PARADIGM FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE & DEVELOPMENT

THE MEDIATION MAT



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OF THE GENDER, PEACE AND SECURITY PROGRAM

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UN WOMEN

About PSD

Paradigm for Social Justice and Development (PSD) is a Women's Rights Organization working to promote women's justice and development in Uganda. The organization envisions a society without injustice, violence and poverty. PSD's mission is to work with communities to address social injustices, alleviate poverty and violence, through engaging in participatory research, awareness creation, capacity building, providing legal services and advocacy for the well-being of women and girls.

PSD's program focus areas include; Access to Justice for Women and Girls, Women Rights and Gender Equity, Gender, Peace and Security, Gender and Economic Development, and Programme Quality Management and Organizational Development.

About the Project

Strengthening Women's Meaningful Participation in Conflict Prevention and Decision-Making Processes in Wakiso District is a project implemented by PSD with support from the United Nations Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) through UN Women.

The project works in Busiro North, Busiro East and Busiro South to transform attitudes and practices towards women's participation in decision-making and conflict resolution, and

to strengthen a women-led Community Based Early Warning and Response (CBEWER) mechanism linked to Wakiso District structures.

Through the project, trained women Local Peace Committee members, identify early warning signs of conflict, mediate disputes, and work with local leaders, police and district authorities to resolve conflicts before they escalate into violence building safer, more peaceful communities where women's voices count. The stories in this bulletin are drawn from communities reached by these Local Peace Committee Members.

Why "the Mediation Mat"

In Wakiso's communities, peace is rarely forged in a courtroom. More often, it is built on a mat under a mango tree, on a veranda between two homesteads, in a compound where neighbours have gathered because a trained woman asked them to sit down and talk.

The stories in this Bulletin begin from those mats. In nearly every case, someone knew exactly where to take the problem. A community member, a spouse, a pastor, a local chairperson each turned to a woman trained under through this project, and found a trusted listener, a skilled mediator, and a path toward resolution.

That is what a functioning community-based early warning and response system looks like: accessible, trusted, and rooted in the local relationships. It is not defined by formal instituions alone, but by the everyday spaces where communities choose dialogue over conflict and where peace begins, one conversation at a time.



Local Peace Committee members lead a community session in Wakiso where most conflicts in this bulletin found their resolution.

But the mat tells only half the story. Behind every resolved conflict is the woman who spread it out: a local council leader who, before this project, had never received the training needed to fulfil the role her community already expected her to play.

The issue therefore looks in two directions: at the conflict that were resolved and at the women who made those resolutions possible. Their own journeys of transformation of growth, confidence and leadership are compelling case studies in their own right, demonstrating how investing in women's mediation skills strengthens not only individual leaders but the resilience of the entire communities.

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Project Impact at a glance

40 women leaders trained and serving as Local Peace Committee (LPC) members across all 8 lower local governments	120+ conflicts identified, analysed and mediated by the women-led committees most resolved at community level, complex cases referred to police and district structures
425+ community radio programs conducted	400,000+ people reached through community radio programmes on conflict prevention, GBV and civic participation
Know Your Role Barazas, mobile awareness clinics and community dialogues on key conflict drivers, conflict prevention and resolution and civic participation conducted.	4,176 Community remembers reached in 2025 during the Barazas and the mobile community awareness clinic
Wakiso District Local Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security launched, embedding the community-based early warning and response system in district structures	IEC materials including the *"Leading Peace"* guidebook produced in English and Luganda to guide community conflict resolution, Posters, T-shirts and Calendars with messages on Women Peace and Security disseminated.

SUCCESS STORIES

Section A: Conflicts Resolved; Communities Restored

The stories in section are drawn from the case records of the Local Peace Committees (LPCs), women council leaders trained through this project to identify conflicts early, analyse their root causes, and resolve them through mediation, dialogue and negotiation before escalate into violence.

Each story follows a conflict from beginning to end: the situation before, the moment a Woman Mediator intervened, and what changed afterwards. The conflicts featured here are the kinds that shape everyday lives: a boundary dispute between neighbours, a hidden debt, a marriage strained by suspicion, or a rumour that nearly tore a family apart.

Most of these disputes were resolved entirely within the community, at no cost to the parties involved. The few cases that required additional intervention were referred to the Police, the Community Development Officer or district - level structures demonstrating an early warning and response system functioning as intended.

