



AGENCY FOR
PEACEBUILDING



**MUSLIM WOMEN
ADVANCEMENT OF
RIGHTS AND PROTECTION**

Webinar Proceedings Report

On

**Navigating Regional Peace Architectures: AU and IGAD Mechanisms for Women in
Mediation and Peacebuilding**

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Navigating Regional Peace Architectures: AU and IGAD Mechanisms for Women in Mediation and Peacebuilding

February 18th, 2026

2:30-4:00 PM (EAT)

I. Introduction

The Horn of Africa (HoA) has long been marked by complex conflict dynamics, political transitions, and humanitarian crises, highlighting the region's fragile peace and security environment. In response, regional mediation and peacebuilding efforts led by the African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) have sought to address these challenges, yet women's participation in these processes has remained limited. Building on earlier initiatives to strengthen women's engagement in peace and mediation, the webinar "*Navigating Regional Peace Architectures: AU and IGAD Mechanisms for Women in Mediation and Peacebuilding*", held on 18 February 2026 at the margins of the AU Summit, provided a platform for technical discussions, cross-country learning, and dialogue on entry points for women to engage effectively with regional peace mechanisms.

II. Opening & Framing

Yemisrach Kebede, Program & Partnerships Director, HCD

Yemisrach Kebede opened the webinar with a warm welcome, emphasizing that this session represents the second in a three-part series under the project *Promoting the Participation of Women in Mediation Processes in the Horn of Africa*. She highlighted the timeliness of the webinar, following the recently concluded African Union Summit, and positioned the discussion to leverage the high-level political momentum to strengthen women's participation in peace processes across the region.

The framing emphasized the practical "**how**" of women's engagement rather than just the "why," focusing on formal entry points within regional mechanisms such as the African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Yemisrach highlighted that HCD's commitment to peacebuilding is grounded in the belief that democracy and stability cannot thrive

without inclusive governance, and underscored the importance of connecting grassroots women mediators with high-level regional processes.

Yemisrach highlighted the following key points in her speech:

- Peace agreements are 35% more likely to last 15 years when women are meaningfully included, yet women make up less than 10% of negotiators globally (UN Women, 2025).
- The session aimed to move WPS from principles into a practical toolkit for women's participation.
- Focus on structured dialogue, learning sessions, and support for women at grassroots and regional levels.

Session 1: AU and the WPS Agenda

Gloria Kabaga, Coordinator, Political and Security Department, African Union Commission

Gloria Kabaga presented an overview of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and the FEMWISE Africa network. She emphasized that the AU's peace and security work is structured around five pillars: the Peace and Security Council, Peace Fund, Early Warning System, African Standby Force, and the Panel of the Wise (PoW), under which FEMWISE operates. FEMWISE Africa, established in 2017, focuses specifically on strengthening women's roles in mediation, preventive diplomacy, dialogue, and peace processes.

Gloria elaborated on the operational modalities of FEMWISE Africa, including membership expansion, capacity-building programs, and deployment in peace processes across Africa (Sudan, South Sudan, Chad, Madagascar, among others). She also highlighted the global collaboration of FEMWISE with eight other women mediators' networks, allowing for the exchange of best practices and high-level advocacy, including engagements with the UN Security Council and Secretary-General.

Key takeaways from Gloria's presentation:

- FEMWISE Africa bridges grassroots peacebuilding with formal AU mechanisms.
- Members are trained in thematic areas such as electoral violence, countering violent extremism, and gender-based violence.
- Deployment strategies focus on integrating a gender lens into mediation processes, including electoral mediation and community-based conflict resolution.
- National chapters allow early intervention before conflicts escalate to the AU Peace and Security Council level.

Session 2: IGAD and the WPS Agenda

Moges Ali, Peace and Security Division, IGAD

Moges Ali presented IGAD's peace and security architecture, emphasizing complementarity with the AU and the principle of subsidiarity. He highlighted IGAD's strategic integration of WPS across its 2015–2025 plans and the elevation of WPS to a standalone strategic objective in the 2026–2030 plan.

IGAD's mechanisms to advance WPS include the Gender Strategy (2023–2030), the Regional Action Plan on WPS (2023–2030), and capacity-building initiatives for member states. Moges emphasized the role of the IGAD Women Mediators Network, and the Gender Unit at IGAD's headquarters in Djibouti, in promoting women's participation across early warning, mediation, governance, and elections.

Key Highlights Include:

- Early warning mechanisms include women to ensure gender-sensitive monitoring and response.
- IGAD convenes platforms such as the IGAD Women, Peace, and Security Forum to strengthen women's engagement.
- National Action Plans (NAPs) follow the UN framework for WPS implementation.
- Implementation of WPS depends on member states' political will, with capacity-building programs supporting women's readiness.

Moges also stressed that high-level political mediation prioritizes ending hostilities, making sustained advocacy for women's inclusion critical, while gradual engagement strategies and local-level deployment remain effective pathways to influence decision-making.

Session 3: AU, IGAD Peace Architectures, and Women in Mediation: Country-Specific Cases

Manal Taha, Sudanese Peacebuilding Expert

Manal Taha shared her hands-on experience in Sudan and South Sudan, focusing on bridging regional structures with local peace initiatives. She highlighted the contrast between South Sudan, where women now hold 75% of high-level decision-making roles due to sustained advocacy, and Sudan, where women remain largely excluded from Track 1 negotiations.

