

A gender lens is essential to sustaining peace: Evidence from Mozambique

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This photo, captured by Dulce Fernando Houane, reflects the intersections of gender, infrastructure and everyday security — one of the main themes of the new report. Due to the potential for violence to occur, Dulce remarked that an unfinished space like the construction site pictured here, “creates a lot of insecurity especially among women in the community.” Credit: Dulce Fernando Houane

Despite decades of relative peace and recent efforts to promote gender equality, women and girls in Mozambique continue to experience a disproportionate amount of insecurity. A new report released today by Associação Sócio-Cultural Horizonte Azul (ASCHA), a Mozambican feminist civil society organization, and the Women, Peace and Security Program at Columbia University reveals the importance of a broad understanding of "peace and security" to account for the insecurity faced by Mozambican women and girls in their everyday lives.

During the [16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence](#) happening now, this report puts forth an inclusive vision peace and [security](#), that fully accounts for issues of everyday human security and wellbeing, like gender-based violence. It also provides an important perspective spotlighting the critical work of grassroots women activists in forwarding sustainable peace.

Through a participatory visual methods project with girls and young women from several neighborhoods of Maputo, Mozambique, this report suggests that peace, as it is traditionally understood, should include everyday human security and wellbeing, beyond issues of war and armed conflict. The women's voices featured in this report underscore the urgency of recognizing the various forms of insecurity that women and girls experience, particularly in public spaces—from how girls are treated in schools, to how safe women feel walking through their communities. They also echo the recent push around the globe, by academics and policymakers alike, who have demonstrated key links between the gendered problems of everyday safety, structural inequality and sustainability, and durable peace and security for all.

An Inclusive Vision of Peace and Security

The testimonies explored in this report bring to light nuanced insights about the daily lives of women and girls in Maputo and their experiences of peace and security in everyday life. Their reflections affirm the need for a holistic understanding of peace and security that expands beyond the context of war and armed conflict.

"Each day, more policemen, more army officers are trained, but it is important to look at the security of the society, security in terms of ideology, [...] of freedom," said Berta de Nazareth, an activist with ASCHA. "If I'm free, I'll feel safe to opionate and make constructive critics, or not, but voice my thoughts. This is a kind of peace I could have."

Berta and the other [young women](#) that participated in this project defined peace as fundamentally grounded in relationships, and they provided real world examples of the conditions and situations that threaten their livelihoods. These are realities that are often not made central in policy, and yet influence women's mobility, sense of security in their surroundings and their public presence as equal actors in society.

A Spotlight on Grassroots Activism

Grassroots organizations led by women, like ASCHA, are essential in both identifying and responding to these nuanced experiences of [peace and security](#).

"Peace [in Mozambique] is still a mirage or a dream, because people, especially women, girls and children, live within insecurity, violence, from the home, from the community, even in the country in general," said Dalila Macuacua, co-founder of ASCHA.

The members of ASCHA named multiple ways that women and girls mobilize and advocate every day to improve conditions and livelihoods

within and among their communities. Their discussions of the need for better public infrastructure, as well as the dismantling of gender norms, are not unique to Maputo, but shared by cities all over the world.

The voices in this report put forward a perspective of peace and security that is not always highlighted but is critical to people's lived experience—that "[public spaces](#) should belong to us."

By providing a snapshot of the lived experiences and grounded knowledge of the participants, this report showcases a reimagined view of peace and security that links everyday safety, structural inequality and well-being through a gendered lens. It suggests that paying closer attention to and taking seriously the experiences of [women](#) and [girls](#) could provide a pathway to achieving sustainable [peace](#), in Mozambique and beyond.

More information: Using a Gender Lens is Essential to Sustaining Peace: Evidence from Mozambique. [ac4.ei.columbia.edu/2019/11/22 ...nce-from-mozambique/](https://blogs.ei.columbia.edu/2019/11/22/...nce-from-mozambique/)

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