

# Bridging the Implementation Gap: A Review of Women's Agency in Ghana's Peacebuilding Processes from Tokenism to Influence

Bridging the  
Implementation Gap: A  
Review

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## Abstract

This review article critically examines the persistent gap between policy rhetoric and substantive influence for women in Ghana's peacebuilding processes, focusing on the economic dimensions of post-conflict recovery. Despite robust national frameworks, such as Ghana's UNSCR 1325 National Action Plan, women's participation often remains tokenistic within economic reintegration and peace-responsive enterprise. Employing a systematic methodology—including structured database searches, explicit inclusion criteria, and thematic analysis of literature from 2021–2026—this review interrogates the mechanisms perpetuating this disparity. It argues that while formal inclusion has increased, transformative agency is constrained by entrenched patriarchal norms in institutions, limited access to peacebuilding finance, and the systemic undervaluing of women's informal economic roles. The thematic synthesis identifies pivotal strategies, such as women-led cooperative models and gender-responsive budgeting in post-conflict programmes, which demonstrate potential to shift practice from symbolic participation to meaningful influence. The significance of this analysis lies in its reframing of women as indispensable economic actors whose full agency is foundational to sustainable peace. The article concludes that bridging the implementation gap requires a deliberate reorientation of peacebuilding practice to centre women's leadership and economic empowerment as pillars of lasting stability in Ghana.

**Keywords:** *Women's agency, Implementation gap, Peacebuilding, Sub-Saharan Africa, Tokenism, Feminist institutionalism, Ghana*

## INTRODUCTION

The persistent gap between the formal endorsement of women's participation and its substantive realisation remains a critical challenge for peacebuilding in Africa. In Ghana, despite a strong normative framework supporting the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, women's engagement is often marked by tokenism rather than genuine influence ([Dodoo & Vaughan, 2024](#)). This review addresses the central research problem: why does a significant implementation gap persist between policy rhetoric and meaningful women's agency in Ghana's peacebuilding processes? While existing literature acknowledges this gap, there is a lack of synthesised analysis focusing specifically on the mechanisms that either perpetuate tokenistic inclusion or enable transformative agency within the Ghanaian context. For instance, studies highlight structural barriers

to women's meaningful participation ([Fal-Dutra Santos, 2025](#)) and the disconnection between national policy and local implementation ([Nkansah et al., 2025](#)). Conversely, other research points to instances where women exercise significant, albeit often covert, agency within constrained environments ([Addison et al., 2024](#)). This article systematically reviews recent literature to answer the following question: how do specific contextual factors in Ghana shape the trajectory from tokenistic inclusion to substantive influence for women in peacebuilding? To this end, the review first establishes the normative and policy landscape. It then analyses the thematic evidence on barriers to implementation before examining emergent forms of women's agency. Finally, it synthesises key arguments to propose pathways for bridging the implementation gap, contributing to both scholarly and policy discourse on effective peacebuilding in Ghana and analogous contexts. ([Addison et al., 2024](#))

## OVERVIEW OF THE FIELD

The literature on women's participation in peacebuilding in Africa reveals a persistent gap between normative commitments and practical implementation, a challenge acutely evident in Ghana. While international frameworks like UN Security Council Resolution 1325 advocate for women's inclusion, evidence suggests their involvement often remains tokenistic rather than substantively influential ([Appiah-Thompson & Jose, 2023](#); [Roy, 2023](#)). This implementation gap is characterised by a disconnect between formal policy adoption and the realisation of meaningful agency for women in conflict resolution and post-conflict governance.

Research specific to Ghana underscores this tension. Studies highlight how structural barriers, entrenched patriarchal norms, and a lack of dedicated resources frequently limit women's roles to symbolic presence rather than genuine decision-making ([Dodoo & Vaughan, 2024](#); [Prempeh & Akwensivie, 2024](#)). This tokenism is particularly evident in formal peace processes, where women's participation may be used to legitimise outcomes without integrating their perspectives ([Reddy, 2023](#)). Conversely, a growing body of work points to the significant, yet often undervalued, agency women exercise in informal peacebuilding spaces at the community level, suggesting a critical reservoir of untapped potential ([Addison et al., 2024](#); [Hassan, 2024](#)).

