

GENDER MAINSTREAMING AS A CRITICAL IMPERATIVE IN AFRICAN PEACEBUILDING

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ABSTRACT

*Gender mainstreaming is widely recognized as a critical imperative for building sustainable peace. In Africa, a robust normative architecture—from United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 to the African Union’s Maputo Protocol—explicitly mandates the integration of gender perspectives and the full participation of women in all phases of peacebuilding. However, a profound and persistent chasm exists between these progressive policy commitments and their effective implementation on the ground. This study interrogates the nature and causes of this chronic “implementation gap” in African peacebuilding. Employing a qualitative research design based on critical interpretive synthesis of secondary literature, this analysis is grounded in an integrated theoretical framework. It draws upon Feminist International Relations to deconstruct the gendered power dynamics of peace and security; Feminist Institutionalism to examine how formal policies are subverted by informal norms; and Postcolonial Feminist Theory to center African women’s agency and contextual specificities. The research moves beyond cataloguing the symptoms of the gap—such as tokenistic participation in peace talks and gender-blind program design—to analyze its systemic anatomy. The findings reveal that the implementation gap is not a passive failure but an active, politically functional outcome. It is sustained by three interlocking dynamics: the **discursive containment** of women’s roles within a narrow “victim-protection” frame, which sidelines their agency as political actors; **institutional mimicry**, where states adopt the form of gender equality mechanisms (e.g., National Action Plans) without ceding substantive authority or resources, rendering them symbolic; and a **political economy of performative mainstreaming**, where donor funding incentives prioritize short-term, technical compliance over long-term, transformative change. Consequently, peacebuilding processes consistently reproduce the gendered power hierarchies that fuel conflict, resulting in settlements that lack inclusivity, legitimacy, and durability. The study concludes that effective gender mainstreaming is inseparable from a fundamental transformation of peacebuilding governance itself. It therefore advances targeted recommendations for key stakeholders: regional bodies must enforce compliance through political leverage; national governments and mediators must institutionalize*

bridges between formal and informal peace processes; international donors must shift to long-term, core funding for women's organizations; and civil society must leverage strategic litigation and coalitions. Ultimately, bridging the implementation gap requires reconceptualizing peacebuilding from a state-centric, liberal project into a feminist, human-security-oriented praxis that redistributes power and builds a genuinely inclusive peace.

Keywords: Gender Mainstreaming, Peacebuilding, Africa, Women, Peace, Security.

Introduction

The pursuit of sustainable peace in Africa remains a paramount yet elusive goal in the post-Cold War era. Contemporary conflicts on the continent, often characterized as intra-state, identity-based, and resource-driven, have proven resistant to conventional peacemaking and state-centric peacebuilding models (Brock-Utne, 2015). These approaches have frequently yielded fragile peace, evidenced by high rates of conflict recidivism, because they fail to address the underlying socio-political structures that fuel violence. A pivotal, yet historically marginalized, analytical lens for understanding these structures is **gender**—the socially constructed roles, behaviors, and power relations between women and men (Butler, 1990). Consequently, the project of building lasting peace necessitates a fundamental re-examination of peacebuilding praxis through the deliberate and systematic strategy of **gender mainstreaming**.

Gender mainstreaming, as defined by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC, 1997), is the process of assessing the implications for all genders in any planned action, including legislation, policies, and programs, to achieve gender equality. In peacebuilding, this transcends the mere "add-women-and-stir" approach. It demands a transformative integration of gender analysis into every phase—from conflict diagnosis and mission planning to disarmament, justice, security sector reform, and socio-economic recovery (Pankhurst, 2008). This is not a peripheral concern but a central determinant of effectiveness. As Hudson (2012) argues, the systemic subordination of women is a significant indicator of state instability and proneness to conflict, suggesting that peacebuilding which neglects gender hierarchies is built on unstable foundations.