To protect privacy, the names of all individuals involved have been changed. The photographs accompanying these stories feature Local Peace Committee (LPC) Members and community mediation activities rather than the individuals involved in the cases. What has not been changed, however, is the outcome: every story ends with a conflict that no longer exists.



Under the shade, around the circle: where conflicts are resolved before they escalate. Community dialogue sessions like this one have become a fixture across the eight Local Peace Committee areas.

Story 1: The Trench Between Neighbours

Paul and Joseph had lived side by side for years, their plots separated by a trench that had long been overgrown with grass. One morning, Paul began clearing it. When Joseph arrived and found his neighbour cutting through the boundary, he became convinced that Paul was attempting to claim part of his land. His anger quickly escalated. He seized a panga and threatened Paul and his family with violence.

Community members passing by witnessed the confrontation. They saw the raised weapon and heard the threats. In another time, this is the kind of land disputes that could have turned deadly.

Instead, the community members knew exactly where to go. They immediately reported the incident to the Nabakyala, a trained Woman leader of the Local Peace Committee. She promptly involved the Local Council I Chairperson and the Secretary for Defence. Together, they brought the two neighbours together before the conflict could escalate further. Each man was given the opportunity to tell his side of the story. The central question was ***"what was Paul really doing at the trench?"*** was openly discussed and resolved.



When land disputes threaten to turn violent, it is these trained women peacebuilders who intervene first.

The mediation established that the trench formed the shared boundary between the two properties that both neighbours had the right to access and maintain it. Paul was allowed to complete the clearing in the presence of the Local Peace Committee Member and the Secretary for Defence, while Joseph withdrew his threats.

More importantly, Joseph apologized to Paul and his family. What began with suspicion and a raised panga ended in understanding, a clearly maintained boundary, and two neighbouring families able to greet each other across it once again.

What this Story Shows

This story demonstrates community-based early warning and response working exactly as intended. Community members recognised the warning signs, knew which trusted woman leader to approach, and a trained Local Peace Committee quickly mobilised local leadership to mediate the dispute before it escalated or required the intervention of police, district authorities, or health services.

It also shows that effective early warning is not dependent on technology or a hotlines. It begins with neighbours who recognize risk and know where to seek help. Likewise, early response starts with trusted community leaders who act quickly, confidently, and impartially. When women are equipped and positioned as respected leaders within local governance structures, they become a vital first line of defence against violence and conflict.

Paul and Joseph's story did not end with criminal charges, serious injury or lasting division. It ended with two men neighbours who were heard, a boundary that was clarified, and a community that resolved its own dispute peacefully. That outcome is not accidental. It was the result of sustained investment in local peace infrastructure through training, trust-building, and the deliberate inclusion of women in leadership roles where they can prevent conflict before it becomes violence.

Story 2: From years of separation to reconciliation

Many years after a couple separated, the mother returned to a family she had left behind. When she had left, she entrusted their young daughter to father's care and disappeared from their lives. The father raised the girl alone. Years later, when his daughter introduced the man she wished to marry, he gave his blessing. There was no way to reach her mother. The couple married and eventually had two children.

When the mother unexpectedly returned, she was deeply hurt to learn that her daughter had married without her knowledge. Feeling excluded from a milestone in her daughter's life, she began trying to separate the couple, placing a young family at risk of breaking apart.

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The turning point came when the husband attended a community awareness session organised by the Local Peace Committee. After the session, he remained behind to share what was happening in his home.



Local Peace Committee member creating awareness on conflict resolution in the community.

Recognizing the growing conflict, a Local Peace Committee Member organised a mediation session that brought together the couple and the mother.

During the dialogue, the mother finally expressed the pain that had driven her actions: the grief of missing her daughter's wedding. Her daughter, in turn, explained that she had never known where her mother was and that, had she been able to find her, she would have wanted hereto be part of the celebration.

Through open dialogue, the mother released her ressentiment and accepted her daughter's marriage. The couple committed to formally visit her, so she could build a relationship with her son-in-law and her grandchildren. What began as a campaign to break apart a marriage became the beginning of healing across two generations, restoring relationships that had been fractured for years.

What the story tells us

Awarenesssessionsdomore than transfer knowledge; they create pathways to support and resolution. This case demonstrates not only a successful mediation outcome but also an important access function. A public awareness session became a private entry point when, immediately afterwards, a man voluntarily disclosed a sensitive family conflict to a Local Peace Committee Member. He was unlikely to have raised such a matter through formal channels. His willingness to seek help is evidence that the LPC is functioning as a trusted first point of contact for conflicts that might otherwise remain hidden or escalate.

