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BRIEF 3

Strengthening Women's Participation in Rangeland Governance and Peacebuilding

Evidence from key informant interviews on women's roles in natural-resource governance, conflict mediation, and formal peacebuilding structures across pastoral communities in Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania, and South Africa

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ABOUT US

CGIAR aims to address gaps in knowledge about climate change and food security for peace and security policies and operations through a unique multidisciplinary approach. Our main objective is to align evidence from the realms of climate, land, and food systems science with peacebuilding efforts already underway that address conflict through evidence-based environmental, political, and socio-economic solutions.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across the East and Horn of Africa, one of the most consistent findings across this study's key informant interviews is that pastoralist women are already functioning as peacebuilders, mediating disputes, de-escalating tensions, and maintaining social cohesion across ethnic and clan lines. Yet this contribution happens almost entirely outside the formal institutions that govern rangelands, water, and peace. Key to note is that elders' councils, natural-resource governance bodies, and peace committees remain predominantly male, and women's mediation work is rarely recognized, resourced or given decision-making authority.

This brief argues that strengthening women's formal participation in rangeland governance and peacebuilding is not simply a matter of equity but is a practical necessity for durable peace and sustainable resource management. Evidence from Ethiopia's participatory rangeland management programmes and Kenya's women's peace networks shows that when women are formally included in governance and mediation structures, communities report improved trust, more equitable resource access, and more resilient conflict resolution. The evidence gaps this study identifies is not whether women can contribute but is it is about whether institutions will let them do so on an equal basis with their male counterparts.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Rangeland governance and peacebuilding are not separate policy domains in pastoral contexts; they are functionally the same terrain. Disputes over water points, grazing corridors and migration routes are simultaneously natural resource management challenges, as well as peace and security challenges. Decisions about who controls access to a borehole or a grazing corridor are, in practice, decisions about who has power to prevent or provoke conflict. This means that excluding women from rangeland governance is not a narrow gap in one sector; it is a structural gap in the region's entire conflict-prevention architecture.

This brief builds on evidence generated specifically for this study emanating from key informant interviews with 20 pastoralist women-led, humanitarian, climate-resilience, policy and peacebuilding organizations across Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania, and South Africa. That evidence shows women actively working to fill this gap informally, assuming different roles as mediators, counsellors, community mobilizers, and protectors of social cohesion but without the institutional standing that would let their work scale, be sustained, or influence formal decisions about resource allocation and conflict resolution.

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What the evidence shows

- Women are already active as informal peacebuilders, mediating family, and community disputes, running peace caravans, and mobilizing communities against violence.
- Formal peace committees, elders' councils, and natural-resource governance bodies remain predominantly male across the study countries.
- Barriers to women's formal participation include patriarchal norms, low literacy, financial dependence, limited mobility, unpaid care burdens and exclusion from customary structures.
- Land and resource rights are a particularly acute barrier in Kenya and Tanzania; in Somalia, exclusion from clan-based leadership and formal institutions is the dominant pattern.
- Where women have gained formal roles in resource governance, respondents and comparative evidence link this to improved trust, more equitable access and stronger conflict-resolution outcomes.
- Meaningful participation requires more than invitations to meetings. Rather it requires enforceable rights, voice, information, finance and decision-making authority.



Photo Credit: CGIAR Climate Security

SITUATING THE EVIDENCE: WHAT THE WIDER LITERATURE SHOWS

The study findings align closely with a substantial and growing evidence base on women's roles in natural-resource governance and peacebuilding across Africa. UN Women's work with Kenya's peace committees provides some of the most direct corroboration available. For instance, in four counties namely Marsabit, Kitui, Kwale and Turkana, supported engagement with local peace and security processes contributed to an increase in women's participation in local peace committees from 29 percent in 2019 to 34 percent in 2023 (UN Women Africa, 2023). This is precisely the kind of incremental, institutionally supported gain in formal participation that this brief's recommendations are designed to accelerate and replicate.

Perhaps the most directly relevant peer-reviewed evidence comes from Ethiopia's participatory rangeland management (PRM) programme. A review of PRM implementation across the Oromia and Afar regions found that women participated in the PRM process at rates broadly comparable to men, and that community members widely believed the programme had improved women's roles in rangeland governance leadership, decision-making and access to rangeland resources describing this as part of a broader transformative process toward gender equality in pastoralist societies (Flintan & Eba, 2023). This finding directly supports this brief's core argument: formal inclusion in governance structures produces measurable gains, not merely symbolic ones.

