



**Womanhood in Peacemaking: Taking Advantage  
of Unity through Cultural Roles for a Successful  
Gendered Approach in Conflict Resolution**

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## **"Womanhood in Peacemaking: Taking Advantage of Unity through Cultural Roles for a Successful Gendered Approach in Conflict Resolution"**

In January 1998, 50 women from opposing sides of the Bougainville Conflict successfully presented a female perspective in the negotiations of the Lincoln Agreement.[\[1\]](#) Consistent participation of women helped establish a permanent peace through collectively using their roles in society for unified initiatives. Conversely, Cote d'Ivoire failed to achieve resolution for its 2002 civil war[\[2\]](#). Though Cote d'Ivoire struggled for a gendered approach to peacemaking, polarization around ethnicity and perceived deviation from cultural roles hindered its effectiveness. Inclusion of women in peacemaking was attempted in both the Bougainville Conflict and the First Ivorian Civil War, but their relative successes were determined significantly by the degree of unity in gendered actions and deference to cultural norms. These two cases show that gender inclusion contributes greatly to peacemaking processes and is essential to sustainable conflict resolution.

Bougainville is an autonomous region of Papua New Guinea which completed its weapons disposal program and held a transparent first election in May 2005[\[3\]](#), finally stepping into long-term stability. From 1989 to 1998, a violent conflict sparked by mining rights between the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) and the Papua New Guinea Defense Forces (PNGDF) raged in the region, leaving over 15,000 dead[\[4\]](#). The government crumbled as the conflict degenerated into widespread guerrilla warfare and localized violence running on revenge and traditional clan tensions[\[5\]](#).

While males were more susceptible to combat-related afflictions in playing active roles in the conflict, women in Bougainville suffered the long-term consequences of the conflict. Expected to continue raising their family, they remained on their land. Women were deprived of basic needs due to PNGDF's eight-year blockade[\[6\]](#) and forced to flee into the wilderness to eke out a living. Often, they were forcefully displaced. Lack of discipline in both armies led to indiscriminate rape and looting[\[7\]](#).

These experiences of conflict galvanized the women to action. Women encouraged reconciliation on an individual scale by persuading their families to cease fighting[\[8\]](#). Bougainville society is matrilineal; women are well-respected in domestic matters. Bougainville women utilized that status by relating to immediate personal impacts of the conflict to persuade the men, distancing themselves from its factions. Adhering to the cultural norm of "homemaker" in persuasion gave their opinions weight. This focus on the irrefutable deterioration of life also enabled Bougainville women to find common ground for establishing peace with opposing

villages. Peace marches, prayer forums, and disarmament of a “Peace Area” were organized to further bridge the divide between factions and beginning reconciliation[9]. Women achieved neutrality because they concerned themselves with the hardships shared by everyone rather than divisive loyalties of combat; it enabled them to become channels for negotiation on a local scale. These peacemakers were then able to find a collective voice through various conferences. Women from both factions attended the Global Conference on Women in 1995; 700 women attended the Peace Forum in Arawa[10]. The conferences catalyzed collective action by gathering individual actors together, which in turn gave the women a voice at formal venues. The inclusion of Bougainville women in formal peacemaking was limited to an advisory capacity[11], but they were able to address gender concerns and expedite negotiation. A position paper from the Women’s Forum of 1996 helped begin the Peace Talks in Burnham[12]. Having attended successive peace talks, women delegates published a position statement with the signing of a cease-fire agreement in the Lincoln Talks on addressing gender issues in peace[13]. Through their consistent adherence to neutrality and their cultural roles, they facilitated negotiation without dissent from men. Women worked for inclusion in the peace talks on all levels, contributing significantly to their success.

Cote d’Ivoire’s own civil war began amongst racial tension when the government drafted a law designed to exclude a candidate popular in the Muslim north from the presidential race[14]. Troops mutinied in September 2002, seizing the north region and attacking the government-controlled south, leaving a thousand dead.[15] France and UN troops attempted to thwart the rebel movement now called “New Forces”. Despite the “end-of-war agreement” signed on July 4, 2004, violence broke out once more. The conflict continued with sporadic battles with until the signing of a second peace agreement on March 4, 2007[16]. In November of that year, an agreement was signed by President Gbagbo to hold elections; when the elections finally took place in 2010 after 6 delays, a second civil war broke out.[17]

In the outbreak of racial and political violence, women were among the greatest victims. Not only did the changes in legislature mean that a portion of Ivorian women were stripped of their citizenship[18], they were seen as symbols of the ethnicity and systematically raped by both rebels and government forces.[19] The victims are stigmatized, with little justice or protection to be offered[20]. Though open warfare was concentrated on clashes of rebel and government forces, women suffered from lowered access to basic necessities and violence.

