Social Change Fellowship participants with WPS program staff at workshop in Nairobi. Photo: Natalia Mroz.

The Suubi Center - Kibuku

Uganda

The Suubi Center is a non-profit organization focused on providing sexual and reproductive health services and works toward ensuring greater access to education and income-generating skills for women in rural communities of Kibuku, Uganda. Suubi, which means “hope” in Luganda, is a focus of the organization as they work on economic empowerment, particularly around teenage mothers. They also work around various issues including land rights and gender-based violence.

Federation of Muslim Women's Associations of Nigeria (FOMWAN)

Nigeria

FOMWAN was established in 1985 in Nigeria, and is comprised of chapters in 36 states and Abuja. Attending the workshop was the Plateau State Chapter from northern Nigeria, whose focus is on women’s rights in education, health, and economic empowerment, among other areas. They have also been active in facilitating interfaith peacebuilding processes in Northern Nigeria, and providing psychosocial services and support to trauma-affected communities. As a network, they registered with a network partner (Jos Stakeholders Center for Peace) with whom they collaborate closely.

MANSAM - Women of Sudanese Civic and Political Groups

Sudan

MANSAM is an alliance of 8 women’s groups, 18 civil society organizations, two youth groups and individuals in Sudan that was active in the Sudanese Revolution in 2019. MANSAM is a network of activists advocating for the meaningful inclusion of women in Sudan’s government and the promotion of women’s and girls’ rights. They continue to organize for peace and stability during and after political revolution, and share their experience with peaceful protest as a tool for social change. Represented at the workshop were members from a variety of regions across the country, some of whom were leaders of local women’s organizations and others independent activists.



Workshop facilitators Nuria Abdi, Ruth Ochieng and Martha Mutisi (left to right) led group during the in-person workshop in Nairobi in 2020. Photo: Natalia Mroz.

Collaborative Learning & Exchange in January 2020



Left: Rose Faida and Seya wa Mwilambwe from REFEADES present their organization's Peace Wall. Right: Participants used a variety of physical materials, especially photos, to represent their organizations' work. Photo: Natalia Mroz.

The January 2020 Workshop in Nairobi was intentionally designed to be a generative space for all participants to exchange insights, strategies and knowledge from their work and to build stronger coalitions both within and across participating organizations. The workshop agenda is produced through a participatory process, using the themes identified through preliminary surveys and scoping phone calls. This process was shaped and influenced by the workshop's co-facilitators, renowned feminist activists and scholars Ruth Ochieng (Uganda), Martha Mutisi (Zimbabwe/Kenya), and Nuria Abdi (Kenya).

Aligned with the WPS program's three goals, the workshop is comprised of opportunities for shared learning, both within organizations and among individuals and groups, through dialogue, moderated discussions, and reflections – as well as opportunities to celebrate together, share meals, and connect through song and dance.

On the first day of the workshop, the participating organizations engaged in a collaborative exercise of visual storytelling termed **'Building and Narrating Peace Walls.'** Each group had the opportunity to highlight and narrate their organization's work through pictures, posters, and original communications materials. For instance, the Barali Foundation (Lesotho) took participants on the journey from their inception to their current diverse portfolio of projects, presented campaign materials and event photos, and discussed the effectiveness of drama and poetry in sharing stories of all those who identify as women in Lesotho.

Similarly, REFEADES (DRC) presented photos of their campaigns in rural DRC to destigmatize and address needs of survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in the context of civil war and instability in eastern Congo. FOMWAN (Nigeria) highlighted elements of their interfaith outreach, while MANSAM (Sudan) members brought together calendars and photos from the work of each participant around various regions of Sudan.



Left: Muibat Abdulrazaq explains FOMWAN's work in Plateau State, Nigeria during the Peace Walls presentation. Right: Members of the Barali Foundation pose for a picture in front of their Peace Wall. Photo: Natalia Mroz.