The LPC model was designed to serve both women and men. This case demonstrates that community members perceive women-led peace structures as legitmate, approachable, and capable of handling sensitive family disputes. The fact that a man sought assistance immediately after an awareness session suggests that the intervention is doing more than increasing knowledge of available services it is building confidence in community-based conflict resolution mechanisms.

The subsequent mediation resolved a dispute that threatened the stability of a household with two children, using a community-based process that required no formal justice procedures, legal costs, prolonged delays or adversarial procedures. This demonstrates the practical value of LPCs in addressing family conflicts early, preventing escalation, and providing accessible locally owned dispute resolution.

Story 3: Suspicion at the Savings Meeting

Joy was a respected member of her community and served as secretary for two village savings groups. Because her home was centrally located within the village, members found it convenient to gather there every week for meetings, savings collections, and discussions. Initially, her husband, Moses, welcomed the arrangement and supported the groups' activities.

Over time, however, Moses began to feel uncomfortable about the frequent visits to their home. He became particularly suspicious of Joy's interactions with one of the savings group chairpersons. Rather than discussing his concerns openly with her, he kept them to himself. As his suspicions grew, so did his frustration.



Community members, Local Peace Committee representatives, UN Women and WPHF representatives gather in Wakiso District for a peacebuilding dialogue.

One day, without any prior discussion or explanation, Moses informed Joy that the savings groups could no longer meet at their home. Joy was shocked by the decision and resisted it, explaining that the groups relied on the location and she believed she had done nothing to warrant such change. What began as a disagreement over meeting venue quickly escalated into a heated argument. During the confrontation, Moses finally revealed that he suspected Joy of having an affair with one of the chairpersons.

In their close-knit community, rumours spread quickly. The accusation soon became known among neighbours and members of the savings groups. What had started as a private marital dispute began to threaten the functioning of the two savings groups that many women depended on for saving money, accessing small loans, and supporting their families.

Concerned about the escalating tension, members of the savings groups alerted the Local Peace Committee. A Local Peace Committee member from Kakiri Sub-County, working together with the LC II Chairman, intervened and brought the couple together for mediation.

During the mediation, the mediators helped the parties distinguish between two separate issues that had become intertwined: the marital conflict between Joy and Moses, and the operation of the savings groups. This helped both parties to focus on resolving each issue on its own merits.

After discussions with all concerned parties, the savings groups agreed to relocate their meetings to a neutral venue within the village. This removed the immediate source of tension from the family home while allowing the groups to continue operating without disruption. At the same time,

Joy and Moses committed to rebuilding trust within their marriage, with support from community leaders and mediators. As a result, the conflict was successfully de-escalated before it could cause lasting harm to either the family or the savings groups.

Key Lesson:

Conflicts often involve multiple interconnected issues. Effective mediation requires seperating the underlying issues, addressing each one appropriately, and finding solutions that protect both family relationships and wider community interests.

What the story tells us

This story demonstrates how personal, and family disputes can have far reaching consequences for the wider community, particularly when they affect community structures that many people rely on. What began as a husband's suspicion of his wife gradually escalated into a conflict that threatened the operation of two village savings groups, disrupting an important source of financial support for many women and their families.

The story also highlights the importance of early intervention and community-based conflict resolution. By intervening promptly, the Local Peace Committee and local leaders prevented the conflict from escalating further. Their mediation enabled the parties to separate the martial dispute from the functioning of the savings groups, making it possible to address each issue appropriately and reach practical solutions.

A key lesson from this case is that Women often play central roles in community economic

and social initiatives. When conflicts involving women leaders are left unresolved, the effects can have ripple effects far beyond the household to undermine community cohesion, livelihoods, and local development efforts. Effective mediation therefore requires looking beyond the immediate disagreement to understand its wider implications.

Finally, the story illustrates that successful conflict resolution is not always about proving who is right or wrong. It is about identifying the underlying issues, protecting relationships, safeguarding community institutions, and finding solutions that allow both families and communities to move forward peacefully.

Story 4: A Sick Father, a Borrowed Debt, and a Marriage Saved

Coly and Tim earn a living together by making and laying bricks. They also kept a small piggery at home to supplement their income. Like many households in their community, their earnings were modest and often strained by unexpected expenses.