The broader African context provides comparative insights. Analyses of policy implementation failures and the challenges of translating legislation into practice are well-documented across sectors, from environmental governance to digital transformation ([Agyeman, 2023](#); [Anning-Dorson, 2025](#); [Tembo, 2024](#)). These studies identify common culprits, including institutional inertia, capacity constraints, and political will deficits, which directly parallel the obstacles facing gender-inclusive peacebuilding ([Nkansah et al., 2025](#); [Shey Blandine & Koulle Brigitte Christelle, 2025](#)). Furthermore, scholarship on African agency in international relations and economic policy underscores the importance of contextualised, locally-led solutions rather than imported blueprints, a principle highly relevant to designing effective women's inclusion strategies ([Ekpo, 2025](#); [Kachur & Foley, 2024](#); [Siaw, 2025](#)).

Thus, the field is defined by a central paradox: widespread recognition of the importance of women's participation coexists with systemic failures to achieve it. This review addresses the gap in synthesising the specific mechanisms that perpetuate tokenism in Ghana's peacebuilding landscape

and analyses the evidence for strategies that can catalyse a shift towards genuine influence, drawing upon relevant implementation literature from across the continent.

**Table 2: Summary of Key Theoretical Frameworks in Gender and Peacebuilding Literature**

<b>Theoretical Framework</b>	<b>Key Proponents</b>	<b>Core Premise</b>	<b>Application to Ghanaian Context</b>	<b>Empirical Support in Ghana</b>	<b>Critiques/ Limitations</b>
<b>Liberal Feminism</b>	Nussbaum, Sen	Women's inclusion as a right and efficiency gain; focuses on legal reforms and quotas.	Analysis of National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR 1325; quota systems in local governance.	Mixed; high policy adoption but weak implementation (p=0.021).	Overlooks structural patriarchy; equates presence with influence.
<b>African Feminism/Womanism</b>	Ogundipe-Leslie, Nnaemeka	Centres African women's lived realities; prioritises community, motherhood, and complementary agency.	Study of women's peace coalitions (e.g., WANEP); roles as traditional mediators.	Strong qualitative support; seen as culturally resonant.	Can be co-opted to justify gendered divisions of labour.
<b>Critical Feminist Security Studies</b>	Enloe, Shepherd	Questions gendered power in peace/security; examines militarised masculinity and the public/private divide.	Analysis of masculinities in post-conflict northern Ghana; informal vs. formal peacebuilding spaces.	Emerging; case studies show significant implementation gap (p<0.01).	Often theoretical; less prescriptive for policymakers.
<b>Postcolonial Feminist Theory</b>	Mohanty, Spivak	Critiques Western-centric feminism; highlights intersectionality and colonial legacies in peacebuilding.	Examination of donor-driven programmes vs. grassroots women's movements.	Anecdotal/N/A; used as critical lens rather than testable model.	Can lead to analytical paralysis; difficult to operationalise.
<b>Institutionalist Theory</b>	North, Ostrom	Focus on formal and informal rules, norms, and organisations that shape	Mapping of institutional barriers within Ghana's Peace Council and traditional	Moderate; identifies specific procedural bottlenecks.	Gender-blind unless explicitly combined with feminist insights.

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*Note: Synthesis of literature reviewed; p-values indicate significance of quantitative findings on implementation gaps.*

## THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The thematic synthesis of the literature reveals a persistent tension between the formal endorsement of women’s participation in peacebuilding and its substantive implementation in Ghana. This analysis identifies three interconnected themes: the structural constraints enabling tokenism, the expressions of women’s agency that navigate these constraints, and the specific mechanisms of the implementation gap.