The visual and narrative cross-sharing created an opportunity for organizations to exchange current practices and techniques and provided a platform to strengthen their skills in effectively communicating and documenting their work. Through this exercise, each organization had an opportunity to exchange ideas and strategies to address cross-cutting challenges, such as using interfaith and intergenerational approaches to building peace... tailoring messages to particular audiences. In this way, organizations learned of the diverse ways that each group broadly conceptualizes 'peace and security' in their contexts, presenting a wide visual array of themes and experiences that physically weaved the women's work together.

The visual and narrative cross-sharing created an opportunity for organizations to exchange current practices and techniques and provided a platform to strengthen their skills in effectively communicating and documenting their work.

Another component of the workshop involved strategy-sharing and collective brainstorming across organizations about various challenges in each other's work in a series of **thematically-focused small group discussions**. The themes for each discussion group arose from the initial scoping phone calls during the participatory planning process. The topics included 'strategies used for responding to and organizing around gender-based violence', 'strategies for working amid political insecurity and state violence', 'strategies for working across differences', and 'strategies for working in rural communities.'

Representatives from each organization contributed strategies on how to navigate these various circumstances based on their own experiences, ranging from how to package information and sensitize communities, to how to use context-specific strategies to engage with various stakeholders and ensure accountability. This exercise served as a vehicle for cross-learning, providing a platform for participants to share their experience, learn from one another, and generate new plans for their own organizations together.

“ This workshop was an excellent opportunity to meet my sisters from other areas and countries from Africa. They have shared their experiences and because of these lessons learned, we can bring this knowledge to our own country or region. ”

—Mazahir, MANSAM (Sudan)

At the end of the first day, participants had the opportunity to view *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*. The film showcases WPS Executive Director Leymah Gbowee’s leadership of the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, which brought together Christian and Muslim women in a nonviolent movement that played a pivotal role in ending Liberia’s civil war and dictatorship in 2003. Following the film, participants engaged in a profound question and answer session with Leymah Gbowee, in which participants shared reflections on leadership, trauma, resilience, and feminist mobilization.



Participants Agnes Ikasilon (Suubi Center), Rose Faida (REFEADES), and Mamello Makhele (Barali Foundation) engage in a small group discussion.
Photo: Natalia Mroz.

On the film, Agnes Ikasilon, from the Suubi Center (Uganda), said: “When I watched the film, I came to realize is that in everything that we do, we cannot do it single handedly. Leymah managed to lead this team but with teamwork... I learned from this film that as a leader you need to be a servant.”

On the final day of the workshop, the participants brainstormed with their respective teams on what specific project of theirs could be bolstered with research support from graduate students at Columbia University. These ideas will shape **collaboratively-designed projects** that fellowship participants and interns will work on over the next six months, in order to strengthen and enhance the visibility of the peace and security work the fellowship organizations are already doing. Graduate student interns, Pearlyn Neo (Columbia University), Sedef Ozoguz (Graduate Center, CUNY) and Katia Henrys (Graduate Center, CUNY), also helped to facilitate these discussions, conducted interviews with the participating organizations during the workshop, and continue to support the program through the course of the entire fellowship period.

Emergent Key Themes

Over the course of the workshop, several key themes emerged in the discussions and activities in which the participants engaged, as well as interviews conducted by the WPS program's interns with each organization. Participants shared common challenges, such as ensuring the scope of their work was manageable, mobilizing resources, telling the story of their work more accurately, and dealing with the ever-evolving socio-economic and political situations in their contexts. Together, they exchanged insights from their own experiences that ranged from using social media as a tool for collaborative outreach, to leveraging intergenerational and interfaith dialogue to promote inclusive peacebuilding. The following section discusses some of the key strategies that the participating grassroots women's organizations all use, in various ways, to advance peace and justice projects in their communities.

THEME ONE

Grassroots women's activism addresses gendered violence that is not only physical, but also structural and rooted in inequalities existing across society.

In this year's cohort, participating organizations address both explicit forms of violence – such as sexual and gender-based violence – but also forms of violence not necessarily as easily recognized throughout society. Their work underscores that a narrow focus on physical violence may actually obscure the multiple ways that grassroots women's organizations mobilize around structural forms violence. For example, they do so by providing access to healthcare, mitigating the effects of environmental degradation, and advocating for greater access to decision-making and economic power.

