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World Vision 



WOMEN IN PEACEBUILDING

Ethiopia, Lebanon,
Myanmar and Somalia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Women in fragile and conflict-affected contexts across Ethiopia, Lebanon, Somalia and Myanmar play indispensable yet often unrecognised roles in sustaining their families, strengthening social cohesion and preventing violence. World Vision's peacebuilding initiatives across these settings demonstrate that when women's leadership is supported, their contributions accelerate healing and enable more inclusive and sustainable peace outcomes. **Despite facing significant barriers such as exclusion from formal peace negotiation processes and heightened safety risks, women consistently act as caregivers, mediators and connectors within and across communities.**

Grounded in the **Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda**, the initiatives highlighted in this case study demonstrate the critical link between women's agency, community resilience and sustainable peace. Across contexts, women are mediating local disputes, supporting displaced families, maintaining social networks and contributing to informal early warning systems. Women's participation is not only a matter of rights but a prerequisite for effective peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

In each context, World Vision delivered essential services, expanded women's livelihood opportunities, engaged in advocacy, facilitated community dialogue platforms and/or strengthened the capacities of local partners; throughout, women's needs, inclusion and leadership were at the forefront. These interventions increased women's empowerment, enhanced trust between communities and institutions, reduced tensions and improved outcomes—while also engaging men, boys, youth and traditional leaders as allies. Evidence from all four contexts highlights three overarching lessons: **peacebuilding is most effective when integrated with meeting pressing needs, locally owned processes are essential for sustainability and meaningful inclusion of women—not symbolic participation—is foundational for durable peace.**

By situating women's lived realities within the broader WPS framework, this case study reinforces the importance of inclusive approaches that strengthen both community-level leadership and formal accountability systems, ensuring that women's contributions to peace and stability are acknowledged, protected and sustained.

Photo courtesy of World Vision Myanmar



BACKGROUND

World Vision engages in peacebuilding programming in fragile contexts around the world, including in Ethiopia, Lebanon, Myanmar and Somalia.

In **Ethiopia's Tigray, Amhara, and Benishangul-Gumuz regions**, prolonged conflict and inter-communal tensions have produced widespread trauma, a breakdown of trust, weakened social cohesion and heightened vulnerability among women, children and youth. Youth unemployment and marginalisation have created frustration, increasing intergenerational mistrust and the risk of violence. Economic shocks have further heightened tensions. Along **Ethiopia's Wollega-Kamashi corridor**, recurrent tensions between Oromo and Gumuz communities undermine trust and disrupt livelihoods. Dialogue mechanisms and early warning and response systems were weak, and the prolonged conflict has eroded confidence in local institutions. Women have been disproportionately affected, facing increased exposure to violence, loss of livelihoods, expanded unpaid care burdens and limited access to protection and decision-making spaces.

In 2024, after nearly a year of lower-level fighting, **Lebanon** experienced a major border escalation involving conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. The fighting devastated the infrastructure and displaced hundreds of thousands of people. The fragile health and protection system was overstretched, and services were disrupted. Women and girls were again disproportionately affected, facing heightened risks of gender-based violence, increased unpaid care burdens and reduced access to essential health, protection and livelihood services.

In **Myanmar**, overlapping crises have left millions of people—especially women and girls—deeply vulnerable. Decades of conflict between the military and ethnic armed organisations have driven displacement, eroded livelihoods and weakened safety nets. The February 2021 coup further destabilised the country, intensifying violence and poverty; by 2024, more than 2.6 million people were displaced and nearly one-third of the population needed humanitarian assistance.



Hiwot, a participant in WV Ethiopia programming



Health education session in Nam Bo Wan Village, Myanmar

The March 2025 earthquake compounded vulnerabilities by destroying homes, health facilities and infrastructure, creating acute shortages of food, shelter and medical supplies. Women, children, people living with disabilities and the elderly were disproportionately affected.

In **Somalia's Luuq District**, diverse clans, internally displaced persons (IDPs), host communities and various marginalised groups live side by side. Past grievances and competition over land and water, exacerbated by drought, displacement and weak governance, have generated mistrust and periodic conflict, such as that which began in July 2024. Since then, inter-clan violence has destroyed homes and markets, displaced at least 5,000 families, disrupted education and livelihoods, restricted humanitarian access and deepened trauma and uncertainty, including among children.