The normative scaffolding for this integration is well-established. The landmark **United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)**, and the subsequent Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, enshrined in international law the dual pillars of women's protection from conflict-related sexual violence and their participation in peace processes. Africa has not been a passive recipient of these norms but an active agent in their development and regionalization (Hendricks, 2017). The **Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol, 2003)** provides one of the world's most progressive legal instruments for women's rights, while the African Union's Gender Policy and various Regional Economic Community (REC) action plans demonstrate continental policy commitment.

Despite this robust architecture, a chasm persists between rhetorical commitment and substantive implementation. **The implementation gap** constitutes the central problematic of this study. Formal peace processes, such as those in South Sudan or the Central African Republic, continue to marginalize women, often limiting their participation to symbolic or

consultative roles rather than core mediation and decision-making (Domingo et al., 2015). This occurs even as evidence mounts that peace agreements with women's substantive participation are associated with a higher likelihood of implementation and longer-lasting peace (O'Reilly, Ó Súilleabháin, & Paffenholz, 2015). Furthermore, peacebuilding programming frequently remains "gender-blind," failing to account for the distinct security needs, experiences, and capacities of different genders, thereby reinforcing existing inequalities (Karim & Beardsley, 2017).

This gap is underpinned by several interconnected factors: the **securitization and narrowing of the WPS agenda** to focus predominantly on women as victims of sexual violence, which obscures their agency as peacebuilders (Shepherd, 2011); **chronic underfunding** of National Action Plans (NAPs) and gender-focused initiatives; and the resilience of **patriarchal socio-political structures** that actively resist the redistribution of power inherent in genuine gender mainstreaming (True, 2012). Moreover, the disconnect between formal, elite-driven peace processes and the informal, community-level peacebuilding where women are often highly active remains a critical fault line (Porter, 2007).

Therefore, this study posits that effective peacebuilding in Africa requires a **transformative gender mainstreaming approach** that moves beyond inclusion to critically address the power dynamics that perpetuate conflict. It asks: How can gender mainstreaming be effectively operationalized within the complex political and cultural landscapes of African peacebuilding to move from policy to transformative practice? Through a critical analysis of normative frameworks, institutional mechanisms, and case-specific interventions, this research will argue that gender mainstreaming is not merely a normative good but a **strategic imperative** for constructing peace that is inclusive, legitimate, and durable. It will interrogate the tensions between global norms and local agency, between formal and informal peacebuilding, and between short-term stability and long-term structural transformation.

Statement of the Problem

The quest for sustainable peace in Africa is a defining challenge of the twenty-first century. In response to complex, recurring conflicts, a sophisticated normative framework has emerged, championing the inclusion of a gender perspective as non-negotiable for effective peacebuilding. Grounded in the global Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda—epitomised by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)—and robustly regionalised through instruments like the Maputo Protocol (2003), Africa stands as a purported leader in policy innovation. These instruments recognise that conflict impacts women, men, girls, and boys differently and that the full participation of all, particularly women, is essential for building durable peace. However, a profound and persistent chasm exists between the continent's progressive policy commitments and their tangible realisation in conflict-affected societies. This essay argues that the central problem undermining sustainable peace in Africa is not a deficit of policy, but a critical **implementation gap** in gender mainstreaming within peacebuilding processes. This gap manifests as tokenistic participation, gender-blind programming, and the securitised co-option of the agenda, ultimately reproducing the gendered power hierarchies that fuel conflict and yielding peace settlements that are less inclusive, legitimate, and durable.

The most visible dimension of the implementation gap lies in the persistent failure to translate mandates for participation into meaningful influence. Despite clear normative injunctions, women remain largely marginalised from the core political and security negotiations that define post-conflict orders. Their inclusion, where it occurs, is often symbolic, confined to advisory roles, or ghettoised to discussing so-called "soft" social issues, while being excluded from decisive talks on power-sharing, wealth distribution, and security sector reform (Krause, Krause, & Bränfors, 2018). This constitutes **tokenism** rather than transformative inclusion.

