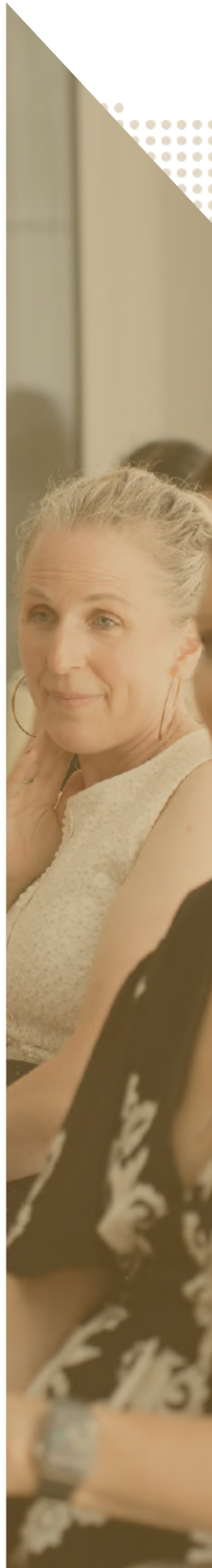
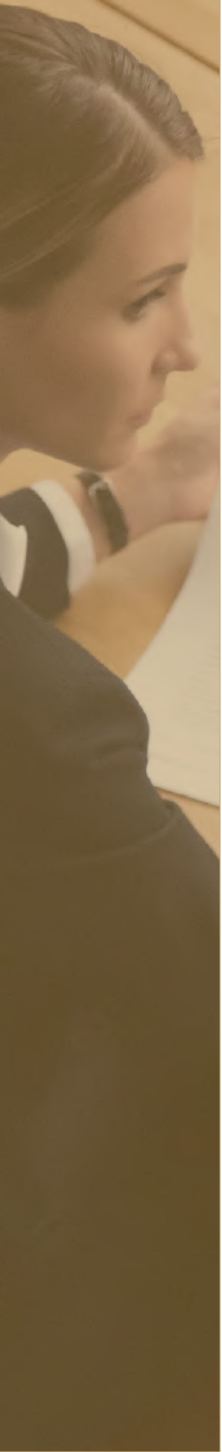


MORE WOMEN MORE PEACE

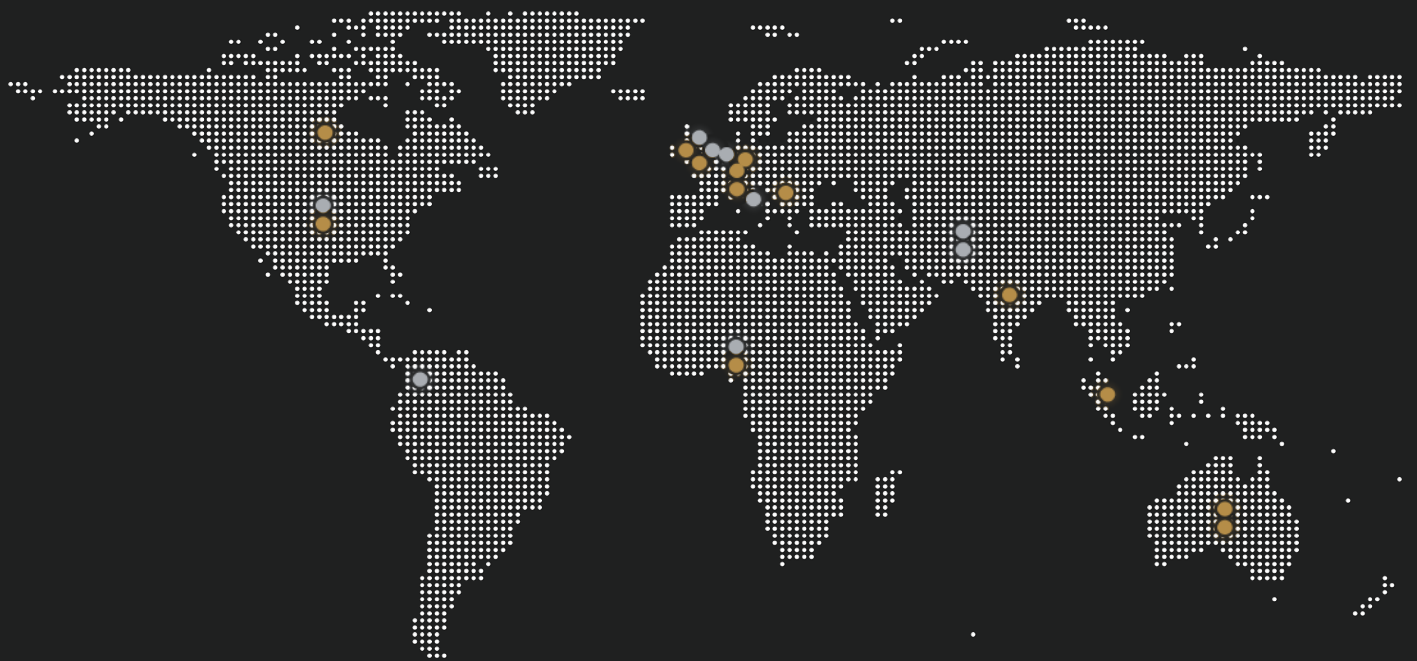
EXTENDED REPORT



2026



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Introduction

The More Women, More Peace campaign began with a simple but consequential observation. Women are disproportionately affected by conflict, yet they remain underrepresented in the rooms where decisions about peace and security are made. Research increasingly shows that women's meaningful participation can contribute to the quality and durability of peace agreements. The question, therefore, is not only why there are still too few women at the negotiation table. It is also important to understand what prevents women from getting there, what enables them to have influence once they arrive.

To explore these questions, the Negotiation Council Geneva launched More Women, More Peace, a three-month campaign bringing together the voices and experiences of more than 20 women from across the globe (see full list below). The participants came from a remarkably diverse range of backgrounds and sectors, including diplomacy, politics, public and private sectors, international organizations, NGOs, academia, entrepreneurship, psychology, coaching, and strategic advisory work. What connects them is their experience of navigating spaces where power is negotiated and decisions are made, together with their willingness to share how they found their way into those spaces.

The campaign was intentionally designed around stories and role models rather than abstract theory alone. Our conversations revealed the personal side of negotiation that is often missing from formal accounts of leadership and peacebuilding. The women we interviewed spoke about moments of self-doubt before entering a room, the struggle to be taken seriously, the unwritten rules of power, the importance of networks and mentors, the courage required to speak up, and the art of strategic listening.

These stories make one thing clear. The road to the negotiation table is often difficult, but it is possible to make the journey and, once there, to change what happens at the table. Across the interviews, a unique body of practical knowledge emerged. The women we spoke to approached negotiation from very different perspectives, yet their experiences repeatedly converged around four areas of interest.

- Relational Leadership, Emotional Intelligence, Trust and Authentic Presence
- Listening and Empathy as Strategic Power
- Agency, Confidence, Strategic Self Leadership, from Self Doubt to Negotiation Power
- Collective Leadership, Networks, Mentorship and Sustainable Peace

Together, these insights offer a different way of thinking about women's participation in negotiation. Inclusion cannot be reduced to a headcount, a symbolic gesture or a box to tick. Having women in the room matters, but meaningful participation means that women can shape the agenda, influence decisions, negotiate on issues considered outside their domain.

