

How Technology Can Empower Women Peace Mediators

by Milica Pejanović-Đurišić



The 25th anniversary of UN Resolution 1325 calls for a reflection on the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and on strategies to enhance women's participation in all phases of peace processes.¹ Despite the historic breakthrough achieved with this Resolution, the involvement of women in conflict prevention and mediation remains limited. In 2023, only 26 per cent (that is, 8) of peace agreements included references to

women and gender issues,² even as conflicts disproportionately affected the fundamental rights of women and girls. This marked a slight decline from 28 per cent in 2022 and highlights an urgent need to translate commitments into actions that empower women mediators to play pivotal roles in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Efforts to increase women's participation in peace processes have led to the creation of various initiatives, including women mediators' networks.

¹ UN Security Council, *Resolution 1325 (2000)*, 31 October 2000, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/426075>.

² Laura Wise, "Gender, Peace Agreements, and Fragmentation", in *PeaceRep Articles*, 1 October 2024, <https://peacerep.org/?p=24149>.

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However, challenges and barriers are numerous and persistent, and a multidimensional approach at the structural, cultural, institutional and operational levels is needed to overcome them.³ Indeed, factors like the cultural and societal contexts and norms still limit women's roles. Furthermore, capacity-building and knowledge-sharing often face institutional resistance and/or are addressed in a fragmented manner, such as on an ad-hoc project basis, resulting in limited progress.

In such circumstances, digital technologies emerge as a notable topic, as they have the potential to help overcome many of the challenges women mediators and peacekeepers face. Traditional digital tools such as email platforms, video conferencing apps, instant messaging services, online course platforms, webinars and survey tools, have already been widely adopted. These tools are accessible, user-friendly and effective in fostering communication, collaboration, education and organisation within peacebuilding efforts. However, while valuable, such solutions alone do not fully leverage the transformative potential of digital technologies.

Expanding horizons through innovative technologies

New and emerging technologies – such as artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR) and big data analytics – open new

possibilities for empowering women mediators, especially as they face unique challenges due to structural inequalities, societal norms and heightened risks in conflict zones. With more innovative tools and measures, women mediators would be empowered to better navigate such an environment while dealing with complex conflicts and advocating for inclusive and sustainable peace processes.

For example, AI and machine learning (ML) can have a transformative impact by predicting conflict escalations and trends, enabling proactive interventions. AI-powered assistants can provide real-time negotiation support, improving decision-making and mediation outcomes. These are also powerful technologies for developing community sentiment analysis tools, using social media and local news to help mediators understand grassroots needs and priorities. With their universally applicable functionalities, AI/ML-based tools have already been used to detect hate speech and inflammatory content on social media, to flag early signs of conflict and to help mediators identify triggers for violence.⁴ While examples of women mediators using these specific tools are still limited, by enabling access to them, women mediators would be able to amplify their contribution using fact-based evidence that would increase their credibility, enhance their preparedness and counter systematic exclusion in male-dominated spaces.

³ Geneva Internet Platform (GIP) Digital Watch: *Women, Peace and Security*, 24 October 2024, <https://dig.watch/?p=190148>.

⁴ Giselle Lopez and Noel Dickover, "Wielding Technology to Combat Dangerous Speech in Myanmar", in *The Olive Branch Blog*, 18 February 2015, <https://www.usip.org/node/90676>.

Similarly, data analytics provides real-time insights into conflict dynamics. In synergy with Quantum computing, it can be used to model highly complex conflict scenarios, testing potential outcomes of various mediation strategies. Such analytical models allow mediators to test the potential impacts of the planned interventions before implementing them. For example, the Institute for Economics and Peace with its Global Peace Index, is moving in that direction, currently using data-based analytics to track conflict trends globally, providing early warnings for mediators and peacebuilders.⁵ Specifically for women mediators, data models can account for gender-specific indicators to ensure that the insights are relevant for women. Since women mediators are often at the forefront of advocating for gender-sensitive approaches, having access to such data would allow them to highlight the broader impacts of such strategies.

Another example is blockchain technology, which ensures transparency and trust in peace processes by securely documenting agreements and tracking their implementation.⁶ Decentralised platforms can be created to enable women mediators to collaborate, share resources and organise their activities in a more efficient and secure way. Blockchain-based crowdfunding might

be effective for securing the financing of women-led efforts while increasing accountability and efficiency.

Virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR) offers additional precious tools, through training simulations that immerse mediators in realistic conflict scenarios, enhancing their skills in negotiations and conflict resolution.⁷ Also, interactive visualisation of stakeholders, power dynamics and relationships can be created, thus providing aid for strategic planning. Similarly, the metaverse can also offer immersive virtual spaces for peace negotiations, enabling equitable participation and fostering neutrality, while overcoming geographic and security barriers, all aspects that are particularly relevant for women mediators. Networking events in the metaverse can create opportunities for them to connect globally and collaborate in a secure and supportive environment, expanding accessibility and allowing flexibility in participation.

As benefits of using the above-mentioned cutting-edge digital technologies in peacebuilding processes are evident, their implementation requires certain preconditions, such as expanded affordable access to the internet in areas of interest, adequate skills of women mediators to use digital technologies effectively and safely, better cooperation with tech companies, academia and civil sector in adapting digital tools to the needs of peacebuilding processes. In addition, it would be challenging to harness the

⁵ Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Peace Index 2024. Measuring Peace in a Complex World*, June 2024, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/GPI-2024-web.pdf>.

⁶ Joe Bush, "Using Blockchain to Bring Peace to Conflict Zones", in *Startups Magazine*, July/August 2019, <https://startupsmagazine.co.uk/node/4434>.

⁷ GuestXR project website: *About*, <https://guestxr.eu/about-guestxr>.

immense potential digital technologies are offering without considering cyber risks and the fact that women mediators may face online harassment, surveillance and targeted cyberattacks.

Addressing cyber risks

Dealing with cyber risks that women mediators might be facing is particularly important. Discussions on ethical principles, legal frameworks and international standards to guide responsible development and use of emerging technologies (AI particularly) are well underway in almost all international organisations and institutions.⁸ However, differing views on the approach to their governance are evident, with some countries advocating for binding international agreements and others expressing scepticism and arguing that over-regulation could create barriers to innovation.

In such circumstances, additional efforts to find an adequate multi-layered approach to enhance digital safety and security for women mediators, and generally women, is needed. Such comprehensive approach is of uttermost importance as women are disproportionately targeted by online harassment, surveillance and cyberattacks, which can undermine their credibility, compromise sensitive negotiations, and put their safety at risk. Given their pivotal role in advocating for gender-sensitive peacebuilding, robust protection ensures they can

work securely and effectively, even in volatile and digitally vulnerable conflict zones.

There again, digital technologies have important potential in creating mitigation measures for risks of this type. For example, AI-powered tools can provide threat detection, enabling digital fingerprinting and tracing sources of harassment. Also, blockchain platforms offer secure communication and document processing with the minimum risk of malicious interference. Lastly, metaverse, VR and AR could be used to simulate real-life cyberattack scenarios, helping mediators learn how to respond effectively.

In combination with efforts meant to create solutions for efficient governing, measures of this type can significantly reduce cyber risks and empower women mediators to operate more confidently and securely in their peacebuilding efforts.

The way forward

To fully harness the potential of digital technologies in empowering women mediators and peacekeepers, several additional steps should be taken. One priority is to expand access through investments in infrastructure to ensure affordable internet access and digital tools in conflict-prone areas. Collaboration among governments, international organisations, tech companies and the civil sector needs to be strengthened to design solutions tailored for peacebuilding. Such platforms and tools should address the diverse needs of women mediators, ensuring they are inclusive

⁸ Geneva Internet Platform (GIP) Digital Watch: *Artificial Intelligence, Peace and Security*, 18 July 2023, <https://dig.watch/?p=184038>.

and accessible. In parallel, targeted training programmes should be provided to equip women mediators with the knowledge and confidence to use advanced technologies. To that end, it would be necessary to reinforce advocating for the ethical use of such tools, supporting efforts to create global standards for their responsible deployment.

While technologies alone cannot dismantle deeply entrenched societal norms, they have immense potential to empower women mediators and revolutionise peacebuilding processes. By investing in inclusive and tailor-made digital platforms and partnerships, women mediators can overcome existing barriers, use technology effectively and safely, and drive progress towards more sustainable peace agreements.

The future of peacebuilding is *digital* – and with the right strategies, it can also be *equitable*.

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