Participants in the workshop articulated a wide range of strategies to address many kinds of issues, reflecting a holistic and broad understanding of the barriers to peace and social change. For instance, the Barali Foundation (Lesotho) pointed to social norms about girls' prescribed roles as an obstacle to address women and girl's sexual and reproductive freedom. They also remarked on the importance of advocacy and the lack of women in decision-making positions as a barrier to policy change. The Suubi Center (Uganda) reflected on how broader themes of constraints on civil society in Uganda have at times restricted their ability to operate, forcing them to develop new strategies and partnerships to sustain their work. MANSAM (Sudan) framed their priorities in terms of building democratic space and transforming unjust state structures.

“ Our aim is to make a society which is characterized by justice, democracy, citizenship, development and peace – and we are dreaming of state of law and accountability in alignment with that. ”

—Omima, MANSAM (Sudan)



Their work underscores that a narrow focus on physical violence may actually obscure the multiple ways that grassroots women's organizations mobilize around structural forms violence.

Mazahir Ali (MANSAM) contributes during a large group discussion. Photo: Natalia Mroz.

Other organizations emphasized that other forms of violence – including violations of children’s rights and environmental degradation – are priority issues in their peacebuilding work. FOMWAN (Nigeria) focuses on addressing children’s rights under the Almajiri education system, finding interconnections between childhood precarity, lack of social integration, and the rising presence of Boko Haram in Nigeria – and demonstrating contextual knowledge of how children are integral actors within the broader security issues facing Nigeria. REFEADES (DRC), on the other hand, drawing linkages between environmental degradation and women’s safety and security, institutes a program mobilizing women and girls to work on environmental restoration.

“ We realized that women cannot be in security and in peace, if they are in a bad environment, so we came up with an activity [to mobilize women in the community] to plant trees in the mountains. ”

—Rose, REFEADES (DRC)

Each organization offered a broad range of strategies honed to their own contexts and relationships to mobilize around their priority issues. Their strategies reflected a more expansive lens of violence that is also structural and “slow,” in that it includes less visible aspects of insecurity such as environmental violence, widespread inequality and the everyday realities of women’s lives.

THEME TWO

Women's organizing to advance justice and peace occurs on a number of levels and scales.

Grassroots women's organizations operate on a number of levels to advance peace and justice. Among the participating organizations, this included directly providing services, as the Suubi Center does with skills-building classes; to education and dialogue, as the Barali Foundation does with sexual and reproductive rights; and advocacy and policy change, as FOMWAN does in partnering with local security authorities.

In the face of various constraints on their work – from lack of resources to shrinking civil society space – grassroots women's organizations constantly innovate and adapt to address the issues facing their communities.

When formal processes proved inaccessible or ineffective to them, participating organizations shared how they developed strategies to advance peacebuilding, while balancing a web of values and interests. For example, the Barali Foundation, beyond their efforts to lobby authorities for policy change around sexual and reproductive health, also uses social media campaigns to elevate the voices of young women who have had abortions. MANSAM (Sudan) united as a collective of women's organizations and civil society groups to use peaceful protest to drive the Sudanese Revolution in 2018 and 2019 – and they continue to leverage their coalition to advocate for human security needs across the country, particularly in disparities in

access to education. MANSAM members discussed the locally-adapted strategy of organizing women's coffee groups in rural areas in order to create space for dialogue and raise awareness. Afkar Nasser, an activist with MANSAM (Sudan), said, “[We have] a coffee group. The way I do awareness, it's just like chatting... If you invite the women to a public speech, they might not come... but coffee group, it's perfect for them.”