More Women, More Peace ultimately set out to achieve something both practical and hopeful. The campaign sought to make the experiences of women negotiators, leaders and peacebuilders visible, to connect generations of women through stories and lessons learned, and to offer practitioners, policymakers, and negotiators insights that can be applied in their own work.

The campaign culminates during the United Nations General Assembly High Level Week in New York in September 2026, at a moment when questions of peace, security, multilateralism, and women's participation are more urgent than ever. The message emerging from these conversations is clear. Women's participation is not an additional element of peacebuilding. It is part of the architecture of sustainable peace. Representation without influence is not enough.

The women whose voices are gathered in this report show what becomes possible when we stop asking whether women belong at the table and start asking how we can ensure that they have the power, confidence, networks, and support to shape what happens there.

A huge thanks to all the inspiring women that participated in this campaign:

Private & Business Negotiations

Dr. Mirjam Staub-Bisang, Switzerland
Ronni Kahn AO, Australia
Nina Devouge, Singapore
Dr. Liane Davey, Canada
Mira Swarup, India
Prof. Dr. Anabel Ternès von Hattburg, Germany
Dr. Glory Edozien, Nigeria
Dr. Stephanie Schoss, Switzerland
Sam McAlister, United Kingdom
Angela Richard, United States of America
Carol Stewart, United Kingdom
Dr. Mira Vasic, Serbia
Sally Prosser, Australia

Political & Peace Negotiations

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Dr. Lara Scarpitta, Italy
Fatimazahra Belhirsch, Netherlands
Fawzia Koofi, Afghanistan
Nazila Jamshidi, Afghanistan
Dr. Ashleigh Huffman, United States of America
Faith Kaminus, Nigeria
Dr. Scilla Elworthy, United Kingdom

Key Findings

How do women describe the individual, relational, structural, and collective conditions that enable them to negotiate effectively and contribute to more inclusive and sustainable peace?

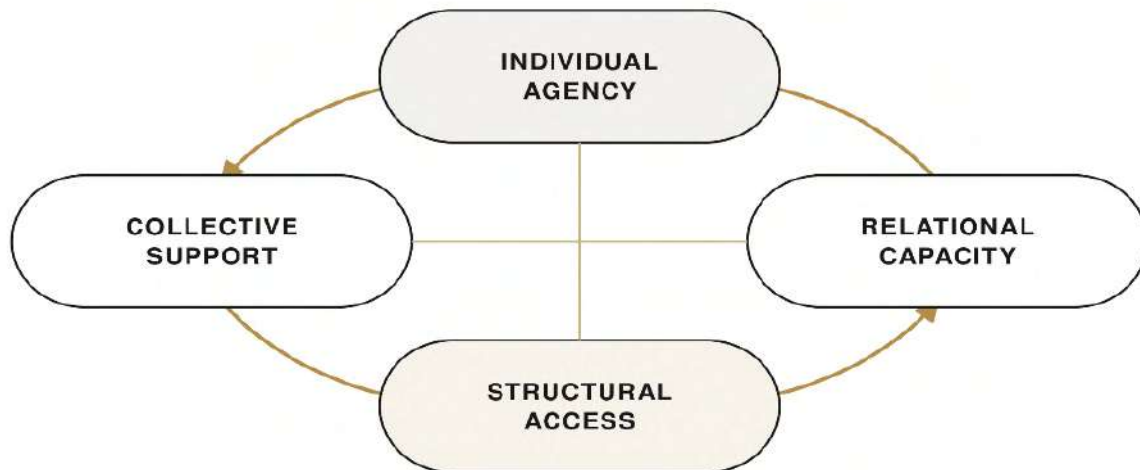
Across diverse professional, cultural, and geographical backgrounds, the interviewees do not describe effective negotiation primarily as the exercise of formal or positional authority. Instead, they repeatedly associate influence with emotional regulation, trust, authenticity, strategic agency, meaningful participation, and the ability to mobilize relationships, communities, and networks. The interviews suggest an emerging model of women's relational leadership in negotiation and peace-building.

This model does not imply that all women negotiate in the same way, nor that relational skills are inherently female. Rather, the interviews indicate that women often develop specific relational, adaptive, and strategic capabilities while operating within institutions and negotiation environments that have historically marginalized them. The interviews point to four connected dimensions:

- The individual includes emotional regulation, authenticity, confidence, preparation, resilience, and strategic self-leadership.
- The interaction includes trust, listening, vulnerability, relationship building, and dialogue.
- The system includes access, tokenism, power, institutional rules, legitimacy, and change.
- The collective includes mentorship, networks, coalitions, civil society, intergenerational exchange, and sustainable peace.

Relational Power in Negotiation

Relational power can be provisionally defined as the capacity to combine grounded self-leadership, trust building interaction, structural awareness, and collective legitimacy to influence decisions and support more inclusive and sustainable negotiation outcomes.



1. Relational Leadership

Interviewees associate effective negotiation with listening, emotional regulation, authenticity, preparation, and the ability to remain grounded under pressure. These qualities help build credibility, understand different perspectives, and respond strategically in complex situations.

2. Relational Influence

Trust and meaningful relationships emerge as central sources of influence. Interviewees highlight listening, communication, dialogue, and the ability to understand different perspectives. Relational influence is therefore not about avoiding disagreement, but about creating the trust needed to navigate.

3. Structural Power

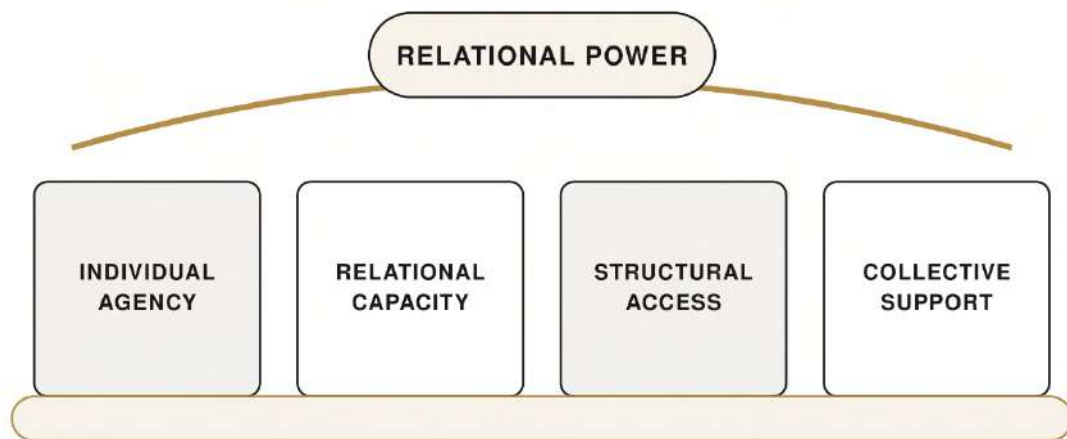
The interviews show that individual capabilities cannot compensate for structural barriers. Meaningful influence depends on access to decision-making spaces, legitimacy, information, resources, and networks. Being present at the table does not necessarily mean having influence at the table.