Using the Jeddah Peace Agreement as an example, Manal explained how women were systematically excluded from negotiations and how she mobilized a network of 79 women to

engage directly with mediators via phone and Zoom to raise critical issues such as sexual violence, human security, and women's safety. She emphasized the need for operationalizing WPS mandates and ensuring that women have meaningful influence in high-level processes, rather than only participating in preparatory workshops.

Key insights:

- Women are ready and trained for Track 1 mediation but require access to decision-making tables.
- Grassroots engagement already delivers human security, but formal recognition in regional and AU processes is limited.
- Implementation of WPS mandates must consider local context to be effective.

Session 4: Partners' Role in Supporting Women in Mediation and Peacebuilding

Memekiya Fissaha, Senior Program Officer, Search for Common Ground

Memekiya presented practical advocacy strategies to promote women's inclusion in peace processes at national and regional levels. Drawing on experiences in Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia, she emphasized coalition-building, insider mediators, capacity strengthening, evidence-based advocacy, media strategies, and post-mediation engagement.

Key strategies highlighted:

- Building networks of women mediators to amplify influence.
- Insider mediators leverage community trust to enhance negotiations.
- Capacity-building equips women to articulate strategic priorities in high-level processes.
- Evidence-based advocacy identifies structural barriers to inform policy.
- Advisory boards and support systems ensure women's sustained influence.
- Media strategies counter gender stereotypes and highlight women's leadership.
- Post-conflict engagement ensures durable peace outcomes.

Recommendations:

- Strengthen women-led coalitions and support networks.
- Focus on high-level decision-making capacity.
- Ensure women's inclusion in Track 1 mediation tables.
- Engage men as allies for gender-inclusive peace processes.

Session 5: Moderated Discussion and Q&A

Yemisrach Kebede, HCD

During the discussion, Yemisrach facilitated participant engagement by linking the panelists' insights to practical questions about AU and IGAD mechanisms. The moderated discussion allowed participants to reflect on key issues, share experiences, and raise questions.

Key questions and probes included:

- “How does IGAD ensure accountability and monitor gender inclusiveness in peace processes at member state level?”
- “How can women mediators move from grassroots engagement to influence in Track 1 negotiations?”
- “What are practical strategies to link grassroots women to continental mechanisms?”

The discussion highlighted the importance of ensuring accountability for WPS mandates at the member state level and strengthening mechanisms that monitor gender inclusiveness in peace processes. Participants also reflected on the importance of moving beyond training workshops toward direct participation in high-level negotiations.

Panelists and participants further discussed the opportunities created by Sudan rejoining IGAD, particularly the potential to establish FEMWISE activities and expand the engagement of women's networks in mediation and peace processes. The conversation also underscored the role of coalition advocacy and cross-country learning in amplifying women's priorities and strengthening their influence across the region.

Panelists emphasized that gradual, strategic approaches are necessary, leveraging both grassroots expertise and regional mechanisms to achieve meaningful inclusion. Reflections from panelists highlighted both challenges and opportunities for women's inclusion, emphasizing gradual strategies, technical support, and political advocacy. Moges noted that high-level mediation often prioritizes ending hostilities, with women's inclusion being secondary, but persistent engagement and capacity-building are critical. Manal highlighted Sudan's recent re-entry into IGAD as an opportunity to establish FEMWISE activities and expand women's participation in formal mediation. Memekiya reinforced the importance of coalitions, advocacy networks, and the strategic use of media to amplify women's voices.

Session 6: Key Takeaways and Recommendations

The webinar concluded with actionable insights and follow-up steps, reflecting both the key takeaways from the discussion and lessons for strengthening women's engagement in regional peace processes. Participants emphasized that effective operationalization of the WPS agenda

requires women's presence in Track 1 mediation spaces alongside political and military actors. Coalition-building, insider mediators, and local advocacy networks were highlighted as vital for influencing outcomes and ensuring that women's priorities are reflected in peace negotiations.

Participants also noted that regional mechanisms such as FEMWISE Africa, IGAD networks, and other continental platforms provide legitimacy and institutional entry points, but women's active engagement and coordinated advocacy are critical for translating these frameworks into meaningful participation. Linking grassroots efforts to formal peace structures and continental mechanisms was emphasized as essential for sustained influence, cross-learning, and stronger representation in regional peace processes.

The discussion further highlighted the importance of strengthening women-led coalitions and support networks, as well as focusing on capacity-building for high-level decision-making to enable effective engagement in Track 1 mediation spaces. Evidence-based advocacy was also identified as critical for identifying structural barriers, shaping policy discussions, and advancing women's participation in peace and security processes.

Participants underscored the role of media and strategic communication in amplifying women's peace leadership, shifting perceptions, and highlighting women's contributions to mediation and peacebuilding. Sustained engagement during post-conflict phases was also emphasized as necessary to ensure durable and inclusive peace outcomes.

In this manner, the webinar successfully provided a practical bridge between policy, advocacy, and grassroots action, highlighting practical strategies for advancing women's participation in regional peace and security mechanisms.

[Session 7: Closing Remarks](#)

Yemisrach concluded by thanking participants, our partners AP and MWARP, and the panelists for sharing critical insights that bridge policy frameworks and grassroots experiences. She emphasized that the discussions; from AU and IGAD frameworks to; on-the-ground advocacy strategies will inform the next phase of the project. Moreover, participants are advised to be on the lookout for our third webinar, scheduled for April 2026, which will focus on real-time political and conflict analysis in Sudan and South Sudan, exploring practical entry points for women's engagement.

Please visit our upcoming events section to read more and register for the webinar on April 1, 2026.