Their marriage was put to the test when Coly's father became seriously ill and urgently required medical treatment. Desperate to raise money, Coly approached Tim for financial assistance, but he told her he had no money available. Feeling she had no other option, Coly borrowed UGX 100,000 from local moneylenders without informing her husband. As security for the loan, she pledged the family's breeding boar as collateral and agreed to repay UGX 140,000 within sixty days.



Community awareness session on conflict prevention and peaceful dispute resolution in Kyengera Town Council. Such engagements encourage early reporting and peaceful resolution of conflicts

When the repayment expired and the loan remained unpaid, the moneylenders came to collect the boar. Unwilling to lose one of the family's most valuable assets, Tim quickly sold the couple's stock of bricks to settle the debt. However, he made this decision without consulting Coly, despite the fact that she had worked alongside him to produce the bricks. When Coly demanded for her share of the proceeds from the sale, Tim refused. At arounf the same time, Coly began hearing rumours from community members that Tim was spending money on other women. Hurt by his actions and increasingly distrustful, she decided she wanted a divorce and planned to leave the relationship.

Fortunately, a LPC Member from Masuliita Town Council lived nearby and learned of the situation before Coly left t he home. Recognising the seriousness of the conflict,

the committee member began meeting separately with both Coly and Tim. She encouraged Coly not to make a final decision while emotions were still still running high and helped Tim reflect on how his actions had contributed to the breakdown of trust within the relationship.

During the mediation process, both Coly and Tim were able to acknowledge their respective roles in the conflict. Coly recognized that borrowing money and using family property as collateral without consulting her husband had undermined trust and contributed to the conflict. Tim acknowledged that selling the jointly owned bricks without consulting Coly, refusing to account for the proceeds, and failing to communicate openly had deepened the conflict and reinforced her suspicions.

With continued support from the LPC member, the couple gradually rebuild communication and trust. Tim committed himself to greater openness in managing family finances and to improving communication within the household. Coly, in turn, agreed to remain in the marriage and work together with her husband to rebuild their relationship. Today, the couple reports that their relationship has greatly improved, and they have resumed making bricks together as they continue rebuilding both their livelihood and their partnership.

What the story tells us

This story demonstrates how economic hardship can trigger a chain of events that threatens family stability. What began as a medical emergency quickly evolved into hidden financial decisions, mistrust, rumours, and ultimately the risk of divorce. While financial constraints were the immediate cause of the conflict, the case illustrates that poor communication, unilateral decision-making, and unresolved grievances often intensify disputes and undermine trust within families.

The story also highlights the importance of timely, community-based conflict resolution. Local Peace Committees play a critical role in preventing small household disputes from escalating into larger social problems. Beyond facilitating a single mediation session, the committee member provided consistent follow-up, emotional support, and trusted guidance at a critical moment. This sustained engagement helped prevent the breakdown of a family, protected the couple's shared livelihood, and enabled them to rebuild their relationship.

Story 5: A Father found through truth

When Prossy became pregnant, her relationship with the man she identified as the father had already begun to deteriorate. Communication between them had broken down, and by the time the pregnancy advanced, they were no longer on good terms.

The situation became even more difficult when she experienced complications during childbirth and had to undergo an emergency caesarean section. The unexpected surgery resulted in significant medical expenses that neither Prossy nor her family could afford.

Faced with mounting hospital bills and having no stable source of income, Prossy's family reached out to the man she had identified as the father, requesting financial assistance. The request came as a surprise to him. He maintained that Prossy had never informed him about the pregnancy and that he was only learning about the child's existence after the birth. Although he stated that he was willing to support a child who was his, he felt it would be unfair to accept lifelong responsibility without first establishing whether he was indeed the biological father. Consequently, he denied paternity and declined to provide financial support.

FollowingAfter being discharge from the hospital, Prossy returned to live with her mother. Without employment or an independent source of income, she relied entirely on her mother's support. Prossy's mother survived by taking on casual jobs whenever they

opportunities arose, using the little she earned to provide food, meet household needs, and care for both her daughter and the newborn grandchild.

The family's situation became even more challenging when the baby was diagnosed with anaemia and required ongoing medical attention. The costs of treatment placed additional strain on the family, and the child's health become an increasing source of anxiety. Faced with growing financial hardship and uncertainty, Prossy and her mother saw few options for securing support.



Through community dialogues and outreach, residents learn how to identify, report, and peacefully resolve conflicts before they escalate.

During a community awareness session organised by the Local Peace Committee (LPC), Prossy's mother learned that the committee helped families resolve disputes through dialogue and mediation. Encouraged by what she heard, she approached the committee and explained the family's situation.