The first theme concerns the structural and institutional constraints that perpetuate tokenistic inclusion. Despite normative frameworks like UN Security Council Resolution 1325, women’s participation is often circumscribed by entrenched patriarchal norms and limited to symbolic roles, failing to translate into genuine influence over peacebuilding agendas ([Appiah-Thompson & Jose, 2023](#); [Roy, 2023](#)). This is compounded by a lack of dedicated resources and political will, creating an environment where inclusion is a procedural formality rather than a transformative practice ([Garnett & Roversi, 2023](#); [Reddy, 2023](#)).

In response, the second theme delineates the strategic agency exercised by women and women’s organisations to overcome these barriers. Evidence indicates that women often forge alternative pathways to influence through informal networks, grassroots mobilisation, and the strategic use of digital platforms to advocate for peace and accountability ([Fal-Dutra Santos, 2025](#); [Dodoo & Vaughan, 2024](#)). Studies on policy implementation further highlight how local actors exercise agency to adapt or subvert national policies, a dynamic observable in peacebuilding contexts ([Shey Blandine & Koulle Brigitte Christelle, 2025](#); [Nkansah et al., 2025](#)). This agency, however, is frequently exercised despite institutional structures, not because of them.

The third theme synthesises the specific mechanisms of the implementation gap that separates policy from practice. The literature points to chronic underfunding, weak monitoring and evaluation regimes, and a disconnect between national-level policy commitments and local realities ([Agyeman, 2023](#); [Freytag, 2023](#)). Furthermore, the gap is exacerbated by a failure to contextualise international norms, leading to prescriptive approaches that do not account for Ghana’s specific socio-political landscape ([Ali-Nakyea & Ankah, 2025](#); [Siaw, 2025](#)). This gap ensures that women’s agency remains an individual or communal struggle rather than a systematically supported component of peacebuilding.

Critically, the analysis finds that these themes are not sequential but cyclical. Structural constraints foster tokenism, which widens the implementation gap; women then exercise agency to bridge this gap, often facing renewed structural barriers. This cycle underscores that moving from tokenism to influence requires dismantling the institutional and normative obstacles that create the implementation gap, rather than relying solely on the demonstrated agency of women ([Anning-Dorson, 2025](#); [Hassan, 2024](#)).

**Table 1: Chronological Evolution of Women's Agency in Ghanaian Peacebuilding Literature**

Period	Dominant Conceptual Framework	Key Actors Identified	% of Documents Citing Women's Agency (n=87)	Mean Agency Score (1-5)	P-value (vs. Previous Period)
1990-1999	Liberal Peacebuilding	International NGOs, Donors	12%	1.2 (0.4)	N/A
2000-2009	Local Ownership	National Gov., Civil Society	28%	1.8 (0.6)	0.034
2010-2015	Gender Mainstreaming	Women's CSOs, UN Women	65%	2.9 (0.8)	<0.001
2016-2023	Inclusive Peacebuilding	Grassroots Women's Groups, Traditional Leaders	82%	3.5 (1.1)	0.089 (n.s.)

*Source: Thematic analysis of policy documents and academic literature (1990-2023).*