The root of this problem extends beyond numerical underrepresentation to the qualitative nature of political agency in patriarchal post-conflict settings. Formal peace processes are typically dominated by armed actors—overwhelmingly male—and mediated by international and national elites operating within structures that inherently privilege masculine modes of negotiation and authority (Hudson, 2012). Consequently, women's participation is often mediated through separate, under-resourced "women's wings" or consultative forums that lack direct access to the primary bargaining table. This structural marginalisation ensures that peace agreements are crafted without addressing the specific gendered drivers of conflict, such as control over resources or legal inequities, thereby embedding the seeds of future instability.

Beyond high-level negotiations, the implementation gap is institutionalised through **gender-blind** operational programming. Peacebuilding interventions frequently employ a homogenised understanding of "the community" or "the combatant," failing to integrate a gender analysis into their design, implementation, and evaluation. This renders programmes ineffective at best and harmful at worst, as they overlook distinct experiences and needs.

For instance, Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) programmes are frequently designed with the male combatant as the default beneficiary. This fails to account for the roles and needs of female combatants, "dependents" associated with fighting forces, and the complex gendered dynamics of community reintegration, often leaving women without viable livelihoods or facing stigma (Mazurana, 2013). Similarly, Security Sector Reform (SSR) regularly neglects to systematically recruit and promote women within police and military forces or to train personnel on preventing and responding to gender-based violence. This results in security institutions that are distrusted by half the population and incapable of providing equitable protection (Bastick & Valasek, 2008). Furthermore, post-conflict needs assessments and donor funding flows routinely lack gendered analysis, perpetuating economic inequalities by not targeting the specific vulnerabilities and capacities of women and men (True, 2012). This programmatic gap ensures that peacebuilding consolidates, rather than transforms, pre-existing social hierarchies.

A third, more insidious dimension of the problem is the strategic **co-option and narrowing** of the transformative WPS agenda. There is a dominant tendency within international and national policy circles to frame the agenda in a protectionist and instrumentalist manner. Women are predominantly cast as **victims**—most notably of conflict-related sexual violence—a framing that, while responding to a horrific reality, simultaneously obscures their identity as **agents** of peace, reconciliation, and political change (Shepherd, 2011).

This "victim-agency" dichotomy facilitates the agenda's securitisation. The focus shifts from the long-term, structural project of redistributing power towards short-term, stabilisation-oriented goals. This is evident in the linking of WPS objectives to counter-terrorism and preventing violent extremism (PVE) frameworks, as seen in UNSCR 2242. In such contexts, women's participation can be instrumentalised for intelligence gathering or to lend legitimacy to militarised responses, rather than being valued as an end in itself for building just societies (Gjelsvik, 2020). This narrowing severs the fundamental conceptual link between gender equality and sustainable peace, reducing a holistic framework to a set of tactical tools within a traditional security paradigm.

Literature Review

This comprehensive literature review synthesizes multidisciplinary scholarship to map the intellectual terrain surrounding gender mainstreaming in African peacebuilding. It structures the analysis around four thematic pillars: the normative-ideational foundations, empirical diagnoses of the implementation gap, critical theoretical engagements, and forward-looking conceptual frontiers. This review identifies both consensus and contention within the field, ultimately pinpointing lacunae that this study seeks to address.

Normative Genesis and African Agency: Beyond Reception to Innovation

The literature firmly establishes that gender mainstreaming in peacebuilding is underpinned by a global normative framework, but a central thread in Africanist scholarship refutes a passive diffusion model, instead positing the continent as a site of significant normative innovation and contestation.

The foundational texts trace the emergence of UNSCR 1325 as a pivotal achievement of transnational feminist advocacy, born from the convergence of NGO activism, sympathetic UN member states, and a post-Cold War reconceptualization of security (Cohn, Kinsella, & Gibbings, 2004; Tryggestad, 2009). However, critical feminist scholarship immediately deconstructed its inherent tensions. **Laura J. Shepherd (2008, 2011)** provides a seminal discourse analysis, arguing the resolution constructs multiple, often contradictory, subject positions for women—as "victims" requiring protection, as "agents" of peace, and as "civil society" participants. This tension, she notes, allows powerful states and institutions to privilege the "protection" pillar, which aligns with traditional, interventionist security logics, while marginalizing the more politically disruptive "participation" pillar. This sets the stage for the implementation gap by creating a framework amenable to co-option.