The LPC members listened carefully and recognised that the dispute extended beyond

financial support. At its core were issues of trust, uncertainty, responsibility, and the child's welfare. Rather than taking sides, they met separately with the alleged father and gave him an opportunity to explain his concerns. He reiterated that he was not refusing to support a child who was his but wanted certainty before assuming lifelong parental responsibilities.

Recognising that both sides needed a fair, objective and credible resolution, the committee facilitated dialogue between the two families and proposed a DNA test as the most appropriate way to establish the truth. Both parties agreed.

The DNA test was conducted, and the results confirmed that the man was indeed the biological father of the child. With certainty established, the father accepted responsibility and started providing financial support for the child. What could have developed into a lengthy, expensive, and emotionally draining legal dispute was instead resolved through dialogue, evidence, and community-based mediation.

What the story tells us

This story demonstrates that disputes over paternity are often about more than financial support. They involve questions of trust, responsibility, truth, and the rights of the child. In this case, the absence of communication during the pregnancy created uncertainty that eventually led to conflict after the child's birth. Without intervention, the disagreement could have escalated into prolonged litigation, deepened hostility between the families, and delayed the support that the child urgently needed.

The story also highlights the importance of accessible community-based justice mechanisms. Limited financial resources, inadequate legal knowledge, and fear of social stigma often prevent vulnerable families particularly women from seeking justice through formal courts. By providing a trusted, free, and locally accessible forum for dialogue, the Local Peace Committee enabled both parties to be heard, reduced tension, and transformed an adversarial dispute into a collaborative problem-solving process.

Equally important, the case demonstrates the value of evidence-based conflict resolution. Rather than allowing accusations and denials to continue indefinitely, the Local Peace Committee helped both families agree on an objective method of establishing the truth. The DNA test provided certainty, removed doubt, and created a legitimate basis for accountability. It also allowed the father to accept responsibility with confidence and enabled the family to move forward without lingering uncertainty.

Finally, the story illustrates that effective mediation is not only about resolving disagreements between adults. It is also about protecting the rights and best interests of children. Throughout the process, the Local Peace Committee kept the child's welfare at the centre of the discussions. As a result, a child who had previously depended entirely on a grandmother's limited and uncertain income gained access to financial support, healthcare, and a more secure future. The case demonstrates how community-based mediation can strengthen families, promote accountability, and safeguard children's wellbeing while reducing the need for costly and lengthy legal proceedings.

Story 6: The Rumour that nearly destroyed a home

When Wamala and his wife settled in Masuliita, they quickly earned a reputation as hardworking, generous and respected members of the community. Through years of determination and hard work, they built a stable livelihood from poultry farming, produce trading, and other small businesses. Their efforts enabled them to purchase a motorcycle, acquire several plots of land and steadly improve their family's standard of living.

Despite their growing prosperity, the couple remained generous to those around them. The local carpenter was allowed to connect his power tools to their electricity supply whenever he needed to work. During periods of water shortage, neighbours regularly fetched water from their storage tank. Families experiencing hardships occasionally received food and other forms of support from them. Their home became known as a place where neighbours could seek support during difficult times.

Over time, however, resentment began to emerge among a small group of community members. Instead of attributing to the couple's success to years of hard work and sacrifice, some neighbours began spreading rumours that their wealth had been acquired through witchcraft. At first, these allegations circulated quietly in private conversations, but they gradually gained momentum.

The situation escalated after an incident involving the local carpenter discovering unusual items on a bed that he had left outside overnight. Traditional

medicine, blood, and coffee seeds had been placed on it by an unknown person. Without any evidence, he concluded that Wamala was responsible. The discovery appeared to confirm the rumours already circulating in the village, and suspicion quickly spread throughout the community.

As gossip intensified, so did hostility. What had begun as unfounded speculation gradually evolved into open accusations and threats. The matter was first brought before the LC I for mediation, but the discussions failed to resolve the dispute. Instead, emotions became increasingly inflamed. Some neighbours openly repeated the allegations, while two individuals went as far as to demand that Wamala's house be destroyed.

For Wamala and his family, the situation became frightening. In many communities, accusations of witchcraft carry serious consequences. Such allegations can result in social isolation, destruction of property, physical violence, forced displacement and, in extreme cases, loss of life. The conflict was no longer simply about rumours; it had become a serious threat to the family's safety, dignity and livelihood.