Across all of these contexts, **peace processes (among other political and leadership spaces) are typically male-dominated**. While women are consistently disproportionately affected by conflict, they are often excluded from these formal processes or are included only symbolically. In Lebanon and Somalia, women peace actors and women mediators face safety risks. Further, in Myanmar, instability and displacement have correlated with increased domestic violence and abuse, as well as heavier unpaid care burdens for women. These challenges frequently lead to feelings of isolation, exhaustion and deteriorating mental and physical wellbeing.

Nevertheless, women remain central caregivers and social connectors within their communities.

The WPS agenda and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 recognise women not only as those affected by conflict but as essential agents in conflict prevention, mediation and sustainable peacebuilding. This agency is visible throughout the contexts discussed in this case study. In Myanmar's displacement camps, they organise food distribution, mediate disputes and support children's psychosocial wellbeing. In Lebanon, women have a long history of maintaining community cohesion through mediation, support to vulnerable families and informal care networks. Finally, in Ethiopia, Myanmar and Somalia, women's social positions enable them to cross ethnic or clan lines to rebuild trust.

With this central role in family and community survival, **women are uniquely positioned to support healing, dialogue and reconciliation as credible messengers for non-violence and coexistence.**

Women's influence in conflict settings often operates through relational authority rather than formal titles, enabling them to broker trust across fractured lines and sustain dialogue where official channels stall. Their embeddedness in everyday community life gives them both legitimacy and access, positioning them as practical peacebuilders whose contributions align directly with the prevention and participation pillars of the WPS agenda.

Pictured below: Faduma, a participant in WV Somalia programming



STRATEGIES & INTERVENTIONS

Prior to World Vision interventions, **women faced a number of personal and structural barriers**. Limited exposure to public participation has led to a lack of confidence and assertiveness, compounded by low levels of education. Deeply rooted patriarchal norms silenced women's voices and engagement in societal affairs, and women feared violence, including sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), in response to raising their voices.

Across Ethiopia, Lebanon, Myanmar and Somalia, World Vision's **peacebuilding activities intentionally supported and involved women**. Through service delivery, livelihood support, awareness-raising and partnerships, the programmes described below meet women's basic needs, leverage their positions as trusted caregivers and empower them to create lasting change within their communities.

Service Delivery

Service delivery programming provided women full, equal and meaningful participation and decision-making power. It also ensured that women and their communities had access to the essentials to support their physical health and psychosocial needs.

Ethiopia: World Vision provided psychosocial support through community-level trauma healing sessions, supporting individual and collective healing processes.

Lebanon: World Vision adapted service delivery models to ensure continued access during instability through approaches including mobile outreach, remote psychosocial support, conflict-sensitive referral pathways, integrated GBV-health programming and enhanced coordination with women leaders and local structures. Through this adaptation, World Vision Lebanon sustained safe identification and referral pathways to specialised services. They also ensured women and families in shelters received essential dignity items, menstrual products, baby kits and hygiene supplies, reducing stress, tension and protection risks.

Myanmar: World Vision expanded access to maternal, newborn and child health (MNCH), sexual and reproductive health (SRH), family planning and psychosocial support services; provided food, water, sanitation and hygiene, and essential non-food items to earthquake-affected populations; and distributed cash in envelopes to 1,829 earthquake-affected people for basic food needs. They also helped 1,300 women and girls access lifesaving health and family planning services.

Livelihood Support

Through livelihood support, World Vision helped women reach greater independence and relieve economic pressures.

Ethiopia: Livelihood support reduced 328 young women's vulnerability to conflict-related pressures and reinforced their contributions to peaceful community relations.

Myanmar: World Vision provided business skills training, start-up grants, and vocational support for 270 women and youth to restore food security and economic independence. They also provided training in organic fertiliser, pest prevention and yield improvement, with market linkages facilitated by local partners.

Pictured below: Livelihood support in Myanmar



Across Ethiopia, Lebanon, Myanmar and Somalia, World Vision's peacebuilding activities intentionally support and involve women.

Advocacy, Awareness-Raising & Community Dialogues

Advocacy, awareness-raising and community dialogues were central to ensuring that women's voices were heard and that their contributions to peacebuilding could benefit their entire communities.