REFEADES emphasized that their work with survivors of sexual- and gender-based violence in their community was an essential part of peacebuilding in eastern Congo, in the face of ongoing conflict and other structural barriers to peace. One participant from DRC put it this way, reflecting on the context of insecurity in which their work takes place:

“ In the East [of the Democratic Republic of Congo], there are a lot of armed groups that can appear anytime, so people in these regions live in permanent insecurity... If we campaign against violence in a village, that's enough to have [armed groups] against us. The danger is constantly there, but we still need to do something to alleviate even slightly the suffering of these women, victims of these rebels. ”

—Seya, REFEADES (DRC)

In the face of various constraints on their work – from lack of resources to shrinking civil society space – grassroots women's organizations constantly innovate and adapt to address the issues facing their communities. Moreover, their strategies reveal a landscape of peacebuilding that resists a ‘top-down’ or ‘bottom-up’ binary.

“ There is no single way to battle the patriarchy. Go under, over and from the sides. ”

—Lineo, Barali Foundation (Lesotho)

THEME THREE

Women's mobilizations for peace and security often rely on integrating diverse stakeholders and perspectives into peacebuilding coalitions.

A final key theme that emerged from the workshop was the importance of leveraging coalitions that integrate diverse stakeholders and perspectives into peacebuilding work. In order to do so successfully, the participating grassroots women's organizations emphasized the need to approach difference as a resource, rather than a challenge to be overcome.



Mamello Makhele (*Barali Foundation*) and Kaltume Abubaker (*FOMWAN*) participate in an energizer activity. Photo: Natalia Mroz.

Leveraging difference as resource to build coalitions is a critical strategy employed by these grassroots women's organizations to build peace and drive social change through solidarity.

Some of the prominent examples that emerged were the ways that participating organizations engaged with religious institutions and even leveraged religious differences to build peace through interfaith work. For instance, REFEADES (DRC) mentioned that in rural contexts with limited connectivity, much of their program outreach occurs through church networks. During the workshop, the Barali Foundation (Lesotho), who also works with church-based groups, engaged in a critical dialogue with FOMWAN (Nigeria), whose programming is framed by Islamic values, about how to work with religious leaders and to strategically package information about sexual and reproductive health.

One organization in particular, FOMWAN (Nigeria), explained that building an interfaith network with other women's groups has been successful in addressing conflict in their community:

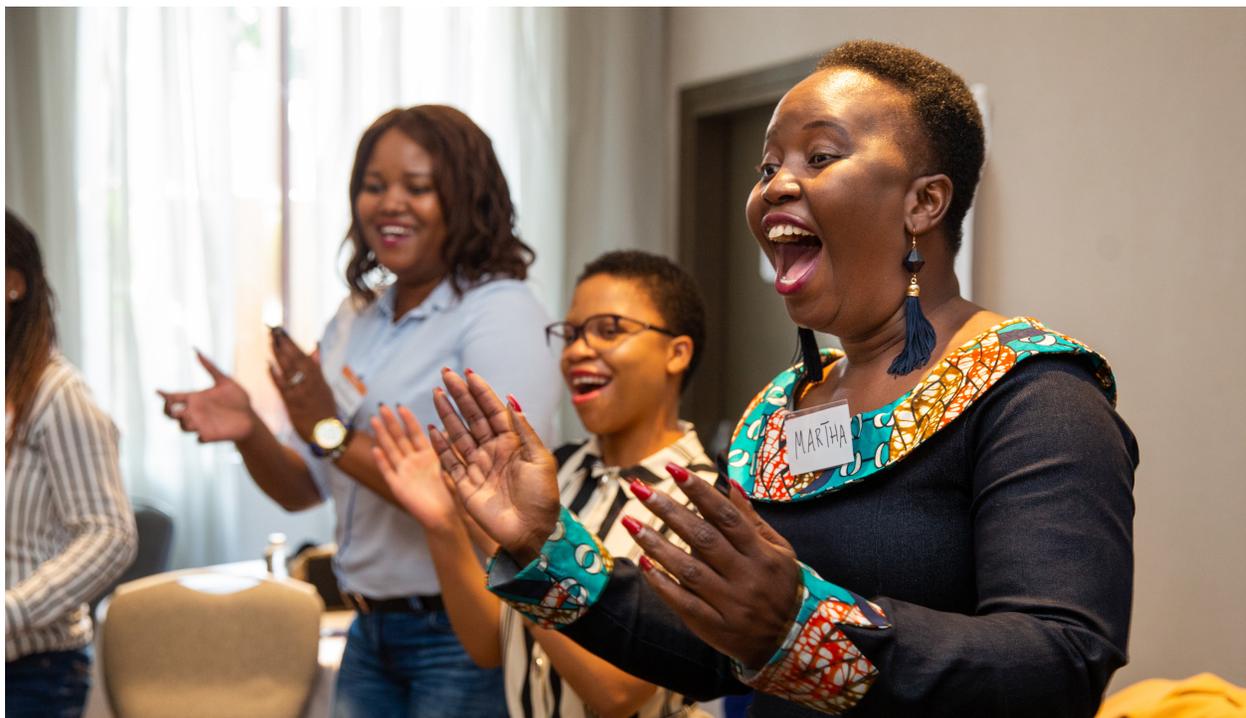
“ We have been able to restore peace to the community; not only FOMWAN but with the help of other Christian organizations - that is the network. We have come together and worked tirelessly to ensure that peace returned back to Plateau State... People are beginning to trust each other. Before, I could not sit with you. Even seeing you, that you are not putting on a veil like I am, I would just look and think, this is not my friend. But now we can hug each other. ”