4. Collective Power

Women's leadership is strengthened through mentorship, networks, coalitions, civil society, and intergenerational exchange. These relationships create opportunities, resilience, and collective capacity, while connecting formal negotiation with communities and longer-term peacebuilding.

Together, the findings suggest that women's meaningful participation is not simply a question of numbers. Representation matters, but influence depends on the conditions that enable women to exercise power once they are present. The findings point towards a shift from presence to influence, from individual capacity to relational power, and from representation to meaningful participation. The central finding is not that women negotiate differently because they are women. Rather, when women can participate meaningfully and when the conditions exist for their leadership to flourish, they can contribute a broader range of relational, strategic, and collective capacities to negotiation and peacebuilding.

More women can mean new relationships with power and new possibilities for peace.



This concept helps integrate all four themes while avoiding two assumptions. Women’s contribution cannot be reduced to supposedly natural qualities such as empathy or care. Women’s underrepresentation cannot be addressed simply by improving individual confidence or negotiation skills. Instead, relational power emerges through the interaction of individual abilities, interpersonal relationships, institutional conditions, and collective support.

Theme 1:

From Representation to Relational Power - Emotional Intelligence, Trust and Authentic Presence

“Silence is the most powerful thing out there because silence is listening and contemplation.”
– Sam McAlister

Effective negotiation is rarely about dominance or the performance of authority. Interviewees instead emphasize the ability to listen, understand different perspectives, regulate emotions and build trust, particularly when interactions become difficult or unpredictable.

I. Listening as strategic power

Listening emerges as one of the clearest themes across the interviews, but it goes much further than simply hearing what the other party says. It is an active process of seeking to understand the interests, emotions, fears, and perspectives that underpin a position. In this sense, listening becomes a source of influence. By creating space for the other party to speak and reflect, negotiators can move beyond transactional exchanges and better identify the conditions for meaningful progress.

This understanding of listening is closely connected to empathy and systemic thinking. As **Prof. Dr. Anabel Ternès von Hattburg** explains, systemic thinking helps negotiators understand the broader consequences of decisions, while empathy allows them to grasp the motivations and fears of the other side. Such understanding can transform negotiation from a process of exchanging positions into one that addresses the underlying dynamics between the parties.

Several interviewees emphasize that listening requires restraint. **Sam McAlister** describes good negotiation as “at least 80% listening” and points to silence as a particularly powerful tool because it creates space for contemplation. Similarly, **Dr. Ashleigh Huffman** argues that “it’s in these moments of silence that real action happens”, suggesting that slowing the pace of an interaction can itself be a form of progress. Silence, in this sense, is not an absence of action but a choice to create room for information.

At the same time, listening should not be confused with remaining silent throughout a negotiation. Sally Prosser captures this balance through the familiar reminder that “we have two ears and one mouth for a reason”, while also stressing the importance of using one’s own voice. Effective negotiation therefore requires knowing when to listen, when to pause and when to speak. Underlying all of this is a certain humility. For Dr. Mirjam Staub-Bisang, effective leadership requires “that humility to know that you don’t know everything.” Listening thus reflects not only a technique but also a particular approach to power and knowledge by recognizing that valuable information emerges when space is given to others.

Overall, these perspectives challenge the assumption that influence comes from speaking first, speaking most, or maintaining control of the conversation. In complex negotiations, influence can instead lie in the ability to slow things down, create space for reflection, and listen closely.

II. Empathy and perspective-taking

Listening and empathy are closely intertwined with the ability to move beyond one’s own perspective and recognize that others may experience the same situation differently. This emerges as an important condition for turning conflict from a source of division into an opportunity for finding new possibilities. Rather than viewing conflict as inherently negative, Dr. Liane Davey distinguishes between conflict that merely creates friction and conflict that creates possibilities. When people engage with perspectives different from their own and develop greater empathy for them, conflict can become a way of moving beyond competing positions and seeking outcomes that optimize the whole. The emphasis is therefore not on determining who is right or who wins, but on expanding the range of solutions available.

This requires attention not only to what is explicitly said, but also to what remains unspoken. Dr. Stephanie Schoss stresses the importance of recognizing values and emotions that are not articulated directly, as well as paying attention to physical presence, eye contact and the ability to read the room. Negotiation, in this understanding, is about creating the conditions for a different reality to emerge, one in which, as Schoss puts it, “more possibilities are possible after you’re having the negotiations.”

Empathy and emotional intelligence consequently become practical negotiation capabilities rather than simply desirable personal qualities. Dr. Glory Edozien identifies a high level of empathy, emotional intelligence and collaboration as particularly important skills in peace negotiations. These qualities allow negotiators to engage with the human dimensions of conflict and to understand how emotions, relationships, and perceptions can influence the space for agreement. The same principle appears in Faith Kaminus’ emphasis on collaboration over competition. For her, negotiation should be directed towards solving a problem rather than producing “a winner or a loser”. Her observation that “Knowledge is not a competition; it is a collaboration” points to a broader conception of negotiation as a collective process.

Ronni Khan AO from Australia firmly highlights that negotiations are not about convincing the other party. The first tool she brings into any negotiation is to put herself in somebody else’s shoes, to try and understand what they’re seeing, so that she can show them a different view. So many times, we go into a dialogue around a conflict with very set views in our mind around the outcome and we miss important information that the other side is transmitting. Reading between the lines is an essential skill.

Ultimately, empathy requires more than simply acknowledging that others have different perspectives. It requires a genuine effort to understand those perspectives on their own terms. As **Fati-mazhra Belhirsch** puts it, progress begins with “real listening, and not to respond, but to understand”, alongside empathy, cultural sensitivity and a willingness to see the world through the eyes of others. In this sense, listening and empathy together form the basis for understanding difference, expanding the space for solutions, and transforming negotiation from a contest between positions into a process of creating possibilities.

III. Emotional regulation and presence under pressure

A further dimension of relational leadership is the ability to remain composed and present under pressure. Across the interviews, emotional regulation emerges as a practical capacity that directly shapes how negotiators perceive situations, respond to others and exercise influence. In complex or high-pressure settings, the ability to manage one’s own emotional and physiological responses can determine whether an interaction becomes reactive or remains constructive.

This connection between regulation and presence is particularly evident in **Mira Swarup**’s description of grounding techniques: “Breathing, feet touching the ground, grounding, finding your place in the body, and then going back to making eye contact.” Her experience highlights that presence begins with the ability to regulate one’s own physical and emotional state and to remain connected to the interaction rather than becoming overwhelmed by it.

Angela Richard points to the importance of remaining open and flexible while maintaining composure, suggesting that effective engagement requires negotiators to absorb new information and perspectives without losing their own stability. Emotional regulation therefore does not mean suppressing emotions or becoming detached. Rather, it creates the space to acknowledge what is happening without allowing an immediate emotional response to determine the next move.

This sense of presence is also closely connected to confidence and self-awareness. **Carol Stewart** emphasizes that leaders need to know “who they are”, understand their values and strengths, and recognize their contribution. She distinguishes that: “Presence does not necessarily mean being aggressive.” Instead, it comes from conviction and communicating your stance with confidence.