Advocacy

Myanmar: World Vision supported women-led organisations (WLOs) as they advocated for stronger legal safeguards, gender-responsive humanitarian aid and recognition of women's rights in governance.

Somalia: Advocacy was key to World Vision's approach to supporting women in peacebuilding in Luuq. Meetings with community and religious leaders promoted equitable access to basic services and resources for IDPs and host communities, reducing tensions and improving social cohesion. The project also advocated for the inclusion of women leaders, youth and marginalised groups within existing peace committees. Government authorities recognised these strengthened peace committees and engaged them to lead mediation dialogues and reconciliation processes, including milestone peace missions.

Awareness days

In Lebanon and Myanmar, World Vision leveraged existing awareness days to spread information. World Vision **Lebanon** used International Women's Day to highlight four stories of women who took active roles during the escalation, acknowledging their courage and publicly affirming their leadership. In **Myanmar**, Women's Day and Anti-Trafficking Day events were held in collaboration with partner organisations and community members, government departments and the anti-human trafficking task force.

Pictured right: participants in WV Myanmar programming

Awareness-Raising and Community Dialogues

Ethiopia: World Vision trained women facilitators to lead non-violent conflict resolution and peer-to-peer dialogues on conflict drivers, dispute mediation and reconciliation. Discussions were inclusive, with representation from women, youth and minority groups.

Myanmar: Small-group dialogues in camps and villages built an understanding of protection risks and promoted gender inclusion in humanitarian response. Meetings with women leaders, village administrators, community elders and displaced families facilitated the creation of women-led committees, which discussed safety and security-related activities. Awareness sessions reached 582 participants, and knowledge on gender equality and protection improved among 540 women, men, girls and boys.

Somalia: Women leaders facilitated awareness-raising and dialogue sessions across clans and community groups to address key local issues, helping communities mitigate risks and address underlying causes of fragility. Quarterly community dialogue sessions convened traditional elders, local authorities, business leaders, religious representatives, women, youth and marginalised groups to build mutual understanding and strengthen trust. Through this process, dialogue was restored between previously conflicting groups, strengthening social cohesion between IDPs and host communities. Child-friendly discussions in schools and displacement sites further promoted non-violence and mutual respect.



Partnerships & Capacity Strengthening

Across all contexts, partnerships underpinned World Vision's support of women in peacebuilding. Collaboration created combined expertise that ensured interventions remained locally grounded and ethically implemented. These approaches also strengthened local organisations' and leaders' capabilities, facilitating sustained impact.

Ethiopia: World Vision partnered with women and youth peacebuilders and the Women and Social Affairs Offices to establish Woreda Working Groups and Steering and Technical Committees. This collaboration strengthened coordination and institutional ownership while embedding women's voices in formal peace mechanisms. Further capacity strengthening trained women, youth, religious leaders and government actors on conflict sensitivity, leadership and dialogue facilitation; 399 women were also trained as trauma healing facilitators. Women and youth peacebuilders then contributed to early warning systems, risk reporting and facilitation of safe dialogue spaces for their communities.

Lebanon: Collaboration with WLOs rooted in their communities enabled rapid, safe outreach to women in conflict situations. Partnerships with ABAAD, health facilities and the Imam Moussa Al-Sadr Foundation enhanced existing institutional capacity, enabling frontline workers, health staff and ISF personnel to adopt more gender-responsive and accountable practices. Together with their partners, World Vision sustained GBV and SRHR services, strengthened accountability and amplified women's voices during and after the 2024 border escalation.

Myanmar: WVIM partnered with Swan In Thit (SIT), women-led community-based organisation, to address the compounded crises the country faces.

This partnership, as well as those with camp committees and community-based focal persons, ensured inclusion and accountability throughout the intervention. Further, collaboration with government and civil society actors facilitated open dialogue, clarified roles and responsibilities and produced a shared referral directory. The project also included comprehensive health education sessions and refresher sessions for partner staff on MNCH, SRH and family planning, coupled with the distribution of Clean Delivery and Newborn Kits. Trainings for women's groups, youth and camp committees reached 190 participants and comprehensively covered GEDSI, child protection and health-related topics.