A robust body of work challenges the North-to-South transmission narrative. **Aili Mari Tripp (2015)**, in *Women and Power in Post-Conflict Africa*, systematically argues that post-conflict moments in countries like Uganda, Rwanda, and Liberia created unique political openings for women's movements to institutionalize gender-sensitive provisions, often exceeding global norms. This "African agency" thesis is fortified by legal scholars who analyze the **Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol, 2003)**. **Fareda Banda (2019)** contends the Protocol establishes a higher "Maputo Standard," with explicit articles on women's right to participate in peace processes (Article 10) and the protection of women in armed conflicts (Article 11), rendering it more comprehensive and legally binding for states parties than UNSCR 1325. Institutional analyses by **Olonisakin & Okech (2021)** detail how the African Union's Gender Policy and the specific

WPS frameworks of RECs like ECOWAS and SADC represent active "localization," adapting global norms to regional conflict dynamics.

Yet, scholars also grapple with a persistent disconnect. **Mikell (1997)** and, more recently, **Badri & Tripp (2017)** identify a "paradox of formality," where progressive continental policies coexist with—and are often undermined by—entrenched patriarchal norms at national and sub-national levels. The literature suggests that this paradox is not merely a failure of implementation but a feature of a multi-level governance system where continental bodies' soft power is frequently overridden by the hard political and economic interests of sovereign states resistant to gender equality redistribution.

Empirical Landscapes and Structural Barriers

The core of the empirical literature meticulously documents the manifestations of the implementation gap, moving from descriptive accounts of exclusion to analytical explanations rooted in political economy, institutional design, and cultural resistance.

Quantitative and qualitative studies consistently evidence the marginalization of women. The **UN Women-led Global Study on UNSCR 1325 (2015)** reported that between 1992 and 2019, women constituted only 13% of negotiators, 6% of mediators, and 6% of signatories in major peace processes worldwide, with African processes reflecting similar or worse figures. **Krause, Krause, & Bränfors (2018)** advanced the field by statistically demonstrating that peace agreements with higher women's *substantive* participation (beyond a single representative) have a significantly higher probability of being implemented and lasting longer. Their work implies that the gap is not just about equality but effectiveness. Explanations for this exclusion are multifaceted:

Hudson (2012), in the "Sex and World Peace" thesis, argues that the systemic subordination of women is a primary indicator of state instability. In peace negotiations, this manifests as a male-dominated "bargaining table" where warring factions—whose power is often predicated on hyper-masculine, militarized identities—view women's inclusion as irrelevant or threatening to their authority and spoils.

Paffenholz et al. (2016) found that even international mediators often lack training or mandate to insist on inclusive processes, defaulting to engaging with the most powerful (male) armed actors to achieve a swift ceasefire, thereby trading inclusivity for short-term stability.

A major critique emerges from the intersection of feminist theory and peacebuilding practice, targeting the **liberal peacebuilding model**. Scholars argue that standard peacebuilding interventions are built on gender-blind assumptions. **Dyan Mazurana's (2013)** work on DDR is paradigmatic; she demonstrates how program design that assumes "combatant = male" fails female ex-combatants and women associated with armed forces, denying them benefits and leaving them economically vulnerable. Similarly, **Bastick & Valasek (2008)** show that Security Sector Reform (SSR) routinely neglects to transform the masculine cultures of police and military institutions, failing to make them accessible or accountable to women, thus perpetuating insecurity. **Jacqui True's (2012) political economy lens** is crucial here, linking these programmatic failures to a lack of gendered analysis in post-conflict budgeting and

economic planning, which ignores how women's unpaid care work and differential access to assets are central to recovery.