These perspectives recommend that presence is both internal and relational. It requires the ability to regulate oneself, remain attentive to others and act from a clear sense of purpose. Far from requiring emotional detachment or dominance, effective presence allows negotiators to remain grounded enough to listen, flexible enough to adapt and confident enough to advocate for what matters.

IV. Vulnerability, authenticity and trust

Several interviews challenge the conventional assumption that authority in negotiation depends on projecting strength, certainty, and control. Instead, they suggest that vulnerability, authenticity, and trust can reinforce authority rather than undermine it. Showing something of oneself can create the conditions for greater openness, making it easier for others to engage with the negotiating partner.

Mira Swarup captures this tension by observing that “we have been taught that strength and vulnerability are opposites”, when in fact vulnerability can play a key role in negotiation rooms. Allowing others to see that one is “not exactly wearing an armor” can make an interaction more human and create space for greater openness and alignment. Vulnerability can make authority more credible by signalling confidence that does not depend on constant self-protection.

This is closely connected to authenticity, which for **Sam McAlister** is grounded when negotiators act truthfully and according to a moral compass. Authenticity can therefore contribute to trust because it reduces the distance between what a negotiator says, what they believe and how they behave.

At the same time, authenticity does not mean abandoning strategy. **Dr. Mira Vasic** challenges the idea that being authentic requires being entirely spontaneous or uncalculated. She argues that women need the tools and mindsets to bring their best version of themselves in an authentic way, but still very strategic. Effective negotiation involves finding a balance between remaining true to one's values and deliberately considering how to advance the interests of all parties. Authenticity and strategy can work together to produce solutions that are acceptable to different parties at the negotiation table.

Nazila Jamshidi emphasizes that inclusion requires creating conditions in which people feel sufficiently safe to bring their authentic selves into the room. This shifts the focus from authenticity as an individual responsibility to authenticity as something that can be enabled, or constrained, by the dynamics of the negotiation space. People are more likely to contribute openly when they feel that their perspectives will be heard and respected. As **Nina Devouge** suggests, trust begins with genuine connection and a willingness to know the other person. Relationship-building is therefore not something that happens before the negotiation begins, but it is part of the negotiation itself and can shape what becomes possible.

The same principle extends beyond interpersonal relationships to broader processes of engagement. **Dr. Lara Scarpitta** stresses the importance of sustained dialogue and partnership with civil society, emphasizing that “it needs to be a constant dialogue.” Trust, in this sense, is built over time through repeated interaction, inclusion, and responsiveness rather than established through a single encounter.

These expert perspectives propose that effective authority does not necessarily require distance or invulnerability. It can instead emerge from the combination of authenticity, strategic awareness, openness and sustained relationship-building. When negotiators can remain grounded in who they are while creating space for others to do the same, trust becomes a condition for long-term results.

V. Relational leadership in conditions of conflict

Relational leadership becomes particularly important when relationships are under strain, because negotiation is often most necessary precisely when trust is weakest and conflict is most intense. Conflict may make dialogue more difficult, but it does not make dialogue less necessary.

Fawzia Koofi captures this paradox from the perspective of deeply entrenched conflict. Reflecting on situations characterized by profound confrontation, she observes that “no matter how much power struggle you have and how much like you actually wrestle in the battlefield, then you need to talk at the end of the day.” Even when parties are engaged in intense power struggles, they ultimately remain dependent on the possibility of communication. The challenge of negotiation, therefore, is not to eliminate conflict before dialogue can begin, but to sustain dialogue despite conflict.

Prof. Dr. Angelika Rettberg's experience negotiating with the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) illustrates the complexity of this task. She found the concept of intersectionality particularly useful because, as she notes, “you never know where someone stands exactly. What parts of each person's identity matter most”. Understanding a negotiating counterpart therefore requires resisting assumptions about what motivates them and remaining attentive to the different identities, experiences, and interests.

This kind of perspective-taking also changes how preparation for negotiation is understood. Drawing on her experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, **Emma Sky OBE** emphasizes that “preparation is not just textbooks and reading. Preparation is a lot about listening.” For her, effective preparation means listening to the different protagonists, antagonists, and actors involved in conflict to understand where they are coming from, as well as their positions and interests. **Dr. Scilla Elworthy** doubles down on this idea and sees listening as a strategic imperative to get to the needs rather than the exertion of strength or being impressive or shouting.

Across the interviews, these insights reinforce a broader understanding of relational leadership as a strategic form of power rather than a soft alternative to traditional negotiation approaches. Listening, empathy, emotional regulation, vulnerability, authenticity, silence, presence, and trust are not peripheral interpersonal qualities. They enable negotiators to read situations more accurately, manage tension and understand the interests underlying stated positions. In difficult negotiations, these capacities can be precisely what allows dialogue to continue when conventional forms of power are no longer sufficient.

At the same time, the interviews caution against interpreting these capabilities as inherently female. Some participants explicitly associate empathy, collaboration and relational skills with women, but the broader evidence suggests that these are capabilities that can be cultivated by any effective negotiator. The distinctive contribution of the women interviewed may therefore lie less in possessing fundamentally different qualities than in challenging established models of authority. Rather than equating leadership with dominance, certainty or constant assertiveness, they point towards a model in which influence can also come from listening, relational intelligence, strategic restraint and the ability to create the conditions for others to engage.

Listening as Strategy: Relational Leadership and the Schraner Concept®

The emphasis on listening as strategic power closely resonates with the Schraner Concept’s understanding of negotiation as an information driven process. The principle of speaking less and listening more, ideally around 20 percent speaking and 80 percent listening, creates space to gather as much information as possible about the other side’s interests, concerns, and emotions. Listening also means paying attention to inconsistencies between what is said, how it is said and what may remain unspoken, helping negotiators identify gaps and better understand the conflict they are trying to resolve. Repeating and clarifying the common conflict can further create a shared point of reference, while deliberate pauses prevent negotiators from responding too quickly with an immediate yes or no.

The emphasis on empathy, perspective taking and emotional regulation also connects directly to the Concept’s insistence on maintaining emotional balance under pressure. Understanding the other side enables the negotiator to distinguish between positions, interests and the underlying conflict while remaining focused on what needs to be achieved. Emotional regulation creates the necessary space to absorb new information without reacting impulsively, particularly when provocation or uncertainty might narrow the range of possible responses. This requires thorough preparation, with negotiators knowing their own demands, targets and walk-away positions and keeping them in sight and preferably in writing so that they can remain anchored. For women seeking to enter or navigate negotiation spaces in which they face additional expectations or pressure, these principles offer a concrete form of agency.

Finally, the focus on authenticity, vulnerability, and trust can be translated into the Schraner Concept® through the deliberate establishment of trust mechanisms. Trust and authenticity are compatible with strategy, as negotiators can remain true to their values and communication style while deciding what to disclose, when to pause and how to advance their objectives. Establishing trust mechanisms, maintaining consistency and staying authentic can make it easier for counterparts to share information.