The peacemaking processes were dominated by males. The conflict being politically oriented, issues pertinent to women such as access to water and systemized sexual violence were not. Though Ivorian women worked towards gender inclusion, they were thwarted by lack of unity and neutrality. The nation was divided on racial lines and regional boundaries that prevented dialogue and mediation[21]. Women could not maintain neutrality in this issue; ethnicity placed them in firm factions. The polarizing conflict hindered collective action; with no forum to bring actors together, no more than token voices were given to women in formal negotiation[22]. Issues

over gender participation stalled the peacemaking process- the Ivorian women, speaking on the political aspects, were seen as usurping societal norms and rejected by the men. One regional talk was abandoned when the men “refused to have women included in the process.”[\[23\]](#) Overall, women had little participation in the negotiations between President Gbagbo and the New Forces to reestablish stability[\[24\]](#). Neither reparations for the systemic rape nor full reconciliation was attempted in the wake of the treaty.. The continued division along political and ethnic lines led to a second civil war in 2010.

Sustainable peacebuilding cannot be achieved without gender consideration. Women experience a different aspect of the conflict, which is invaluable in addressing key issues for resolution. They can facilitate dialogue for reconciliation at all levels. In the Bougainville Conflict, fighters were insensible to its long-term impacts until women appealed to them. During the negotiations, a more complete resolution was drafted by women’s statements on their positions[\[25\]](#). Conversely, the lack of gender inclusion in the peacemaking process rendered the ceasefire inadequate for addressing crucial concerns.

For stable resolution, both genders must be present in peacemaking. A true gendered approach utilizes both men and women, ensuring both are properly represented. Women are invaluable for peacemaking in facilitating conflict resolution and addressing gendered issues. However, gender inclusion must be sensitive to culture to ensure success. The gendered approach in Bougainville benefited from its matrilineal culture. Women utilized their traditional roles as homemakers; staying in the societal norm reduced friction and increased influence. The neutrality essential to peacemaking was achieved through women’s cultural roles. Cote d’Ivoire’s patriarchal culture reacted negatively to women’s deviation from societal norms to talk of “men’s affairs[\[26\]](#)”, reducing influence and hindering peacemaking.

However, the entire population must be engaged in establishing peace. Acknowledgement and utilization of different roles that women can play in peacebuilding is recommended for peacebuilding. In Cote d’Ivoire, lack of gender inclusion resulted in a failed peace, while women were a major peacemaking force in Bougainville. Through peaceful conflict resolution and cultural adherence, Bougainville women were able to disarm combatants and address gendered issues[\[27\]](#). They ensured sustainable peacebuilding and emphasis on domestic affairs. Though a gendered approach is necessary to prevent instability, culture must be accounted for success. As seen in Bougainville, women are effective local peacemakers; using cultural norms allow for effective delivery. Encouraging women to utilize their sphere of influence in acting as facilitators through non-governmental organizations, prayer vigils, and regional activities would include gender effectively in grassroots peacebuilding. Furthermore, creation of forums for women will allow opposing factions to find common ground and begin resolution. Unifying the women for peace will increase their influence and inclusion in official peacemaking efforts. In Cote d’Ivoire, attempts at gender inclusion were ineffective due to lack of unity.

Most importantly, women must be introduced to the peacemaking process not as a challenge to male authority, but as a complement. The perception that women were usurping male roles was disastrous to gender inclusion in Cote d'Ivoire, while the use of such cultural norms benefitted Bougainville women. Beginning women's participation with such a focus reduces hostility from men. Baby steps are valuable; integrating women in peacemaking through cultural values reduces gender conflict and allows them to grow into other capacities after establishment. The successes of Bougainville and Cote d'Ivoire demonstrate the necessity for a gendered approach to peacemaking. By fostering unity and working with cultural roles, the inclusion of women can significantly benefit peacemaking processes.

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