Somalia: The three-phase peacebuilding project in Somalia emphasised government involvement and enhanced local capacity for reconciliation, mediation and social cohesion. It promoted inclusive participation of women, youth and marginalised groups in peace committees, which were further strengthened through training in mediation, negotiation and reconciliation. Leadership development and communication training empowered women to engage effectively with elders, religious leaders and local authorities, increasing their confidence and influence in peace processes. Each of these activities, alongside community dialogues, reinforced community ownership and strengthened local capacities for conflict resolution. Peace agreements achieved through mediation are under implementation, demonstrating increased commitment from community leaders and local authorities following this project.

Pictured below: WV Lebanon programming



OUTCOMES & LESSONS LEARNED

The projects described above highlight three key takeaways: peacebuilding programmes are most effective when integrated with programmes that meet other community needs; a sense of local ownership is crucial for sustainability; and inclusion of women—but also youth and men and boys, when appropriate—is essential to successful peacebuilding.



“Peace is not created only at negotiation tables, it is built every day through systems that protect, heal and empower people.”

-World Vision Lebanon

Integration

Peacebuilding programming, as with other types of programming, must recognise that **women’s and communities’ needs cross the boundaries of specific initiatives and sectors**. As World Vision Lebanon reflected, “Peace is not created only at negotiation tables, it is built every day through systems that protect, heal and empower people.”

In Ethiopia, integrated psychosocial support (including trauma healing), youth peacebuilding, community dialogue platforms and livelihood interventions created spaces where women’s contributions could reduce tensions and strengthen coexistence. In Lebanon, integrated programming across health, GBV, SRHR and social cohesion helped communities rebuild stability and resilience, including in fragile border areas.

It also created safe, inclusive spaces for women’s participation and leadership and increased trust between communities, service providers and institutions. In Myanmar, integrating gender equality, humanitarian response and resilience-building facilitated simultaneous response to urgent needs and community cohesion strengthening, anticipatory action protocols for natural disasters and women’s peacebuilding leadership. Finally, in Somalia, linking humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding initiatives improved community acceptance, relevance to local needs and long-term resilience in displacement-affected settings.

Sustainability & Local Ownership

Humanitarian and development work in fragile contexts requires strong coordination and flexible implementation. **Locally driven peace initiatives have been shown to achieve greater acceptance and sustainability** overall.

In Somalia, for example, inclusive, locally owned processes contributed to de-escalation, restored social cohesion and supported civilian protection. Early, continuous coordination with authorities and partners harmonised interventions and ensured efficient use of limited resources to improve response effectiveness. Additionally, engagement with traditional elders and religious leaders enhanced cultural sensitivity and increased acceptance of peacebuilding interventions, while capacity strengthening bolstered local actors’ confidence and negotiation capabilities. Overall, partnering with trusted local actors reinforced acceptance, transparency and accountability; partnering with locally rooted and culturally sensitive WLOs in particular promoted programme effectiveness by ensuring interventions are grounded in local realities. As a result, cultivating local capacities and ownership engendered greater sustainability beyond the life of any individual project, creating more durable peace.

Inclusion

Finally, inclusive approaches that engage women, youth, and men and boys increase programme legitimacy, broaden representation and support more sustainable reconciliation outcomes for peacebuilding work.

Women's Empowerment

As described above, women already serve vital roles in their communities. When empowered as leaders within their communities and formal peace processes, women's knowledge and connections enable them to be effective agents of prevention and dialogue. Overall, **peacebuilding is more sustainable when women's leadership is embedded across all phases** of peacebuilding processes.

In Ethiopia, women's leadership has been shown to increase community acceptance and trust, and women's economic empowerment strengthens peace dividends. Women emerged as trusted mediators, healers and peace advocates, reinforcing the sustainability of peace efforts. In Lebanon, placing women and WLOs at the centre of protection and resilience efforts strengthened early warning systems, improved conflict-sensitive service delivery and increased community trust, demonstrating that women's leadership is not peripheral to peacebuilding but foundational to it. In Myanmar, programming supported women-led initiatives in GBV response, peace negotiations and reconstruction, empowering 300+ women leaders to take active roles in protection, crisis response and decision-making. In Somalia, leadership development and communication training empowered women to engage effectively with elders, religious leaders and local authorities, increasing their confidence and influence in peace processes. Women became recognised as trusted mediators and negotiators across clans whose continued involvement reinforced trust and sustained dialogue amid insecurity and displacement.