Theme 2:

Power, Inclusion, and Change: From Representation to Meaningful Participation

“Your job is not done once you are in the negotiation room. It only starts then.” – Fawzia Koofi

Throughout the interviews, it becomes clear that being present at the table is not the same as having power at the table. Women may be formally represented, consulted or included in institutional structures while still having limited influence over the outcomes. Meaningful participation requires authority, access to information, networks, recognition of expertise, and the ability to shape decisions.

I. Beyond the room: participation, legitimacy and influence

Meaningful participation begins well before, and extends far beyond, simply gaining access to the negotiation table. **Fawzia Koofi**’s experience as an Afghan political leader and member of the negotiating team in the Doha talks with the Taliban illustrates this. For Afghan women negotiators, being formally included in the process was only the first step. They also had to establish the legitimacy of their participation and demonstrate that they represented constituencies beyond the negotiation room. To do so, they organized daily virtual consultations with civil society actors across Afghanistan, creating channels through which a wider range of voices could inform the negotiations.

Yet even when women are present and recognized as legitimate participants, presence does not necessarily translate into influence. **Nazila Jamshidi** describes this gap as an “illusion of inclusion” as women may be brought into a process or consulted at its margins while the key decisions have been determined elsewhere. For participation to become meaningful, she argues, there must be mechanisms ensuring that women’s recommendations are reflected in agreements and decision-making structures.

Prof. Dr. Angelika Rettberg’s experience in the Colombian context illustrates how this gap can persist even where women appear to have substantial representation. During negotiations between the Colombian government and the ELN, women were present on both sides of the process, including women who had previously been combatants. Yet their formal status did not translate into equivalent negotiating power. Traditional gender roles continued to shape how they were perceived and the space they were able to occupy within the negotiations. Their experience demonstrates that even numerical representation can coexist with limited influence over the substance and direction of a negotiation.

This distinction between presence and meaningful influence is equally important beyond the specific context of women’s participation in peace processes. **Angela Richard** highlights how organizations can mistake numerical diversity for genuine inclusion by bringing more people into a room, which does not mean that their voices carry greater weight. Inclusion requires a further shift in which underrepresented voices are not only present but heard, recognized, and given access to positions where decisions are shaped. The challenge is consequently not simply to diversify who is present, but to examine who has the power to shape priorities, decisions, and outcomes.

Ultimately, this question of influence is closely connected to the sustainability of peace processes. **Dr. Lara Scarpitta** emphasizes that who is included in a process can directly affect whether it can produce sustainable peace. Inclusion is about ensuring that those impacted by a process have meaningful opportunities to contribute to the solutions that emerge from it. When participation extends from presence to genuine influence, negotiations are better positioned to reflect the realities, interests, and expectations of the communities concerned.

II. The informal structures of power

Exclusion is not always produced by explicit rules or formal barriers. More often, it is reproduced through informal structures, relationships, and expectations that shape how organizations work. **Dr. Mira Vasic** traces some of these patterns back to the historical development of institutions whose structures were established at a time when women were largely excluded from professional and political life. As a result, many organizations inherited models of leadership and decision-making built around predominantly masculine norms. While formal rules may have changed, the unwritten rules remain.

These informal dynamics are reinforced by the networks through which opportunities and information circulate. **Dr. Glory Edozien** points to unequal access to sponsorship, influential relationships, high-visibility assignments, and informal strategic spaces as important structural barriers. Networks sometimes described as the “boys’ club” can determine who is exposed to opportunities, whose ideas are taken seriously, and who is invited into conversations where decisions are shaped. This also reveals a crucial distinction between formal authority and actual influence. Someone may formally own a decision while another person, with no equivalent title, may have considerable influence over its outcome. For Edozien, preparing for a negotiation therefore requires looking beyond the formal organizational chart and mapping the wider ecosystem of power.

The persistence of these patterns is also connected to what **Dr. Ashleigh Huffman** describes through the idea of familiarity. What is familiar is often perceived as more credible, legitimate, or natural. When leadership has historically been associated with identities, behaviors, and networks, those who resemble the established model may be granted credibility more easily, while others are required to demonstrate their legitimacy. In this way, exclusion can reproduce without anyone deciding to exclude.

This is why the burden of change cannot rest entirely on individuals. **Carol Stewart** cautions against placing too much emphasis on women’s need to adapt, develop resilience, or learn how to navigate existing systems. Leadership development can certainly provide women with tools to navigate existing systems, but it cannot by itself transform the conditions that determine who gain access. Meaningful change therefore requires institutions to look inward and question the informal norms, expectations, and power structures that continue to make such adaptation necessary in the first place.

III. Building pathways to leadership

Structural change also depends on who can enter, progress through, and ultimately reach positions of leadership. As **Dr. Mirjam Staub-Bisang** cautions, senior-level representation cannot be transformed overnight. Sustainable change requires a leadership pipeline built over time, through education, mentorship, professional networks, and meaningful opportunities to gain experience and responsibility.

This is particularly important for younger women entering political and professional spaces. **Faith Kaminus** stresses that inclusion cannot stop at an invitation to participate. Young women need meaningful responsibilities and opportunities to develop the experience and confidence that come from taking decisions. Without these opportunities, participation risks becoming symbolic where women may be present, but remain on the margins of the work and without a genuine pathway towards authority.

At the same time, building that trajectory is not only a question of institutional access. **Emma Sky OBE** offers a complementary perspective by emphasizing women's own agency in entering spaces where they want to have an impact. Rather than waiting to be invited, she encourages women to make themselves relevant and to step into the arena. Her point challenges the assumption that access must always come in the form of formal permission or an invitation. Sometimes, creating a leadership trajectory also means identifying where one can contribute and making that contribution visible.

Sam McAlister emphasizes persistence and the willingness to claim space rather than stepping aside for someone perceived as more experienced or better positioned. Her reflection speaks to the importance of inhabiting spaces of authority with confidence rather than apologizing for being there. All in all, these perspectives suggest that meaningful leadership trajectories emerge through an interaction between structural opportunity and individual agency. Institutions have a responsibility to create genuine pathways into leadership, but women also need the opportunity and confidence to use those pathways.

IV. Meaningful participation as institutional transformation

The case for inclusion is increasingly recognized across both the public and private sectors. **Fati-mazhra Belhirsch** emphasizes that leaving women out of negotiation rooms inevitably means losing valuable knowledge and expertise. Meaningful participation requires institutions to see women's contribution not as an additional perspective, but as a source of insight into better decision-making.

As **Dr. Scilla Elworthy** puts it: "often women aren't really invited until a later stage [...] and that puts a woman at a disadvantage because she doesn't know what's been established as a norm beforehand." To circumvent this institutional problem, she emphasizes that women joining negotiations must have full and equal access to everything that has been said before, otherwise it undermines her negotiation role.

Ronni Kahn AO emphasizes meaningful participation as a form of institutional transformation by highlighting the value of perspectives and capacities that women can bring to peacebuilding. She argues that conforming to traditionally male dominated ways of working can suppress important abilities, such as seeing the other, and taking a broader view. For Ronni, meaningful participation is therefore not limited to women occupying formal positions of power but also involves recognizing that every individual can contribute to social cohesion and change through care, attentiveness, and engagement.

