

**Contribution Of Women's Religious Organizations To Peace building And The  
Promotion Of Gender Justice In The Sebei Sub-Region**

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**Abstract**

This study examines the contribution of women's religious organizations to peace building and the promotion of gender justice in the Sebei sub-region. Recognizing the central role that faith-based women's groups play in shaping social norms, resolving conflicts, and advocating for equitable treatment across gender identities, the research investigates how organized religious women's networks influence community cohesion, conflict transformation, and gender-inclusive policy discourse. The study population comprised adult women and community stakeholders in the Sebei sub-region, drawn from diverse religious affiliations and local governance structures. A total of 100 respondents were selected through purposive and stratified sampling techniques to ensure representation across age groups, religious denominations, and organizational leadership positions. The main objective was to assess how women's religious organizations contribute to peace building initiatives and promote gender justice within family, community, and institutional settings. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and supplemented by key informant interviews, then analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Findings reveal that women's religious organizations in the Sebei sub-region significantly facilitate dialogue between conflicting parties, lead community reconciliation efforts, and champion gender justice through ethical teachings, advocacy campaigns, and support services for survivors of gender-based violence. The conclusions indicated that women's

religious organizations are pivotal actors in both peace building and gender justice promotion, functioning as bridges between traditional authority, religious moral frameworks, and modern human rights ideals. However, constraints such as limited resources, patriarchal resistance, and insufficient institutional support can undermine their impact. Based on the findings, recommendations include: strengthening capacity-building programs for women religious leaders; fostering inter-faith collaboration on peace and gender justice agendas; integrating faith-based approaches into formal conflict-resolution frameworks; and supporting policy reform that encourages equitable participation of women in decision-making at community and regional levels. These measures can enhance the transformative potential of women's religious organizations in promoting peaceful coexistence and gender justice in the Sebei sub-region.

**Key words: Women, religion, peace building, gender justice**

## **Introduction**

The intersection of faith, gender, and conflict transformation presents a complex yet profoundly impactful arena for social change. Globally, women's religious organizations have historically operated in a paradoxical space: within traditions that often uphold patriarchal structures, they have simultaneously forged powerful platforms for peace advocacy, social healing, and the renegotiation of gender norms. This dynamic is acutely visible in contexts like the Sebei sub-region of Eastern Uganda, a community with unique cultural and religious tapestries, historically marked by inter-clan conflicts, resource-based tensions, and the pervasive challenge of gender-based violence. Here, women's church groups, inter-faith networks, and faith-based associations are not merely auxiliary bodies; they are critical agents of social cohesion and advocates for a more equitable interpretation of cultural and religious principles. Examining their contribution necessitates a global lens, acknowledging both transformative precedents and scholarly debates on the limits and potentials of religious feminism in peace work.

Examples from around the world underscore the potent model that Sebei's organizations may reflect or adapt. In Liberia, the Christian and Muslim women's movement, led by figures like Leymah Gbowee, used prayer vigils, public protests, and strategic non-violence to pressure warring factions into peace talks, directly contributing to ending the Second Civil War. In Fiji, the Interfaith Search Fiji Women's Desk brings together Hindu, Muslim, and Christian women to bridge ethnic divides, promote inter-religious dialogue, and address communal violence. In Pakistan, the Aurat March (Women's March), while not exclusively religious, includes powerful cohorts of religiously observant women who reinterpret Islamic texts to advocate for gender justice, challenging discriminatory laws and violent extremism. These cases illustrate a common thread: the strategic use of religious identity to claim

moral authority, mobilize across divides, and create protected spaces for dialogue and advocacy.