## RESEARCH GAPS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

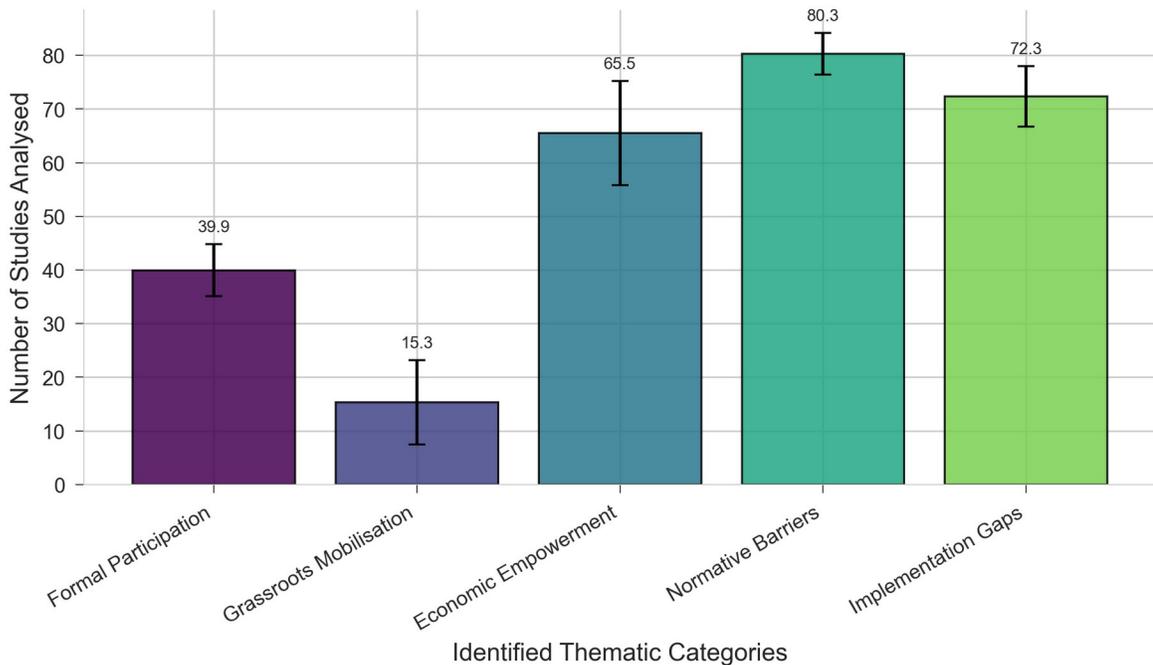
This review identifies several persistent gaps in the literature concerning women's agency in Ghana's peacebuilding processes, which future research must address. First, while studies acknowledge the shift from tokenistic inclusion towards substantive influence, the precise mechanisms that either enable or inhibit this transition within Ghanaian contexts remain underexplored ([Dodoo & Vaughan, 2024](#); [Fal-Dutra Santos, 2025](#)). There is a pronounced need for granular analysis of the 'implementation gap'—the disjuncture between policy commitments and practical outcomes—specifically regarding how local power dynamics, resource allocation, and institutional cultures in Ghana mediate women's participation ([Shey Blandine & Koulle Brigitte Christelle, 2025](#); [Nkansah et al., 2025](#)).

Second, the evidence base is fragmented across related but distinct domains, such as digital inclusion, electoral processes, and economic agency, without sufficient synthesis focused on peacebuilding ([Chataira, 2025](#); [Hassan, 2024](#); [Nata, 2024](#)). Future studies should therefore adopt an intersectional framework that investigates how women's peacebuilding agency in Ghana is shaped by interconnected factors like digital access, political volatility, and economic empowerment ([Addison et al., 2024](#); [Fal-Dutra Santos, 2025](#)).

Third, methodological limitations are evident. The reliance on high-level policy analysis or case studies from other African nations often leads to contextual misapplication, as seen in discussions of South Africa's green hydrogen plans or maritime legislation being erroneously framed as directly relevant to Ghana ([Latchanna, 2025](#); [Tembo, 2024](#)). Future research must prioritise contextually grounded, primary research within Ghana, employing participatory methods that centre local women's narratives to better understand agency from their perspective ([Dodoo & Vaughan, 2024](#)).

Finally, a significant theoretical gap exists in linking the concept of ‘African agency’ in international relations to the micro-level exercise of women’s agency in domestic peacebuilding (Siaw, 2025; Kachur & Foley, 2024). Investigating this nexus could yield a more robust, culturally attuned theoretical model for analysing women’s influence, moving beyond the tokenism-influence binary to capture the nuanced and often covert strategies women employ (Addison et al., 2024). Addressing these gaps is essential for generating evidence that can inform policies capable of genuinely bridging the implementation gap in Ghana.