Several interviews point to necessary conditions for meaningful participation. Women need access to formal negotiation spaces, but also to the informal networks where decisions are shaped. Women demand recognition of their expertise and political legitimacy, as well as opportunities to influence agendas and outcomes. They need to know that their contributions will be reflected in agreements, implementation, and monitoring. And they need institutional pathways, resources, sponsorship, and networks that enable them to progress into positions of authority. The broader challenge is consequently not simply to equip women to succeed within existing systems. It is also to transform those systems.

The Schraner Concept®: From Presence to Power at the Negotiating Table

The distinction between being present at the table and having meaningful influence can be understood through the Schraner Concept's power and cooperation diagram. Negotiators need to assess not only their formal authority, but also how power is perceived by the other side and how much influence they can exercise within the negotiation system. Women may at times underestimate their own perceived power, particularly when they enter spaces where legitimacy has historically been associated with more established or traditionally dominant actors. The Schraner Concept® therefore offers a useful lens for making power explicit and recognizing that perceived power can be strengthened through preparation, clear demands and confident communication. If a negotiator's legitimacy, mandate or right to participate is questioned, this should not be avoided or treated as a secondary issue. It should be addressed early and openly, in the spirit of putting the fish on the table, so that an underlying challenge to the negotiation itself does not remain unspoken and continues to shape the process.

Meaningful participation also depends on understanding the wider negotiation architecture and the different roles within it. The Schraner Concept® distinguishes between the negotiator who conducts the conversation, the commander who provides strategic direction and the decision maker who ultimately has the authority to approve or reject an outcome. Keeping these roles and their respective responsibilities clear is particularly important where women may be included in a process without having the same access to information, mandate, or decision-making authority as others. A negotiator therefore needs to know what she can decide herself, what requires escalation and who ultimately needs to be brought into the process, while also ensuring that the team presents a coherent position. Seen in this way, inclusion is not only about having a woman in the room but about giving her a defined role within the negotiation team, a clear mandate and genuine access to the structures of power.

Theme 3:

Agency, Confidence, Strategic Self-Leadership: From Self-Doubt to Negotiation Power

"I will have the seat at a table and never even questioned that I shouldn't have it."

– Dr. Mirjam Staub-Bisang

Within this campaign, confidence and negotiation performance emerge not as fixed personal characteristics, but as capacities shaped by experience, preparation, self-knowledge, socialization, institutional environments and repeated practice. Women often strengthen confidence through exposure to challenging situations, preparation and successful experiences. At the same time, it can be constrained in environments where their authority is questioned, or their voices are discounted.

The interviews therefore challenge the assumption that visible confidence is necessarily a proxy for competence. Silence, hesitation, apologetic language or reluctance to assert authority may reflect an environment in which women do not feel psychologically safe or do not feel that they belong. Yet agency cannot depend entirely on external recognition. Strategic self-leadership also means defining objectives, establishing red lines, understanding the interests and power structures surrounding a negotiation, communicating a clear position and acting without waiting for universal approval.

I. Confidence is developed, not innate

Several interviewees explicitly reject the idea that confidence is something one either naturally possesses or lacks. **Sam McAlister** describes confidence as a practice that must be built deliberately, comparing it to going to the gym. In high-stakes environments, a negotiator's visible nervousness or fear can affect the people around them. Confidence matters not only for the individual, but also for how others perceive and respond to them.

Sally Prosser connects confidence to preparation and control of one's voice. Mastering the voice, in her view, can strengthen internal confidence, while preparation provides the robustness needed to withstand external pressure. Confidence thus does not mean the absence of uncertainty, but the ability to remain grounded when pressure arises. **Dr. Mirjam Staub-Bisang** places preparation at the center of effective participation and describes entering the negotiation room with an unshaken assumption that she belongs there. At the same time, she distinguishes presence from lasting authority.

Prof. Dr. Anabel Ternès von Hattburg connects confidence and resilience to clarity of purpose. Following a serious accident and almost two years in hospital, she had to redefine her identity beyond titles and positions. The experience strengthened her resilience and reinforced her belief that it comes from knowing why one is present and what one stands for. She encourages negotiators facing resistance to remain anchored in their values and vision, rather than interpreting pushback as evidence that they are on the wrong path.

II. Psychological safety, belonging and the environment

The interviews also challenge individualized explanations of confidence. **Carol Stewart** points out that women in male-dominated environments may internalize negative treatment and conclude that the problem lies with them. She emphasizes the importance of recognizing when the environment, rather than the individual, is the issue. Where psychological safety and belonging are weak, behavior that appears to reflect low confidence may instead be an adaptive response to exclusion.

Dr. Glory Edozien highlights the gendered double standards surrounding women's authority. Women who are outspoken may be described as "brash" or otherwise negatively labelled, while comparable behavior in men may be interpreted as evidence of leadership. She links these expectations to socialization and to norms that have historically associated humility with silence.

Faith Kaminus describes a similar pattern. Women, she argues, are often socialized primarily into roles such as mother, wife, child, or daughter rather than leader. This does not mean they lack leadership capabilities. She stresses that women already possess many of the skills required for conflict resolution and mediation but may hesitate to exercise them publicly because of gender expectations. When opportunities are provided, however, women can be highly vocal and assertive.

Nina Devouge likewise connects self-doubt to the narratives women absorb about what they can do. She recalls hearing women question whether they have the confidence to take on certain roles, while tracing these doubts back to socialization. Her response is explicitly agentic, meaning that rather than waiting for permission or certainty, she encourages women to act and to become their own role models.

III. From seeking permission to exercising agency

A strong pattern across the interviews is the distinction between confidence as a feeling and agency as a practice. Women do not necessarily need to eliminate doubt before acting. More important is developing the ability to act strategically despite uncertainty. **Dr. Mira Vasic** argues that while individuals cannot fully control unconscious thoughts, they can control their behavior and negotiation strategy. Self-leadership therefore does not require eliminating internal doubts, but it requires ensuring that those doubts do not determine one's actions. Vasic observes that women advocate confidently for their organizations and colleagues while becoming more hesitant when asserting their own interests.

Dr. Scilla Elworthy shows that agency in peace negotiations is not simply something a person possesses but something that can be developed through practice. Women may need to overcome fear, anxiety, embarrassment, or a lack of self-confidence to speak up and make their voices heard. However, their ability to act is also shaped by their environment, especially in male dominated spaces. When women are seen as difficult or challenging, they may face backlash and be overlooked despite their abilities.

Angela Richard similarly frames agency as an intentional practice. Exercising agency in career and negotiation decisions requires preparation and positional clarity. She recommends entering important conversations with a concrete understanding of what one wants to communicate. Agency is more than confidence in oneself, but rather it is the capacity to act with purpose and direction.

IV. Strategic clarity: goals, red lines and preparation

Strategic agency also depends on the ability to establish clear boundaries. **Nazila Jamshidi** identifies clarity about what is non-negotiable as a first step, while stressing that such clarity must come from preparation. At the same time, she cautions against viewing agency as purely individual. Holding one's ground often requires collective backing, and no negotiator operates entirely alone.