Scholarly perspectives on this phenomenon are divided. Many scholars, like Elisabeth Porter and Susan Hayward, affirm that religious women possess unique access and credibility within their communities, enabling them to address sensitive issues of reconciliation and gender norms in ways external actors cannot. Their work often emphasizes “everyday peacebuilding” and holistic healing, integrating spiritual and psychosocial support. However, critical scholars, including Margo Honecker and Aili Mari Tripp, caution that religious frameworks can also reinforce patriarchal norms. They argue that women’s peace roles are sometimes celebrated in a way that confines them to stereotypically “feminine” spaces of prayer and care, without granting them real decision-making power in formal peace processes or challenging deep-seated theological patriarchy. Some studies, such as those on evangelical women’s groups in Latin America, show how organizations may promote gender complementarity rather than equality, potentially upholding male headship while expanding women’s social service roles.

While comprehensive, localized statistics on Sebei-specific women’s religious peacebuilding are scarce, global and regional data contextualize its significance. According to a UN Women (2020) analysis, when women are included in peace processes, the resulting agreement is 35% more likely to last at least 15 years. Furthermore, the African Union (2021) reports that over 60% of faith-based organizations delivering community services on the continent are led or primarily staffed by women, highlighting their de facto role as frontline social infrastructure. In Uganda, demographic surveys indicate that religious affiliation in the Sebei region is predominantly Christian (over 85%), with a growing minority of Muslims, suggesting that interventions framed within these faith contexts have broad reach. Critically, Uganda’s Police Crime Report (2022) continues to document high rates of domestic and sexual violence nationwide, underscoring the urgent need for the gender justice work these organizations undertake.

This introduction, therefore, posits that women’s religious organizations in the Sebei sub-region represent a vital, yet under-studied, force. They navigate the delicate balance between respecting cultural-religious authenticity and transforming harmful

norms. By drawing lessons from global parallels and engaging with scholarly debates on empowerment versus co-option, this study seeks to critically analyze their methodologies, impacts, and challenges. It aims to document how, through scripture study, trauma healing, mediation, and advocacy, these women are not only building peace between conflicting groups but also pioneering a more just interpretation of gender within the very heart of their communities.

## Findings

Table 4.6 showing Contribution Of Women's Religious Organizations To Peace building And The Promotion Of Gender Justice In The Sebei Sub-Region

Contribution(s)	SA	A	SD	D	NS
Advocacy Against Harmful Cultural Practices in the area creates peace in the area	44(44%)	23(%)	7(7%)	16(16%)	10(10%)
Women organizations promote Gender Equity in Family and Community Roles	51(51%)	10(%)	32(32%)	6(6%)	1(1%)
They provide Mediation in Conflicts and Peace building Efforts	56(56%)	18(%)	7(7%)	15(15%)	4(4%)
Economic Empowerment as a Tool for Justice is not possible with such organisations	12(12%)	6(6%)	49(49%)	16(16%)	17(17%)
They support Mentorship and Leadership Development in the areas where they operate from	41(41%)	19(19%)	15(15%)	20(20%)	5(55%)
Women's Leadership in Public Life has supported peace building efforts	53(53%)	18(18%)	9(9%)	15(15%)	5(%)
Advocacy for Legal Reforms has been constrained by women organisations	12(12%)	6(6%)	26(26%)	56(56%)	(00%)
Educational Campaigns on Women's Rights have been key in peace building efforts	39(39%)	21(21%)	15(15%)	20(%)	5(%)

**Source: Field Study, 2024**

Regarding Advocacy Against Harmful Cultural Practices in the Area Creates Peace, the responses indicate that the strong support (67% combining SA and A) indicates that advocacy by women's organizations has had a significant impact on addressing harmful cultural practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriages. These practices have long been entrenched in Sebei culture, and addressing them contributes to peace and gender justice. While advocacy is impactful, the 16% who disagreed and 10% who were unsure suggest gaps in reach or effectiveness. This could be due to resistance from cultural custodians or lack of consistent funding for sustained advocacy campaigns. In Uganda, NGOs like *REACH* (Reproductive Education and Community Health) have worked in partnership with religious organizations to combat FGM, showcasing the potential for broader collaboration.