—Muibat, FOMWAN (Nigeria)

Other key examples of leveraging difference included efforts to engage and integrate the perspectives of marginalized groups directly into programming and organizational leadership. For example, the Barali Foundation's approach to peacebuilding work emphasized the need for inclusion of LGBTIQ voices to strengthen feminist movement-building. They organize programming for LGBTIQ youth about sexuality and mental health and mobilize against discrimination based on sexual orientation in order to foster inclusive peace and social change for all women.

“ *Barali* translates to daughters, and that's why we call ourselves the Barali Foundation... [Early on in our program development] I realized that as *barali* we need to accommodate everyone who defines themselves as a woman, whether they're LGBTIQ, or whichever way you identify as a woman in Lesotho. ”

—Lineo Matlakala, Barali Foundation (Lesotho)



Top: Rose Faida (REFEADES) dances during a final group circle. Bottom: Martha Mutisi (co-facilitator) alongside Lineo Matlakala (left) and Mamello Makhele (center) from the Barali Foundation (Lesotho). Photo: Natalia Mroz.

Lessons for Women, Peace and Security

The themes that emerged from the January 2020 workshop contribute to new understandings of grassroots women's activism and constitute key lessons for the field of women, peace and security.

Adopting a broad lens of 'peace and security' more fully captures the nature of women's grassroots peacebuilding.

Grassroots women's mobilizations and strategies drive positive social change in broad ways in their communities, based on a complex understanding of the structural barriers to sustainable peace. Women's organizations are mobilizing every day around various forms of inequality and insecurity, such as access to education, environmental degradation, and poverty. Across a spectrum of political contexts, all participants demonstrated a wide-ranging expertise of local dynamics and grassroots work. Their expansive work underscores the necessity of an inclusive vision of 'peace and security,' accounting for the political, social and economic security in the household, the community, and beyond. They spoke not only from a perspective of meeting basic needs, but also of their vision of transformation in their communities:

“ We want to see our community transform... Now, girls have that courage in case there is such a problem. They have courage to go back to school and life changes afterwards. ”

—Agnes, Suubi Center (Uganda)



Kaltume Abubaker (*FOMWAN*), Jennifer Yarima (*Jos Stakeholders Center for Peace*), Bridget Sharon Mukade (*Suubi Center*) and Agnes Ikasilon (*Suubi Center*), left to right. Photo: Natalia Mroz.

Recognizing this broad scope of peace and security work provides a deeper lens with which to view the multitude of techniques grassroots women's organizations and networks employ to drive social change. In conventional understandings of 'development' and 'peace' work, grassroots organizations are often understood primarily as those offering direct and immediate services, oftentimes in response to issues such as gender-based violence. While addressing sexual- and gender-based violence continues to be a key priority, the experiences of the participating organizations demonstrate how grassroots women's activism operates in understandings of violence not limited to the physical.