This broader perspective is particularly relevant to peace negotiations. **Fatimazhra Belhirsch** emphasizes that women typically bring a deep understanding of how political decisions affect people's everyday lives, including those beyond the immediate conflict zone. Their perspectives therefore connect negotiation outcomes to their wider social consequences.

Fawzia Koofi provides a powerful example of agency shaped by sustained adversity. Her experience in the Doha negotiations with the Taliban demonstrates how preparation can translate into agency under extreme conditions. Shortly before the talks, Koofi had survived an assassination attempt and arrived at the negotiating table with her arm in a cast. She nevertheless prepared carefully, relied on figures and data, and placed particular emphasis on being accurate, responsible and accountable in what she said. Her example shows how preparation can support effective participation even under extreme pressure.

Koofi's experience also connects agency with the willingness to enter difficult spaces. In the Doha negotiations, she was determined to ensure that Afghan women were present in the room and prepared to engage directly with people they strongly disagreed with. Agency includes the capacity to tolerate discomfort, disagreement, and uncertainty rather than withdrawing because a negotiation is difficult.

V. Confidence as performance, not perfection

These insights suggest that confidence has both an internal and performative dimension. Negotiators may experience uncertainty, self-doubt, or fear while still communicating conviction, composure, and authority. Conversely, appearing confident does not necessarily mean possessing genuine agency.

The perspectives of [Sally Prosser](#) on voice, [Carol Stewart](#) on the distinction between presence and aggression, [Dr. Mira Vasic](#) on separating internal thoughts from strategic behavior, and [Sam McAlister](#) on the role of preparation all point towards a similar conclusion. Confidence is not the absence of doubt, but rather is the ability to act purposefully despite doubt.

This is particularly significant for women because the social costs associated with confidence may be unevenly distributed. As [Dr. Glory Edozien](#) observes, women who are outspoken can be labelled negatively, while similar behavior in men may be interpreted as leadership. Women may therefore have to navigate a narrower space between appearing insufficiently assertive and being perceived as overly aggressive. The goal should consequently be to enable women to develop authentic and strategic forms of presence while also addressing the environments that penalize women for exercising authority.

[Ronni Kahn AO](#) presents confidence as performance rather than perfection, emphasizing the importance of trusting one's creativity and ability to act without being limited by self-doubt. Her confidence comes from an abundance-mindset that focuses on possibilities and solutions rather than on what is lacking or on finding the perfect response. In situations of conflict, this means being willing to listen deeply, share openly, and work toward the best possible outcome for everyone involved.

VI. From individual empowerment to institutional responsibility

The experience of [Prof. Dr. Angelika Rettberg](#) illustrates how institutional assumptions can shape women's roles even before negotiations begin. During her negotiation with the ELN, she was automatically assigned to civil society sub commission because it was associated with traditionally feminine areas of expertise. Her own interest, however, lay in weapons, military affairs and cease-fire negotiations. Her experience demonstrates that inclusion requires more than placing women somewhere in the process. Institutions also need to recognize individual expertise and give negotiators the authority to pursue areas in which they can make the strongest contribution.

Gender provisions in agreements are similarly important, but they cannot remain implicit or dependent on verbal commitments. [Dr. Lara Scarpitta](#) stresses that gender perspectives need to be explicitly reflected in agreements and decisions and that advancing them is a responsibility shared by both women and men. Several interviews caution against treating confidence as an individual solution to structural inequality. Women benefit from preparation, negotiation skills, self-knowledge, strategic clarity and self-leadership. Yet these capabilities cannot compensate indefinitely for environments that question women's legitimacy, exclude them from networks, or penalize assertiveness.

At the individual level, women can strengthen agency by preparing thoroughly, defining goals and red lines, developing their voice and presence, understanding stakeholders, practicing self-advocacy and learning to act despite uncertainty. At the institutional level, organizations must create environments in which women can exercise these capabilities without being penalized for doing so. The deeper finding is that agency is both personal and relational. Women need to recognize their own authority, while institutions and negotiation environments need to recognize and enable it. Psychological safety, belonging and meaningful participation are among the conditions that make leadership possible.

Schranner Concept® Lens on Agency, Confidence, Strategic Self-Leadership

The interviews' emphasis on these qualities connects closely to the Schranner Concept® because effective negotiation begins with preparation and clarity about one's own position. Before entering the room, negotiators need to know what they want to achieve, where they are prepared to compromise and which points are nonnegotiable. Defining a minimum target, a maximum target and clear red lines help prevent pressure in the room from leading to decisions that have not been strategically considered. Preparation also means understanding one's own interests and those of the other side, anticipating possible moves and countermoves and keeping one's demands resilient throughout the negotiation.

The interviews also show that confidence is strengthened when negotiators know what they stand for and have prepared their arguments, options, and boundaries. The Schranner Concept® mindset can ultimately be a gamechanger by shifting the perspective from playing not to lose towards playing to win. Seeing negotiation as a competition does not mean approaching the other side aggressively, but adopting a positive, proactive and confident mindset in which the negotiator actively seeks to shape the process rather than merely react to it. This changes how demands are formulated, how one presents oneself at the table and how internal and external coordination are managed. For women in particular, this mindset can support the shift from seeking permission or waiting for external validation towards confidently claiming their mandate, defending their position and creating the conditions needed to achieve the best possible outcome.

Theme 4:

Collective Leadership: Networks, Mentorship and Sustainable Peace

"The future is female, you can just see this rising level of really brilliant, strong women." – Emma Sky OBE

Leadership rarely appears as an isolated individual achievement. Women's ability to enter, navigate and influence negotiation spaces is repeatedly linked to the networks, relationships, and communities around them. Mentors, peers, civil society organizations, women's networks, allies and intergenerational relationships can provide access to information, opportunities, legitimacy, visibility, confidence and political support. They can also create channels through which knowledge and influence move between communities and formal negotiation processes.

In negotiation and peacebuilding, networks can connect formal negotiators with affected communities, strengthen the legitimacy of positions brought to the table, facilitate coordination among fragmented actors, build pipelines of future negotiators and sustain engagement beyond formal negotiations. In this sense, collective leadership becomes part of the infrastructure of inclusive and sustainable peace.

I. Networks as sources of legitimacy, knowledge, and influence

Dr. Lara Scarpitta draws on her Syrian experience as she describes how bringing women from different backgrounds together enabled them to coordinate their positions and build on one another's expertise. This collective capacity subsequently allowed them to engage more constructively with international actors. For Scarpitta, networks help to build trust among actors, demonstrating that confidence in peace processes does not emerge only inside formal negotiation rooms. It can be cultivated through sustained relationships among civil society, communities, mediators and international institutions.

Legitimacy in today's corporate system is still highly influenced by verbal recommendations. **Dr. Scilla Elworthy** puts forth an important point, which is the fact that men and women recommending women for peace negotiations can go a long way. To get a foot in the door, it may be as simple as asking the decision-maker within the negotiations if he or she would consider women to contribute to the discussion at hand.

Her experience also shows how such networks can become institutionalized. She refers to significant investment in the Women's Network and to the importance of leveraging the Women Mediators Network, while highlighting the value of intergenerational exchange. Her argument is that formal commitments have greater impact when they are shaped by the experience of people working directly with communities. Networks therefore function not simply as support structures, but as mechanisms through which knowledge, legitimacy, and influence move between different levels of a peace process.