Comparative research reinforces this pattern beyond Ethiopia. A comparative case study of women's grassroots environmental governance in post-conflict Liberia and climate-stressed Kenya found that women's participation in environmental governance is closely linked to peacebuilding outcomes, even as systemic legal, sociocultural and institutional barriers continue to constrain their influence (Shulika & Shafiei, 2026). Similarly, community-based degraded land rehabilitation programmes reviewed across multiple African contexts were found to improve women's roles in leadership, decision-making and access to and control over resources, with downstream effects on gender equality and women's empowerment in rural communities more broadly (Flintan & Eba, 2023).

UN Women's own peacebuilding case studies from across Africa echo the finding that women's peace contributions are real but systematically under-recognized. In Somalia, women mobilized as the informal "6th Clan" to influence political dialogue and claim representation outside the country's formal clan-based power structure (UN Women Africa, 2025), a direct parallel to this study's finding that Somali respondents emphasized exclusion from clan-based leadership specifically. Another example from In Côte d'Ivoire shows that local women mediator platforms de-escalated inter-community conflict in the Cavally region, leading to a signed local peace agreement and, for the first time, the designation of women as formal guarantors of its follow-through (UN Women, 2025), precisely the kind of formalization of women's existing mediation role that this brief recommends for the Horn of Africa.

At the same time, the global data underscore how far formal peace architecture still has to go. A twenty-year review of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 implementation found that women were signatories to only 13 of 130 peace agreements signed between 1990 and 2014, with no meaningful increase in that share over time, and that by 2019 women still made up under 5 percent of military personnel and under 11 percent of police personnel in UN peacekeeping missions (Tripp, 2020). This global pattern of formal exclusion despite informal contribution is the same structural gap this brief identifies in pastoral rangeland and peace governance specifically.

Taken together, this literature confirms our findings that women's informal contribution to peacebuilding and resource governance is extensive and well documented across the continent, and that formal institutional inclusion where it has been deliberately built, as in Ethiopia's PRM programme or Kenya's supported peace committees produces measurable governance and peace benefits.



KEY FINDINGS

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1. Women are already peacebuilders albeit informally

Across the dataset, women were consistently described as mediators, counsellors, mobilizers and protectors of social cohesion. Their social relationships and responsibility for family welfare often position them as first responders when tensions emerge as they engage in family-level negotiation, reconciliation, peace caravans and community dialogue well before formal institutions become involved.

> "Women play critical roles as mediators, counsellors, mobilizers, and protectors of social cohesion." - ICAN

This pattern was reported consistently by key informants across all four study countries i.e. Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania and South Africa, thus indicating a shared regional dynamic rather than a localized effect. This finding is strongly corroborated by UN Women's documentation of Kenyan women peacebuilders such as Mary Mariach and Christine Lemuya, who mediate longstanding inter-tribal disputes in Kenya's ASAL regions through local dialogue and outreach, using approaches that, per UN Women's reporting, male-dominated leadership structures have not always been willing to take (UN Women, 2022).

2. Formal governance structures remain predominantly male

Despite women's active informal peacebuilding role, formal peace committees, elders' councils and natural-resource governance bodies across the study countries remain predominantly male. Respondents identified patriarchal norms, low literacy, financial dependence, limited mobility, unpaid care work, intimidation and exclusion from customary structures as the primary constraints on women's formal participation.

UN Women's tracking of women's representation on Kenyan peace committees provides a useful, if sobering, benchmark and demonstrates that even with sustained donor and government support across four counties, women's participation rose only from 29 percent to 34 percent between 2019 and 2023 (UN Women Africa, 2023). Though this is meaningful progress, it still falls short of parity, and achieved only through deliberate, resourced intervention rather than as a natural byproduct of programming.

3. Land and resource rights are a structural precondition for participation

Land rights emerged as an especially significant barrier in Tanzania and Kenya, where cultural and institutional norms continue to limit women's ownership of land, livestock and other productive assets, even where women carry the primary burden of securing food, water and income for their households. In Somalia, the dominant pattern was noted to be different because exclusion is rooted more in clan-based leadership structures and formal institutional arrangements than in land tenure specifically.

Such distinction matters for policy design. Ethiopia's PRM experience suggests that governance reforms which explicitly build women's participation into the process rather than assuming inclusion will follow automatically from generic community engagement and produce measurable gains in both participation and perceived legitimacy (Flintan & Eba, 2023). Therefore, a one-size-fits-all approach to women's inclusion in governance is therefore unlikely to work equally well in a land-tenure-driven context like Kenya or Tanzania and a clan-structure-driven context like Somalia, suggesting the need for context – specific inclusion strategies.

4. Formal inclusion produces measurable governance and peace benefits

Where this study's respondents described positive examples of women's formal inclusion in governance, the effects mirrored what the wider comparative literature documents notably greater trust, more equitable resource access and stronger conflict-resolution outcomes. This is not a normative claim about fairness alone but an empirical claim about what makes rangeland governance and peace processes work better.