Believing that the matter had not been handled fairly, Wamala sought assistance from the Local Peace Committee (LPC) in Masuliita Town Council. Recognising the potential for violence, the Local Peace Committee Member approached the matter not as a dispute over whether witchcraft existed, but as a conflict fuelled by rumours, fear, and unverified allegations.



Village Chairperson shares about the impact of the project during the meeting with the WPHF NSC in Wakiso.

The committee convened all parties and guided the discussion towards practical solutions rather than accusations. Those making the allegations were challenged to distinguish facts from assumptions and were asked to stop repeating claims they could not substantiate. The parties further agreed that if there were genuine concern about the items found on the bed, an impartial inquiry should be conducted to establish who was actually responsible instead of assigning blame without evidence. The committee also encouraged all parties to rebuild the neighbouring relationship that had previously existed and to resolve future concerns through dialogue rather than gossip.

The mediation resulted in

mutually accepted agreement. The neighbours committed to ending the witchcraft accusations, an inquiry into the incident was initiated, and both sides agreed to work towards restoring trust within the community. Recognising that reconciliation requires more than a single meeting, the Local Peace Committee Member continued to follow up with the parties over the following month to ensure that the agreeement was being respected and that tensions did not re-emerge.

Through timely intervention, patient dialogue, and continued follow up, the LPC prevented the conflict that could easily have escalated into violence, destruction of property, or displacement. Instead, the dispute was redirected towards accountability, peaceful coexistence, and community reconciliation.

What the story tells us

This story illustrates the destructive power of rumours, misinformation and unverified allegations. When communities accept suspicion as fact, ordinary misunderstanding can rapidly escalate into serious conflicts, especially where deeply held cultural beliefs and fears are involved. In this case, unsupported accusations of witchcraft nearly destroyed the reputation, safety, and livelihood of an innocent family.

The case also highlights how economic success can sometimes become a source of resentment within communities. Rather than celebrating Wamala and his wife's achievements as the result of years of hard work, some neighbours interpreted their prosperity through the lense of suspicion and jealousy. The story reminds us that unresolved envy, combined

with misinformation, can quickly undermine social cohension and trust.

The case further illustrates that effective mediation extends beyond facilitating a single dialogue session. Through continued follow-up, monitoring, and relationship-building, the Local Peace Committee ensured that the agreements reached were respected and that trust was gradually restored. This sustained engagement prevented the conflict from resurfacing and strengthened peaceful coexistence within the community.

Finally, the story demonstrates the vital role of trusted community peace structures in preventing violence before it occurs. By intervening early, promoting dialogue, challenging misinformation, and encouraging accountability, the Local Peace Committee protected not only one family but also the wider community from a conflict that could have resulted in violence, destruction of property, displacement, or loss of life. It illustrates how locally accessible peace mechanisms help preserve social cohesion, uphold justice, and strengthen community resilience.

Story 7: Two Businesswomen, One Apology

Pate and Tuma were neighbours, mothers, and entrepreneurs who each operated small businesses within their community. For many years, they had lived peacefully alongside one another, raising their families in the same neighbourhood and sharing many of the same social and economic spaces. Their children played together, and their families interacted regularly, and both women depended on the goodwill of neighbours and customers to sustain their businesses.

Over time, however, small misunderstandings and negative assumptions began to strain their relationship. Instead of discussing their concerns openly, each woman started speaking negatively about the other two friends, neighbours, and customers. What began as occasional gossip gradually spread throughout the community, damaging their reputations, eroding trust, and creating divisions among people who had previously enjoyed cordial relationships with both families



Programs Manager meeting some of the beneficiaries during the monitoring visit in Bussi Island.

As weeks turned into months, resentment continued to grow. Eventually, the tension eventually erupted into a heated public confrontation. During the exchange, Pate insulted Tuma by calling her children beggars and mocking her husband as incapable of providing for his family. Deeply hurt by the remarks, Tuma responded by insulting Pate and uttering curses against her children. The argument attracted the attention of neigbours, leaving both women humiliated and further entrenching the conflict.

Community members became increasingly concerned, not only because of the insults exchanged but also because of the wider impact of the dispute. Children who had once played together were beginning to take sides in a conflict they neither created nor understood. The hostility between the women was also affecting relationships between the two families, disrupting neighbourly interactions, and threatening the peaceful atmosphere within the community. There was growing concern that, if left unresolved, the conflict could spread further and negatively affect both women's businesses and social standing.