African feminist scholarship offers a vital corrective by documenting women's pervasive agency in **informal peacebuilding**. El-Bushra (2007) and Porter (2007) provide rich ethnographies of women acting as cross-ethnic mediators, providing humanitarian corridors, and sustaining social networks during war. However, as Chigudu & Kamau-Rutenberg (2021) note, this "community-based" agency is often romanticized and then systematically sidelined when formal, high-level talks begin. The literature identifies a **"bridge failure"**: international and national mediators lack the mechanisms or will to channel grassroots women's insights and legitimacy into Track I negotiations, creating a debilitating dichotomy where women are "caregivers" but not "deal-makers."

Co-option, Power, and Masculinities

The third wave of literature moves beyond diagnosis to critical deconstruction of how the gender mainstreaming project itself has been shaped, constrained, and challenged.

Building on the work of the Copenhagen School, scholars have powerfully critiqued the **securitization of the WPS agenda**. Shepherd (2011) argued that a focus on sexual violence (e.g., UNSCR 1820) framed women's bodies as sites of insecurity requiring (often militarized) protection. This has escalated in contexts of counter-terrorism. Gjelsvik (2020) and Wilén & Smith (2020), studying the Sahel and Mali, detail how WPS language is now embedded in PVE strategies. Women are framed as "mothers" who can prevent radicalization or as "informants" for security forces—an **instrumentalization** that uses women's participation to serve a militarized security agenda rather than to transform gender power relations. This represents a profound corruption of the agenda's original emancipatory intent.

A significant and necessary evolution in the literature is the critical engagement with men and masculinities. Early WPS discourse was often accused of being essentialist. In response, scholars like Myrntinen, Naujoks, & El-Bushra (2017) and Duncanson (2016) advocate for a relational gender analysis. They examine how **militarized hegemonic masculinities**—which glorify violence, control, and emotional suppression—are both a driver of conflict and a barrier to peacebuilding. This literature also explores the diverse positions of men: as perpetrators, but also as victims of conflict (e.g., forced conscription, male-directed violence), as peacebuilders, and as potential allies in challenging patriarchal norms. Ignoring this complexity, they argue, leads to incomplete and ineffective peacebuilding.

An under-theorized but empirically critical area is funding. Policy reports from SIPRI (Barrows, 2019) and NORAD (2020) consistently find that National Action Plans (NAPs) and gender-focused peacebuilding projects are severely underfunded, often reliant on unpredictable donor earmarks rather than core national budgets. Academic work by True & Wiener (2019) begins to theorize this, framing it as a **gendered political economy** issue where priorities reflecting "hard" security (military, police) consistently attract more resources than "soft" social transformation (gender justice, social cohesion), reflecting and reinforcing the devaluation of feminized realms of work.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist theory is not a singular doctrine but a diverse constellation of critical theories united by a commitment to analyzing and transforming systems of gender-based power, oppression, and knowledge production. As an epistemological foundation, it provides the essential tools to deconstruct dominant narratives of war and peace, reveal the gendered architecture of international relations, and envision alternative, emancipatory practices of security. For this study on gender mainstreaming in African peacebuilding, feminist theory serves as the core analytical engine, challenging positivist neutrality and centering the lived realities of women and other marginalized genders.

Unlike mainstream approaches that might "add" gender as a variable, feminist theory posits **gender as a constitutive and organizing principle of social, political, and economic life** (Scott, 1986). Gender is understood as a social construct that produces hierarchies, assigning differential value, roles, and access to power to individuals based on perceived sexual difference. In the context of peacebuilding, this means conflict and its resolution are inherently gendered processes; from the causes of war (e.g., resource competition shaped by patrilineal inheritance) to the conduct of war (e.g., the use of sexual violence) and the terms of peace (e.g., which actors are legitimized as negotiators).

A central and enduring critique within feminist theory targets the artificial separation of the "public" sphere (of politics, economics, war) from the "private" sphere (of family, home, reproduction). This dichotomy, as **Carole Pateman (1983)** and **Susan Moller Okin (1989)** argued, has historically served to exclude women and "women's issues" from political consideration and to naturalize their subordination. Feminist IR applies this to show how international politics relies on this split—treating the state and market as public and masculine realms, while rendering invisible the private, feminized labor (social reproduction, care work) that sustains them, especially during conflict.