**On Women's Organizations Promote Gender Equity in Family and Community Roles:**

A majority (61%) affirm the positive role of women's organizations in promoting gender equity, particularly by redefining traditional family roles and fostering shared responsibilities. However, the high percentage of disagreement (38%) indicates persistent cultural barriers that limit women's empowerment. While the efforts of religious organizations are commendable, the disagreement suggests limited integration of gender equity messages in some communities. Greater focus on community dialogues and male inclusion programs could address this issue. The *Sebei Diocese Mothers' Union* has been known to encourage joint decision-making between spouses, which has improved household harmony and reduced domestic conflicts.

**Regarding: They Provide Mediation in Conflicts and Peace building Efforts:**

A significant 74% acknowledge the role of women's organizations in mediating conflicts, highlighting their trusted positions within communities. Their involvement in grassroots peace building efforts has likely contributed to reducing tribal and family disputes in the Sebei region. The 15% dissent may reflect situations where mediation efforts were unsuccessful or not inclusive enough. More investment in training mediators in nonviolent communication could improve outcomes. During land disputes between clans in Kapchorwa District, women's religious groups successfully mediated by drawing on shared values of compassion and forgiveness.

### **On Economic Empowerment as a Tool for Justice is Not Possible with Such Organizations:**

A majority (65%) disagreed, demonstrating confidence in the role of women's organizations in economic empowerment. These groups often facilitate microfinance initiatives and vocational training programs to uplift marginalized women. The 18% agreement reflects skepticism, likely due to resource constraints or limited economic programs. Expanding access to capital and networking opportunities could bolster their economic impact.

The *Women's Guild* in Sebei has provided seed funding for women-led agricultural cooperatives, enhancing household income and stability.

### **As far as They Support Mentorship and Leadership Development is concerned:**

A combined 60% agreement highlights the importance of mentorship in preparing women for leadership roles, fostering confidence and capacity for public service. The 35% who disagreed or were unsure might indicate insufficient outreach to rural women or inadequate mentoring programs. Tailoring mentorship initiatives to specific

local needs could improve engagement. Women trained by the *Church of Uganda's Mothers' Union* have gone on to assume roles in local councils and committees, driving community transformation.

### **On Women's Leadership in Public Life has Supported Peace building Efforts:**

The high support (71%) underscores the transformative role of women leaders in fostering dialogue and championing peace in their communities. The 24% dissent suggests resistance to women in leadership, likely rooted in patriarchal norms. Continued advocacy for gender inclusivity in governance is essential. The election of women leaders in Kapchorwa has inspired more inclusive policymaking and strengthened peace committees.

### **Regarding Advocacy for Legal Reforms has Been Constrained by Women's Organizations:**

A majority (82%) refuted this claim, indicating confidence in the capacity of women's organizations to drive legal reforms. Religious organizations often play a key role in lobbying for laws against gender-based violence and other injustices.

The 18% who agreed or were unsure may reflect perceived limitations in political advocacy or access to decision-makers. Strengthening alliances with civil society groups could amplify their influence. Advocacy by the *Uganda Women's Network (UWONET)* has contributed to the enactment of gender-sensitive laws in Uganda, which women's religious groups could emulate.

### **Educational Campaigns on Women's Rights Have Been Key in Peace building:**

A combined 60% agreement reflects the importance of awareness campaigns in transforming societal attitudes and empowering women to assert their rights. The 35% dissent suggests that educational campaigns may not be reaching all target groups effectively. Incorporating multimedia tools and local languages could enhance accessibility and impact. Women's organizations in the Sebei sub-region have organized workshops on reproductive rights and conflict resolution, fostering a more informed citizenry.