The Ethiopian PRM review found that community members across Oromia and Afar broadly believed the programme had improved women's roles in rangeland leadership and decision-making and had encouraged a wider transformative process of gender equality in pastoralist governance (Flintan & Eba, 2023). Complementary evidence from Isiolo, Kenya, found that integrating climate adaptation into peacebuilding through community-based water conservation and rangeland rehabilitation involving women enhanced drought resilience while also reducing inter-clan conflict over resources (Medina et al., 2025).

5. Meaningful participation requires more than a seat at the table

Respondents were clear that genuine participation requires enforceable rights, voice, information, finance and authority and not simply an invitation to attend meetings that continue to be dominated by existing power structures. This distinction between token representation (tokenism) and substantive authority recurs throughout the global literature on women, peace and security.

A twenty-year review of UNSCR 1325 implementation found that women remain grossly underrepresented in formal peace processes globally, they were signatories to only 13 of 130 peace agreements signed between 1990 and 2014, and their peacebuilding activities, even when substantial are frequently ignored by formal processes, even as those same activities build bridges across ethnic, religious and political divisions (Tripp, 2020). This global pattern reinforces the finding that the barrier facing pastoralist women is not a lack of will or activity on their part, but rather a lack of formal recognition and authority.

THE CORE POLICY ARGUMENT

The evidence in this brief points to a specific and actionable policy gap: pastoralist women are already doing the practical work of peacebuilding and, in many cases, natural-resource stewardship but formal governance architecture has not caught up with that reality. Where deliberate institutional reform has taken place, as in Ethiopia's participatory rangeland management programme or Kenya's supported peace-committee network, the result has been measurable gains in both women's participation and the quality of governance and peace outcomes. The policy task is therefore not to build a case for why women should be included the evidence for that case is already strong but to replicate, adapt and scale the specific institutional mechanisms that have been shown to convert informal contribution into formal authority.

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below are derived directly from the key informant interview findings presented in this brief and are further supported by the regional and global literature reviewed above. They translate this brief's core argument that formal governance architecture has not caught up with women's already-extensive peacebuilding and resource-stewardship work into specific institutional actions, naming the mechanism, the responsible actors, and an existing model to replicate wherever one exists.

1. Formal Governance Representation

- Formalize seats and voting authority for women in rangeland and peace governance - guarantee women's representation, with voting rights rather than observer status, on peace committees, elders' councils and natural-resource governance bodies, following Kenya's supported peace-committee model.

- Adapt Ethiopia's Participatory Rangeland Management model directly - pilot and scale governance models that explicitly build women's participation into rangeland decision-making processes from the outset, rather than assuming inclusion will follow generic community engagement (Flintan & Eba, 2023).

- Move beyond token representation - pair any formal seat for women with the information, finance and enforceable rights needed to exercise real decision-making authority, since participation without authority replicates exclusion in a new form.

- Track participation as a standing governance indicator - establish and publicly report participation benchmarks for peace committees and rangeland governance bodies, following the model of Kenya's tracked increase from 29 percent to 34 percent (2019–2023), to sustain accountability for progress over time (UN Women Africa, 2023).

2. Transboundary and Cross-Border Conflict Governance

- Resource named cross-border coordination mechanisms directly — channel technical and financial support through IGAD's Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) and the Peaceful and Resilient Borderlands Programme's cluster-level coordination bodies like the Karamoja cluster, the Mandera Triangle, and Moyale -Moyale which CEWARN has, since 2026, begun integrating with climate-risk data to anticipate resource-driven conflict before it escalates (Monitor, 2026).

- Support community-led cross-border peace platforms - back elder and community-driven models such as the Ateker Leaders' Council, established in December 2025 across Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan and Ethiopia, as a template for combining community legitimacy with formal state and regional backing (CEWARN, 2025).

- Embed women specifically within cross-border platforms - ensure emerging cross-border coordination bodies and community councils include formal seats for women mediators from their founding stage, rather than adding women's representation after a platform's structure is already fixed.

3. Context-Specific Barriers

- Prioritize land and resource rights reform in Kenya and Tanzania - address land tenure specifically, since it is the dominant barrier to women's participation identified in these contexts, distinct from the clan-based exclusion pattern found in Somalia.

- Prioritize formal representation within and alongside clan-based structures in Somalia - design participation mechanisms that engage clan governance directly rather than assuming a single national model will work across both land-tenure-driven and clan-structure-driven contexts.