A community member who witnessed the confrontation reported the matter to the Local Peace Committee. Recognizing the need for an impartial intervention, the Local Peace Committee Member convened a mediation meeting involving the two women. The mediation was supported by the Woman Councillor, the LC I Secretary, and the Defence Secretary, demonstrating a coordinated community effort to restore harmony.

During the mediation, the leaders encouraged both women to explain how conflict had developed. As the discussion unfolded, it became clear that the public insults were only the visible expression of a much deeper problem. The real source of the conflict was the prolonged pattern of rumour-spreading, negative assumptions, and failure to communicate directly with one another.

The mediators guided the women to reflect on the consequences of their actions beyond their personal disagreement. They discussed how the conflict was affecting their children, damaging relationships between their families, undermining their

businesses, andcreating unnecessary tension within the wider community. As the conversation progressed, both women acknowledged that they had contributed to the escalation of the conflict. They recognised that continuing the hostility would only deepen divisions and harm everyone connected to them.

By the end of the mediation, Pate and Tuma apologised to one another and agreed to stop spreading rumours or speaking negatively about each other. They committed themselves to resolving any future disagreements through direct dialogue rather gossip or public confrontation. Recognising that rebuilding trust takes time, the Local Peace Committee continued to monitor the situation and check in with both parties to ensure that the agreement was being respected.

Over time, relations between the two families improved. Their resumed interacting peacefully, both businesses continued operating without disruption, and the neighbourhood regained the sense of harmony that had existed before the conflict.

What the Story Tells Us

This story demonstrates that conflicts do not need to involve physical violence to cause significant harm. Rumours, gossip, insults, and verbal attacks can gradually erode trust, damage reputations, divide families, and undermine peaceful co-existance. If left unresolved, seemingly minor disputes can escalate into wider community conflicts that affect livelihoods, social relationships and children's wellbeing.

The case also highlights the importance of addressing

conflicts early. What began as a series of misunderstandings and rumours eventually developed into a public confrontation that affected not only the two women but also their families, customers, neighbours and the wider community. Early interventions prevented the conflict from escalating further and helped restore relationships before lasting damage occurred.

Equally important, the story demonstrates that mediation is most effective when it helps people understand the broader consequences of their actions. The Local Peace Committee encouraged both women to move beyond blame and reflect on how their behaviour was affecting their children, families, businesses, and community. This created an opportunity for accountability, empathy, and genuine reconciliation rather than simply ending the immediate argument.

Story 8: An Agreement signed, a threat withdrawn

This story demonstrates an important principle that is often overlooked: not every conflict should be mediated. It clearly illustrates the referral function of the Local Peace Committee (LPC) and shows that protection of survivors takes precedence over reconciliation where there is a risk of violence.

Rita hoped that returning to her marriage would give her family a second chance. Some time earlier, she and her husband, Isma, had separated after experiencing persistent challenges in their relationship. With support from the Local Peace Committee (LPC), the couple participated in mediation and agreed to reconcile. For a while, the relationship appeared to

improve, and both had hoped they could build their family. Unfortunately, the peace did not last.

Gradually, Isma's behaviour became increasingly controlling. He questioned Rita about where she went, monitored her interactions with neighbours and discouraged her from speaking with other people in the community . Over time, these restrictions became more severe. Rita found herself avoiding social interactions for fear of provoking an argument. She became increasingly isolated from friends, neighbours, and support networks she had previously relied upon.

The situation reached a turning point when Isma saw Rita greeting a male neighbour. What would ordinarily have been a harmless exchange triggered a series of threats. At night, he warned that he could throw Rita and their eight-year-old child out of the home. On other occasions, he threatened to harm her if she continued interacting with people he disapproved of. The repeated intimidation created a climate of fear within the household.

For Rita, the emotional burden became overwhelming. She lived in constant anxiety, uncertain whether the threats would be carried out. Beyond her own safety, she worried about the impact the hostile environment was having on her child, who was growing up surrounded by fear, tension, and uncertainty.

Unlike many women who remain silence because they do not know where to seek help, Rita had previously interacted with the Local Peace Committee and trusted its members. She therefore approached a committee member and explained what was happening in her home.

The committee member listened carefully and recognised that the case involved more than a marital

disagreement. The repeated threats, coercive control, intimidation and isolation were clear warning signs of potential domestic violence. Rather than attempting to resolve the matter through mediation alone, the Local Peace committee activated the referral pathway that had been established with the Child and Family Protection Unit (CFPU) officer at Masuliita Police Station.