Jennifer Yarima (*Jos Stakeholders Center for Peace*) engages in a small group discussion during the January workshop, as Makhotso Kalake (*Barali Foundation*) listens. Photo: Natalia Mroz.

This finding was significant in last year's Peace and Social Change cohort, and underscores the sustained importance of adopting a broad lens of 'peace and security' in order to fully account for the impact of grassroots women's organizations on peace and social change.

Grassroots women's organizations have much to learn from each other through sharing of strategies, stories and key lessons.

It was evident from the experiences of these grassroots women's organizations that they are co-producing innovative strategies to navigate the complexity in their environments, and exhibit a deep expertise in the peace and security terrains of their specific contexts. Their approaches to peacebuilding ranged from addressing structural drivers of insecurity, such as access to healthcare, to confronting instances of inequality through direct action, protest and advocacy. They operate on multiple scales of changemaking – from direct service provision to advocacy – and to do so, their strategies are grounded in the need to be resilient in the face of challenges and constraints on their work.

One example from the organizations participating in the 2020 Fellowship program was the ability to leverage differences through diverse coalitions and practice meaningful solidarity to advance positive social change. Participants' testimony about using interfaith approaches underscores the strength of an inclusive concept of peacebuilding work – one that is comprised of the daily strategies deployed and relationships forged by women in their communities to advance justice and create change.

Having opportunities to make powerful connections with each other can help shape more nuanced understandings of grassroots women's work. Bringing greater visibility to and bolstering the complex peace and security work of grassroots women's organizations, as well as deepening cross-learning among the grassroots women's groups, continues to be some key goals of the fellowship program.

Spaces for constructive horizontal engagement can help build stronger coalitions both within and across grassroots women's organizations.

Creating spaces for women's organizations to exchange their insights and expertise with one another proved imperative to build a sense of community and a multi-country network of grassroots organizations united in their work towards gendered elements of peace. For example, many of the workshop participants remarked that by exchanging strategies and experiences with one another, they recognized new possibilities for transnational collaboration:

“ I've learned that the problems we are facing [are not only] in the area where we live. People [in our community] have the same problems that other women throughout Africa are facing. And so, I understand that collaboration is very important and that this may help us to deepen our strategies in order to overcome the problems we are having and to build a world where there is peace. ”

—Seya, REFEADES (DRC)

“ In most of our work we have collaborated only within the southern region [of Africa], but now we are coming here and forming alliances with other countries, and really the world, this is something I am very grateful for because in that we can build the Africa we want. ”

—Mamello, Barali Foundation (Lesotho)

The workshop space served to underscore the power of platforms that promote horizontal engagement across movements. To elevate these voices, the women, peace and security field can benefit from finding new venues to build stronger coalitions within and across grassroots women's organizations and to generate new strategies for sustainable peace through these critical connections.



Omima Alfadil (*MANSAM*), Katia Henrys (*WPS Intern, CUNY*), Afkar Nasser (*MANSAM*), Aline Sifa Mulibinge (*REFEADES*), Mamello Makhele (*Barali Foundation*), and Rasha Abubaker (*MANSAM*) pose during a coffee break. Photo: Natalia Mroz.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the themes from the workshop demonstrate how peace itself is a story to be told, believed, and enacted through everyday actions. The field of women, peace and security is strengthened with the knowledge that there are many ways to tell the story of peace, ranging from ones of protest and revolution, to those of health, respect and empowerment. The participants spoke to the power of women as decision-makers and bridge-builders, while simultaneously sharing strategies from their specific contexts and testimonies to the iterative processes that make change possible. The participants demonstrated how their aims were interrelated and evolving based on changing understandings of underlying needs from women, girls and societies at-large. Conversely, sharing stories of threats facing the participants served as real reminders of the everyday resilience of grassroots women's organizations. Transforming how to really listen to the experiences of women peacebuilders, and how to strengthen connections among them, provides a path forward for the field and beyond.



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