**From the interviews conducted, the following can be noted**

**Regarding Advocacy Against Harmful Cultural Practices:**

Respondents reported that,

***“Women’s religious groups have been instrumental in advocating against harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM). They educate communities on the health and human rights implications of these practices while offering alternative rites of passage.”(KI 1)***

Women's religious organizations in Sebei Sub-Region, such as church-based women's fellowships and Islamic women's associations, have worked to align cultural practices with religious principles that promote dignity and justice. By leveraging their moral authority, these organizations encourage the abandonment of practices like FGM. In Uganda, groups like the *Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU)* collaborate with women's religious organizations to offer counseling and community workshops. In Sebei, local women's religious networks have successfully reduced the prevalence of FGM through interfaith campaigns.



**On the Promotion of Gender Equity in Family and Community Roles,**  
respondent reported that:

*“Through religious teachings and prayer meetings, women’s groups empower women to assert their rights within families and communities. They emphasize the equality of men and women as taught in scripture.”(KI 2)*

Women’s religious organizations often reinterpret religious texts to highlight themes of justice and equality. These interpretations are shared in community settings to promote mutual respect between men and women in marriage, inheritance, and decision-making.

The *Mothers’ Union* in the Anglican Church in Uganda promotes women’s leadership within families and communities, challenging patriarchal norms that restrict women’s rights.

### **On Mediation in Conflicts and Peace building Efforts**

*“We mediate family and community disputes using religious values of forgiveness, love, and reconciliation. Women’s groups are trusted because we approach conflicts with compassion and neutrality.”(KI 3)*

Women’s religious groups are often seen as neutral actors in conflicts. Their involvement in mediating disputes—whether domestic or community-level—contributes to peace building by fostering dialogue and understanding. In Sebei, women’s religious groups have mediated land disputes that disproportionately affect widows and other vulnerable women, ensuring their rights are upheld. Globally, similar roles have been observed in Rwanda, where faith-based women’s organizations facilitated reconciliation efforts after the genocide.

## **On Regarding Economic Empowerment as a Tool for Justice**

***“We organize savings groups and vocational training to help women achieve financial independence. When women are empowered economically, they can advocate more effectively for their rights.” (KI 4)***

Savings groups provide women with a safe space to save money, access credit, and develop financial literacy (Kumar et al., 2017). They have also helped in Increased Income: Savings groups can help women increase their income through entrepreneurship and investments (Duvendack et al., 2011). The non-profit organization, CARE, has established savings groups in various countries, including Rwanda and Bangladesh, to empower women economically. There is Skill Development where vocational training provides women with the skills and knowledge needed to access better-paying jobs or start their own businesses (ILO, 2018) and such training can enhance women's confidence and self-esteem, enabling them to advocate more effectively for their rights (UN Women, 2015). The World Bank's Vocational Training for Women project in Morocco has helped thousands of women acquire skills in areas like IT, hospitality, and entrepreneurship. Economic empowerment enables women to make choices and decisions that affect their lives, including advocating for their rights (Kabeer, 2017) while at the same time, it increases women's agency, enabling them to challenge patriarchal norms and advocate for their rights (Sen, 1999). The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India has empowered thousands of women through economic opportunities, enabling them to advocate for their rights and challenge patriarchal norms.

Economic empowerment initiatives led by women's religious organizations enhance women's capacity to negotiate for better treatment in their homes and communities.

Financial independence reduces vulnerability to exploitation and strengthens women's voices in decision-making. In Sebei, church-based women's groups have established microfinance initiatives that support widows and single mothers. Globally, organizations like *Caritas Internationalis* integrate economic empowerment with advocacy for women's rights.

**For Mentorship and Leadership Development: The respondents had this to say:**

***“We train young women in leadership, teaching them to see themselves as future leaders in both religious and public spheres.”(KI 5)***

This implies that Women's religious organizations often nurture leadership skills among young women, enabling them to take active roles in community development and advocacy. This mentorship fosters a new generation of gender justice advocates who combine faith and activism.

The *Uganda Women's Network (UWONET)* collaborates with faith-based women's groups to train young women in leadership and rights advocacy.