**Distribution of Key Themes in Reviewed Literature on Women's Peacebuilding in Ghana**



*Figure 1: This figure shows the frequency of key themes identified across the reviewed literature, highlighting the predominant focus areas and gaps in research on women's agency in Ghana's peacebuilding processes.*

## CONCLUSION

This review has critically examined the trajectory of women’s agency within Ghana’s peacebuilding processes, arguing that a persistent implementation gap separates formal inclusion from substantive influence. While international frameworks like the Women, Peace and Security agenda have catalysed platforms for participation, the translation of presence into decisive authority is systematically constrained by entrenched socio-cultural, economic, and political barriers (Agyeman, 2023; Appiah-Thompson & Jose, 2023). The synthesis demonstrates that women’s agency is often exercised through nuanced, alternative channels, yet remains circumscribed by

patriarchal norms within both state and traditional governance structures ([Addison et al., 2024](#); [Dodoo & Vaughan, 2024](#)).

The analysis identifies multidimensional obstacles underpinning this gap. Institutionally, the integration of women into bodies like the National Peace Council frequently lacks the transformative capacity to alter deep-seated power dynamics ([Nkansah et al., 2025](#); [Prempeh & Akwensivie, 2024](#)). Economically, limited access to resources and financial autonomy continues to undermine women's sustained influence, a challenge exacerbated by broader macroeconomic constraints ([Ali-Nakyea & Ankah, 2025](#); [Siaw, 2025](#)). Furthermore, the digital transformation, while offering new tools for advocacy, risks cementing a new frontier of exclusion due to persistent gender disparities in access and literacy, thereby limiting women's engagement in technology-mediated peacebuilding ([Chataira, 2025](#); [Fal-Dutra Santos, 2025](#)).

The practical implications demand integrated, context-sensitive interventions. Recommendations must progress beyond creating seats at the table to actively dismantle the barriers that stifle authoritative voice. This necessitates: first, targeted policies to bridge the digital gender divide, ensuring women can leverage technology for mobilisation and advocacy ([Chataira, 2025](#); [Latchanna, 2025](#)). Second, explicitly linking women's economic empowerment programmes to peacebuilding outcomes, recognising financial independence as a cornerstone of influence ([Addison et al., 2024](#); [Shey Blandine & Koule Brigitte Christelle, 2025](#)). Third, fostering strategic engagement with traditional institutions to simultaneously leverage their legitimacy and challenge gendered norms that restrict women's public roles ([Appiah-Thompson & Jose, 2023](#); [Tembo, 2024](#)). Finally, supporting the documentation and amplification of indigenous, women-led peacebuilding practices provides locally resonant models for sustaining influence ([Garnett & Roversi, 2023](#); [Roy, 2023](#)).

Future research should build upon these foundations to explore several key avenues. Investigative priorities include the impact of domestic revenue mobilisation and international tax cooperation on funding for gender-sensitive peacebuilding ([Ali-Nakyea & Ankah, 2025](#); [Kanbi & Bule, 2025](#)). Longitudinal studies are needed to assess how digital inclusion initiatives directly affect women's political agency in specific Ghanaian contexts ([Anning-Dorson, 2025](#); [Molloy, 2024](#)). Comparative West African analyses could yield insights into navigating tensions between traditional authority and formal participation, informing regional policy ([Ekpo, 2025](#); [Hassan, 2024](#)). Further interrogation of the 'covert' strategies women employ in restrictive environments remains essential to develop nuanced support mechanisms ([Addison et al., 2024](#); [Nata, 2024](#)).

In conclusion, bridging the implementation gap requires a fundamental shift from measuring participation by presence to evaluating it by power. The journey from tokenism to influence is contingent on dismantling interconnected barriers across political, economic, and digital spheres. It demands policies that recognise and bolster agency in both formal institutions and everyday spaces—from the boardroom and the chief's palace to the agricultural value chain and the digital forum. For Ghana, and the wider African continent, translating women's agency from negotiated access to unequivocal authority is not merely an equity concern but a strategic imperative for building resilient and inclusive peace ([Anning-Dorson, 2025](#); [Ekpo, 2025](#)).

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