II. Women lifting other women: mentorship, sponsorship and the leadership multiplier

Dr. Glory Edozien stresses that reaching a position of influence is not the endpoint. The most influential women are those who use their position to create opportunities for others, effectively "sending the ladder back down." This creates a multiplier effect. Leadership becomes less concentrated when those who reach influential positions actively widen access for others. The objective is therefore to create pathways through which influence can be shared and reproduced.

Networks matter in this context not only because they provide opportunities, but because they make leadership visible and imaginable. **Nina Devouge** identifies the lack of role models as a persistent barrier. Her response has been to create platforms through which women can see that others have already taken similar paths. For her, this visibility matters because women can "light up the path for others."

Dr. Mirjam Staub-Bisang makes a similar connection to negotiation. She argues that role models are particularly important at the negotiating table because talented and ambitious women may struggle to see a pathway into senior negotiation without visible examples. For her, role models and pipeline building are closely connected, and women already in positions of power have a responsibility to bring forward their peers and nurture the next generation.

III. Strength in solidarity and intergenerational leadership

Dr. Ashleigh Huffman frames collective leadership through solidarity. Her formulation, "Strong women, better world," links individual confidence to collective strength. The emphasis is particularly significant because many of the barriers identified across the interviews are structural and cannot be addressed by individuals acting alone. Collective confidence, mutual support and shared visibility can help women navigate environments in which they remain underrepresented.

Emma Sky OBE brings an explicitly intergenerational dimension to this argument. She points to the growing presence of highly capable women in politics and leadership and sees this as evidence of a broader generational shift. Her observation that "The future is female, you can just see this rising level of really brilliant, strong women" reflects optimism and the importance of preparing the next generation.

Faith Kaminus emphasizes that each generation contributes its own knowledge and perspectives in response to different social and environmental challenges. Together, these perspectives suggest that leadership transformation about ensuring that knowledge, experience, and confidence are transferred across generations. This links directly to the role-model and pipeline arguments made by **Nina Devouge** and **Dr. Mirjam Staub-Bisang**. Sustainable leadership requires both visibility and mechanisms through which knowledge and opportunities are passed on.

IV. Collective leadership requires allies

The interviews do not present collective leadership as a women-only project. **Dr. Stephanie Schoss** explicitly argues that change requires everyone, including men. Her call for women to “step up and join” is therefore accompanied by a recognition that institutional transformation also depends on male colleagues, mentors, sponsors, decision-makers and allies. More inclusive systems require women’s agency and solidarity, but also engagement from those already holding institutional power.

Fawzia Koofi illustrates another dimension of allyship. She emphasizes the need for established international partners to remember and include Afghan women and their institutions. Collective leadership should therefore not only be understood as creating separate spaces for women. Rather, it requires transforming the networks through which access, influence, and resources are distributed.

Collective leadership should also account for differences among women themselves. **Prof. Dr. Angelika Rettberg**, drawing on her research, highlights differences between women’s positions in the center and periphery of Colombia. For negotiations, understanding these geographical and contextual differences is essential. Inclusion requires attention to the diversity of experiences and interests within movements.

V. From networks to sustainable peace

Networks support individual leadership by providing mentorship, confidence, information, sponsorship, and opportunities. They further strengthen negotiation processes by connecting actors across institutional and societal levels, facilitating coordination, building trust, and bringing community knowledge into formal spaces. Thirdly, networks contribute to sustainable peace by creating relationships and leadership pipelines that can endure beyond individual negotiations.

Dr. Lara Scarpitta’s experience is particularly relevant to this third dimension. Networks do not simply help women gain access to negotiation processes. They can also strengthen the relationship between formal diplomacy and the communities affected by negotiated outcomes. When women’s networks coordinate positions, contribute expertise and build trust with international actors, they create channels through which formal processes can remain connected to realities on the ground.

This suggests that the success of collective leadership should not be measured solely by the number of women participating in a particular negotiation. A broader measure is whether the process leaves behind durable networks, mentorship relationships, institutional pathways and intergenerational leadership structures. The focus therefore shifts from individual leaders to leadership ecosystems. The question is not only whether a woman can reach the negotiating table, but whether the ecosystem around her enables others to follow, allows knowledge to circulate across generations and institutions, and turns relationships developed through negotiation into resources for longer-term peace.

Ronni Kahn AO from Australia presents sustainable peace as something that grows from strong, purpose driven networks and meaningful human connections. She underscores the importance of building relationships carefully, preparing for challenges before they escalate, and creating communities in which people genuinely take care of one another. While technology can be useful, she argues that it cannot replace human connection and collective responsibility. For Ronni, expanding women's presence and influence within these networks is essential to creating broader visions and achieving lasting change.

VI. Emerging pattern

Across interviews, collective leadership emerges as a form of strategic infrastructure rather than an optional form of professional support. Networks provide access and legitimacy, mentors and sponsors can open doors, role models make leadership imaginable, peers provide confidence and solidarity, and intergenerational relationships transfer knowledge and institutional memory. As **Sam McAlister** puts it, "I'm cheering all the women on and we must help each other." Her observation points to a broader challenge. Women's advancement cannot depend solely on individual achievement when access to power is still shaped by networks and informal structures.

The central finding is therefore that women's leadership becomes more transformative when it creates pathways for others to lead. Sustainable inclusion requires more than bringing individual women into existing structures. It requires building networks, pipelines, and relationships through which participation can become cumulative rather than exceptional. **Fatimazhra Belhirsch** adds an important dimension by linking leadership to responsibility. With effective leadership comes an awareness of the broader consequences of negotiation decisions and their impact on people's lives.

Schranner Concept® Lens on Networks, Mentorship and Collective leadership

The campaign insights suggest that collective leadership is not simply about mutual support but can be a strategic resource within negotiation itself. This connects closely to the Schranner Concept®, which places strong emphasis on the composition and coordination of the negotiation team. Networks and mentors can strengthen this architecture by providing access to information, expertise, and perspectives that the individual negotiator may not have. A diverse team can challenge assumptions, identify blind spots and broaden the range of options before and during the negotiation.

This also highlights the importance of building relationships beyond the immediate negotiation team. Mentors, sponsors and professional networks can provide strategic advice, help women assess power dynamics and strengthen their confidence in situations where their legitimacy or authority may be questioned. In the Schranner Concept®, effective negotiation depends not only on the person at the table, but also on the wider team and support structure behind them. Collective leadership therefore means ensuring that different voices are brought into preparation, that expertise is actively used and that negotiators know where to turn for support and strategic input.

From this perspective, diversity is not primarily a question of representation, but of negotiation effectiveness. A sufficiently diverse team can improve analysis, expand possible solutions and strengthen the legitimacy and sustainability of outcomes. The objective of More Women, More Peace is therefore not simply to place more women at the table, but to ensure that they have meaningful negotiating power and are connected to the networks, mentors, and teams. More diverse teams mean more perspectives in preparation and decision-making, creating greater potential for agreements that are legitimate, sustainable, and capable of lasting beyond the negotiating table.



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