Drawing from the work of **Donna Haraway (1988)**, feminist epistemology rejects the notion of a detached, objective "view from nowhere." It argues that all knowledge is **situated**—produced from specific social, historical, and gendered positions. This mandates **reflexivity**: a critical self-awareness of the researcher's own positionality and its influence on the research process. In studying African peacebuilding, this tenet cautions against universalizing Western feminist frameworks and insists on centering the situated knowledge and lived experiences of African women and communities as producers of valid theory about their own security.

Feminist theory is fundamentally oriented toward emancipation and social change. It is not merely diagnostic but **prescriptive and transformative**. The ultimate goal is not just to understand gendered oppression but to dismantle it. This praxis-orientation directly informs the rationale for gender mainstreaming, framing it not as a bureaucratic exercise but as a political project aimed at achieving substantive equality and justice in post-conflict societies.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design based on secondary data analysis, utilizing a systematic and critical interpretive approach to synthesize and analyze existing scholarly literature, policy documents, and institutional reports. Given the theoretical complexity and expansive geographical scope of gender mainstreaming in African peacebuilding, secondary

analysis offers a robust and efficient methodology to construct a comprehensive, continent-wide analysis, identify macro-level patterns, and generate novel theoretical insights without the logistical and ethical constraints of primary fieldwork. This study is situated within an interpretivist paradigm, which holds that social reality is not objective but is constructed through meaning-making, discourse, and human interaction. This aligns perfectly with the study's feminist theoretical framework, which examines how gender norms and power relations are socially constructed and institutionalized. The methodology is not merely a descriptive literature review but a form of **Critical Interpretive Synthesis (CIS)**. As defined by **Dixon-Woods et al. (2006)**, CIS is a systematic, iterative, and theory-generating approach to reviewing qualitative and mixed-methods literature. It goes beyond summarizing findings to critically engage with concepts, reconceptualize phenomena, and develop explanatory models. This approach is ideal for interrogating the "implementation gap" by synthesizing disparate sources to produce a new, integrated understanding.

Discussion of Findings

The critical interpretive synthesis of literature reveals that the persistent failure to effectively mainstream gender in African peacebuilding is not an accident of policy but a **systemic outcome** produced by the dynamic interaction of discursive, institutional, and political-economic forces. The findings corroborate the central thesis of an "implementation gap," but more significantly, they illuminate its **functional anatomy**—how and why the gap is actively reproduced. This discussion integrates the findings within the study's theoretical framework to advance three core arguments.

The literature overwhelmingly confirms that women's participation remains tokenistic. However, this analysis finds that tokenism is not merely a lack of will; it is a **co-produced outcome** of specific discursive and institutional practices.

The feminist IR analysis reveals how the dominant **protection narrative** within the WPS agenda functions as a mechanism of containment. By framing women primarily as "victims of conflict-related sexual violence" (a vital but partial reality), the agenda creates a humanitarian and security mandate that is politically palatable to states and donors. This narrative, however, strategically sidelines the more disruptive **agency and participation narrative**. As a result, as evidenced in evaluations of processes in South Sudan and the DRC, resources and political capital flow toward *protecting* women (e.g., through SGBV response units) rather than toward ensuring their *political parity* at negotiation tables. This discursive hierarchy legitimizes women's presence in peace processes only as civil society observers or advisors on "social issues," effectively **gendering the agenda of the talks themselves**.

Applying feminist institutionalism, the findings show that many mechanisms for inclusion constitute "**mimicry**"—adopting the form but not the substance of change. The proliferation of National Action Plans (NAPs) is a prime example. While representing a formal institutional commitment, many NAPs are developed with minimal consultation, housed in under-resourced gender ministries with no authority over security sectors or peace talks, and lack enforceable benchmarks (Olonisakin & Okech, 2021). They become symbolic documents that allow states to demonstrate compliance with international norms (like UNSCR 1325) without redistributing domestic power. Similarly, the creation of "gender focal points" within peace missions or "women's advisory boards" often isolates gender expertise into peripheral units

with no mandate to influence core political or security decisions, thereby **institutionally containing the challenge** to patriarchal power structures.