With World Vision's support, women's influence extended beyond representation to meaningful leadership at decision-making and grassroots levels. As the above cases demonstrate, empowering women to shape solutions is not only transformative for individuals but also strengthens the resilience and peacebuilding capacity of entire communities.

Remaining Barriers

Women's peacebuilding contributions still frequently remain constrained by structural barriers such as limited representation in formal decision-making spaces, inconsistent funding for WLOs and persistent patriarchal social norms. **Continued, deeper change will require further investment.**

WORK WITH MEN, BOYS AND YOUTH

Men, boys and youth can also be consequential actors and allies in peacebuilding processes. In Ethiopia, youth-inclusive approaches have been shown to prevent future violence. In Lebanon, engaging men and boys, especially those exhibiting aggressive behaviour, contributed to shifts in social norms and improved household and community dynamics. In Somalia, child-friendly platforms enabled children to serve as positive messengers of peace, and engagement with male leaders and religious figures deepened community recognition of women's contributions and fostered shared ownership of inclusive peacebuilding efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Grounded in the WPS framework, future strategies should systematically operationalise the four pillars of Participation, Protection, Prevention and Relief and Recovery, ensuring women's leadership is embedded across governance, humanitarian and peacebuilding systems in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

FOR NGOS AND PRACTITIONERS



Participation

Ensure women's voices are central in agenda-setting, design and accountability processes, shaping both immediate humanitarian responses and long-term stability strategies. Create structured pathways that connect community-level engagement with municipal, sectoral and national policy influence. Support women-led organisations through equitable partnerships, co-design and sustained institutional capacity strengthening.



Protection

Sustain capacity development on survivor-centred, trauma-informed and conflict-sensitive approaches for women, youth, local partners and government actors to strengthen safe participation and leadership.



Prevention

Strengthen early warning and response systems by formally integrating women, youth, traditional leaders and faith actors into coordination and decision-making mechanisms. Promote inclusive programming that addresses harmful norms, strengthens social cohesion and reduces structural drivers of violence.



Relief and Recovery

Embed child-centred peace education in schools and community platforms and integrate psychosocial support for conflict-affected children and families. Improve coordination and access through institutionalised engagement with local authorities and security structures to support gender-responsive recovery and stabilization processes.

FOR DONORS



Participation and Prevention

Prioritise investments that scale women's mediation, dialogue facilitation and conflict prevention leadership, ensuring programming moves beyond consultation toward structural inclusion.



Protection

Support integrated, multi-sectoral and conflict-sensitive approaches that embed safeguarding, GBV response and protection systems within peacebuilding and governance portfolios.



Relief and Recovery

Commit to multi-year, flexible and adaptive funding models capable of withstanding logistical, political and climate-related disruptions, ensuring continuity of women-led initiatives and institutional strengthening. Promote resource documentation, evidence generation and learning to scale effective gender-responsive peacebuilding practices.

FOR POLICYMAKERS



Participation

Institutionalise women's full, equal and meaningful participation and decision-making power in peace and governance structures at all levels, including local crisis committees, district and community peace platforms, municipal planning bodies and national peace and security mechanisms. Ensure that women's leadership is substantive rather than symbolic, with formal mandates and voting authority. Women-led organisations should hold structured and resourced roles within peace processes rather than being confined to advisory spaces.



Protection

Embed survivor-centred, rights-based GBV and SRHR services within national preparedness, response and recovery frameworks to ensure women and girls are protected before, during and after crises. Strengthen accountability mechanisms to address violations and impunity.



Prevention

Recognise and formalise the role of women as mediators, early warning actors and community peace architects within local and national conflict prevention systems.



Relief and Recovery

Allocate predictable, long-term financing to women-led organisations and gender-responsive peacebuilding initiatives to support sustainable recovery, institutional reform and resilience-building.



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Thank you to the staff of World Vision Ethiopia, World Vision Lebanon, World Vision Myanmar and World Vision Somalia for their work on these programs, and to the women peacebuilders supporting and strengthening their communities around the world.

World Vision is a Christian humanitarian aid, development, and advocacy organisation, working to end extreme poverty and injustice – one child, one family, one community at a time. As a global collective, we protect and provide for children, refusing to accept poverty and injustice as the end of the story.