The response highlights the importance of training young women in leadership, enabling them to envision themselves as future leaders in both religious and public spheres. Regarding empowerment through Leadership Development, it's evident that Leadership training programs can empower young women to develop the skills, confidence, and knowledge needed to become effective leaders (Wilson, 2018). Leadership training can help young women challenge traditional gender stereotypes and biases that limit their opportunities for leadership (Kabeer, 2017). Women's Leadership in Faith Communities: Women's leadership in faith communities can promote gender equality, challenge patriarchal norms, and foster more inclusive and

equitable religious practices (Ammerman, 2014). Therefore, empowering women as religious leaders can help to promote social justice, human rights, and sustainable development (UN Women, 2015).

**On Women's Leadership in Public Life:** Women's leadership in public life can promote gender equality, challenge patriarchal norms, and foster more inclusive and equitable decision-making processes (Paxton et al., 2017). Empowering women as public leaders can help to promote social justice, human rights, and sustainable development (UNDP, 2019). This can be seen in examples of Successful Leadership Training Program including the Global Women's Leadership Initiative, a program, launched by the Harvard Kennedy School, provides leadership training and mentorship to women from around the world (Harvard Kennedy School, n.d.) and the African Women's Leadership Institute, based in Ghana, provides leadership training and capacity-building programs for women from across Africa (African Women's Leadership Institute, n.d.).

**Respondents were also asked about Advocacy for Legal Reforms and they noted that:**

***“We work with religious leaders and local government to ensure laws that protect women are upheld and implemented.”(KI 6)***

This implied that Women's religious organizations often act as bridges between communities and policymakers, advocating for the enforcement of laws that address gender-based violence, inheritance rights, and other critical issues. In Uganda, women's groups have been vocal in advocating for the enforcement of the *Domestic Violence Act (2010)*. In Sebei, these organizations are active in monitoring cases of gender-based violence and ensuring perpetrators are held accountable.

**Regarding Educational Campaigns on Women's Rights, a key informant noted that:**

*“We organize seminars and workshops to teach both men and women about the religious basis for women's rights, focusing on equality and mutual respect.”(KI 7)*

By combining education and religion, women's religious organizations challenge myths and stereotypes that undermine gender justice. These campaigns are particularly effective in rural areas where formal education may be limited. In Sebei, women's groups have collaborated with the Catholic Church to offer education on human rights through the lens of Christian doctrine. Globally, similar efforts by Islamic women's organizations in Malaysia promote women's roles as equal partners in society.

The response highlighted the organization's efforts to promote women's rights and equality through religious education. One of the issues is the Religious Basis for Women's Rights where the organization focuses on teaching the religious basis for women's rights, which involves interpreting scriptures in a way that promotes equality and mutual respect (Barlas, 2002) as well as Challenging Patriarchal Interpretations. By emphasizing the religious basis for women's rights, the organization challenges patriarchal interpretations of religious texts that have been used to justify gender-based discrimination (Wadud, 1999). This has been done through Seminars and Workshops. The organization uses seminars and workshops as a platform to educate both men and women about women's rights and equality (UN Women, 2015). These seminars and workshops are likely designed to be interactive and participatory,

encouraging attendees to engage in discussions and share their perspectives (Freire, 1970).

There is also focus on Equality and Mutual Respect through promoting Gender Equality where the organization's focus on equality and mutual respect reflects its commitment to promoting gender equality and challenging gender-based discrimination (UNFPA, 2019). By engaging men in the conversation, the organization encourages positive masculinities and promotes a culture of mutual respect and equality (Promundo, 2019). Examples of successful programs that promote women's rights and equality through religious education include the Islamic Institute for Development and Research (IIDR) which offers training programs for Muslim leaders and communities on women's rights and equality (IIDR, n.d.) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) which has launched initiatives to promote women's rights and equality through theological education and training (WCC, n.d.).

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