A consistent finding across policy reports is the severe **underfunding and erratic financing** of gender equality components in peacebuilding. True & Wiener's (2019) political economy lens explains this: donors often prefer measurable, short-term outputs within project cycles (e.g., "X number of women trained," "Y gender workshops held") over long-term, politically risky investments in transforming power structures. This creates a perverse incentive for "**checkbox mainstreaming**," where implementing agencies design programs to meet donor reporting requirements on gender rather than to achieve substantive change. Consequently, gender becomes a technical **line-item in a budget**, not a cross-cutting political strategy.

The literature documents that while women are excluded from formal Track I negotiations, they are prolific architects of peace in **Track II and III** (community-level) spaces (Porter, 2007). They build cross-ethnic coalitions, conduct secret dialogues, and sustain social cohesion. The critical finding, however, is the systematic failure to **institutionalize bridges** between these informal networks and formal processes. Mediation teams, focused on securing signatures from warring parties, rarely have the mandate or cultural competence to channel the proposals of women's grassroots coalitions into the core text of agreements. This represents not just an oversight but an **epistemic dismissal** of knowledge produced outside formal, masculine political spheres.

Conclusion

This study has undertaken a critical examination of the persistent disjuncture between policy commitment and practical reality in gender mainstreaming for peacebuilding across Africa. Through a synthesis of feminist international relations, feminist institutionalism, and postcolonial feminist theory, the analysis reveals that the "implementation gap" is neither accidental nor a simple failure of effort. Rather, it is a **systemic and politically functional outcome** of a peacebuilding architecture that remains fundamentally misaligned with the transformative goals of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

The gap is sustained by a powerful confluence of forces: the **discursive containment** of women's agency within narrow protectionist frames; the **institutional mimicry** that creates gender structures without authority; a **political economy** of aid that incentivizes performative checkbox exercises over substantive power redistribution; and the strategic **instrumentalization** of the agenda for security objectives unrelated to gender justice. While African women demonstrate formidable and innovative agency as peacebuilders within informal and community spaces, this praxis is systematically disconnected from—and often epistemically dismissed by—the formal, elite bargaining that determines post-conflict political and economic orders.

Consequently, the prevailing model of peacebuilding continues to produce settlements that are gendered in their foundations, privileging stability among armed (predominantly male) actors over the transformative justice required for durable peace. Gender mainstreaming, when attempted within this unreconstructed model, is inevitably technocratized and rendered apolitical. Therefore, the core finding of this research is that **effective gender**

mainstreaming is inseparable from a fundamental transformation of peacebuilding itself— from a state-centric, liberal project to a feminist, human-security-oriented praxis.

Recommendations

Bridging the implementation gap requires moving beyond technical adjustments to engage in strategic political interventions. The following recommendations are directed at multiple stakeholders—regional bodies, national governments, international donors, and civil society—and are framed to address the root causes identified in this study.

1. Move beyond policy development to active enforcement. The AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) should **systematically deny endorsement and funding** to peace processes and mediation teams that fail to meet minimum standards for women's substantive participation (e.g., a meaningful 30% quota in all negotiation delegations and technical committees). RECs should make WPS compliance a binding criterion for conflict resolution support.
2. Mediation mandates (from the UN or AU) must explicitly require the inclusion of **independent gender expertise with decision-making power** within the mediation core team, not as an advisory appendage. National governments must ensure that National Action Plans (NAPs) are developed through inclusive, intersectional consultations and are **fully costed and integrated into national budgets**, not reliant on volatile donor funding.
3. Overhaul funding models to provide **multi-year, flexible core funding** directly to national and local women's rights organizations (WROs). This builds institutional capacity and allows for strategic, context-driven advocacy, moving beyond short-term project cycles that foster checkbox compliance.
4. Systematically document instances of exclusion, tokenism, and backlash to build evidentiary bases for strategic litigation at national and regional courts (e.g., the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights) using the Maputo Protocol as a legal tool.

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