4. Sustaining Women's Existing Mediation Work

- Fund and professionalize women's mediation networks - provide sustained financial and technical support to existing women's mediation networks and peace caravans, building on models such as for example the Marsabit Women's Mediation Network, rather than creating parallel structures.

- Invest in the preconditions for participation - address literacy, financial dependence, mobility constraints and unpaid care burdens directly, since these were identified as primary barriers to women's formal participation independent of any change in governance structures.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

This brief is the third in a five-part CGIAR- OPPD- SAWONET policy brief series drawing on key informant interviews with pastoralist women-led, humanitarian, climate-resilience and peacebuilding organizations across Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania and South Africa. It builds on the flagship brief's overarching findings (Brief 1) and the adaptation-leadership evidence in Brief 2 and precedes companion briefs on pastoral mobility through a GESI lens and the alignment of education systems with pastoral mobility.

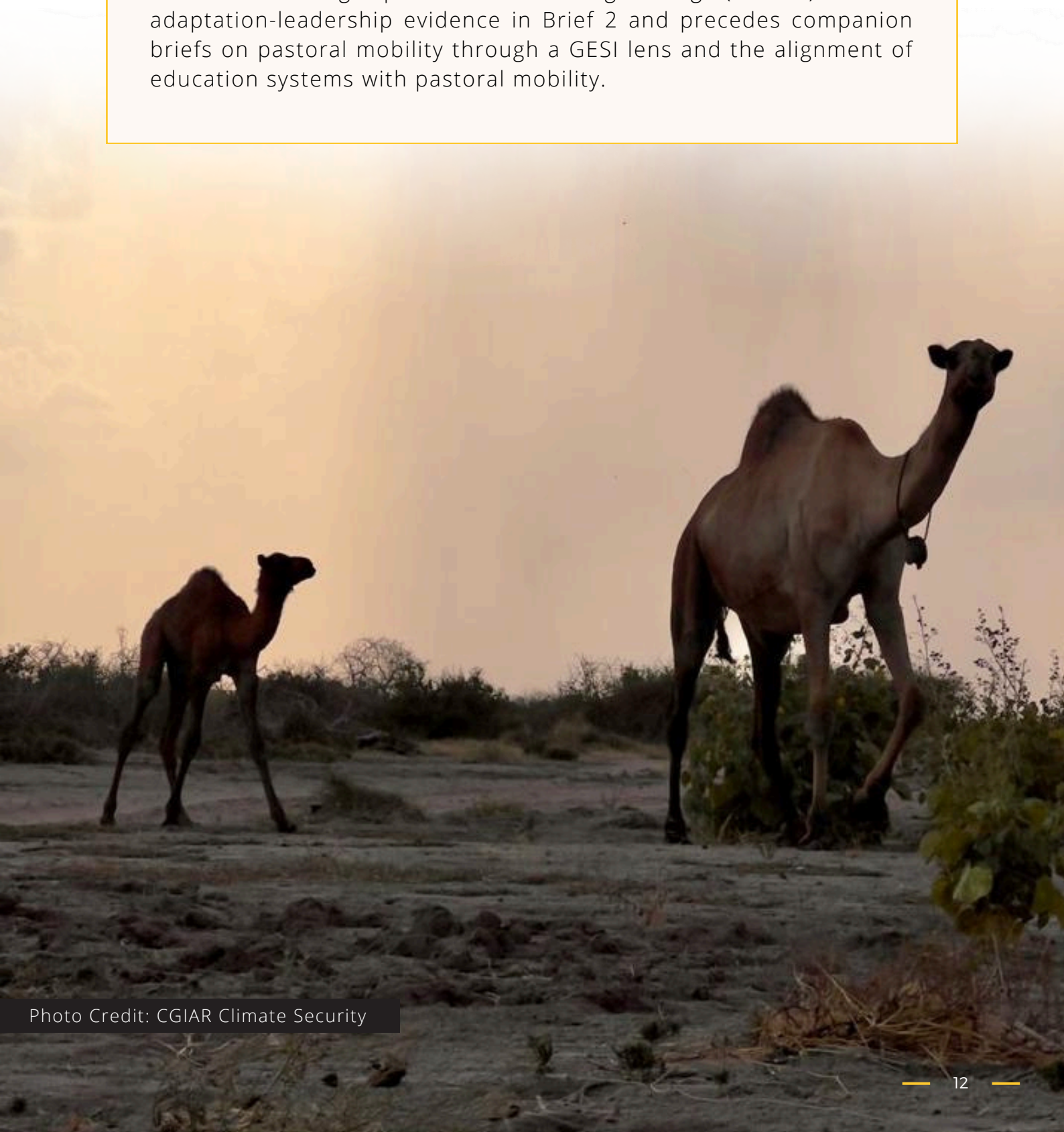


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