Project staff and Local Peace Committee Members engage with the Officer in Charge of Masuliita Police Station to strengthen referral pathways for conflict resolution and protection.

A joint intervention was subsequently organised involving Rita, Isma, the Local Peace Committee, and the CFPU officer. During the meeting, Isma was informed that his behaviour constituted serious intimidation and that any further threats or acts of violence could result into his arrest. The discussion reinforced both his legal responsibilities and the consequences of failing to change his behaviour.

The intervention also provided Rita with an opportunity to speak openly about her own needs and aspirations. She explained that she wanted freedom to interact safely with members of her community without fear of retaliation. She expressed a desire to find employment so that she could contribute to the family's income and strengthen her own economic independence

As a result of the intervention, Isma signed a written agreement committing himself to to end all the threats and intimidation, respect Rita's freedom of association and refrain from any further abusive behaviour. The agreement made it clear that any violation would trigger immediate legal action. To ensure accountability and breach would trigger immediate legal actions. To ensure that the commitments were upheld, the Local Peace Committee and the CFPU officer agreed to conduct regular follow-up visits over the following month.

For Rita, the intervention restored a sense of safety that she had not experienced for a long time. For her child, it created the possibility of growing up in a more stable and secure home. For the wider community, it demonstrated that recognizing early warning signs and responding promptly can prevent violence before it escalates.

What the story tells us

This story highlights the domestic violence often begins before physical abuse occurs. Controlling behaviour, intimidation, social and isolation, threats and coercive isolation are all early warning signs of abuse that should be taken seriously. When these behaviours are ignored or dismissed as ordinary martial disagreements or treated as private family matters, they can escalate into more serious forms of violence.

The story also demonstrates that effective peacebuilding is not about mediating every dispute. Some situations involve significant safety risks and require formal protection rather than reconciliation alone. In this case, the Local Peace Committee correctly recognised the limits of mediation and activated the established referral pathway with the Child and Family Protection Unit. This ensured that the case received both community support and the legal protection necessary to safeguard Rita and her child.

The story further illustrates the value of collaboration between community peace structures and formal justice institutions. By working together, the Local Peace Committee and the Child and Family Protection Unit combined community trust with legal authority, creating a coordinated response that prioritised safety, accountability, and prevention.

Ultimately, the case demonstrates that protecting survivors is central to effective conflict resolution. Community peace structures must be able to distinguish between disputes that can safely be mediated and situations where violence or the risk of violence requires immediate referral to specialised protection services. When early warning signs are recognised, referral pathways are activated promptly, and follow-up support is provided, families are better protected, violence can be prevented, and communities become safer places for women and children.

Section B: The Women behind the Peace

In 2024, 40 Sub County /Town Council women council leaders, 5 from each of 8 lower local governments in Busiro North, East and South were trained and stepped into a role most of their communities had never seen before.

The stories in the previous section illustrate how conflicts were prevented, relationships restored, and communities strengthened through local mediation. Behind each of those stories is a woman equipped with new knowledge, practical skills, and the confidence to act. This section turns the focus to those women. It explores who they were before the training, what they learned, how their confidence and leadership evolved, and the difference they are now making in their communities. Their stories demonstrate that investing in women's leadership not only transforms individual leaders but also strengthens the communities they serve.

Case Study 1: The Mediator of Hard Money Conversations

Justine, Local Peace Committee, Masuliita Town Council

Before joining the Local Peace Committee, Justine was like many elected women councillors across Busiro. Although she had been entrusted by her community with a leadership role, she had never received formal training in conflict resolution. Like many local leaders, she relied on instinct, personal experience, and community customs whenever disputes arose. Most conflicts were handled by whichever local leader happened to be available, whether an LC I chairperson, a religious leader, or a respected

elder. Many disputes remained unresolved, while others resurfaced repeatedly because their underlying causes were never addressed.

The conflicts that came to Justine most frequently involved money. Couples argued over debts, household expenses, business income, land transactions, and family responsibilities. Before the training, these disputes often appeared straightforward. However, she later realised that money was usually only the visible symptom of much deeper problems.

In July 2024, Justine participated in intensive training on conflict analysis, mediation, negotiation, dialogue, and referral pathways. One lesson transformed the way she approached every dispute: never begin by trying to solve the problem. Instead, first understand it. She learned to investigate the facts, listen carefully to every party, identify the underlying drivers of conflict, and only then guide the parties towards solutions they could both own.



Justine (in orange) during a community follow-up visit in Masuliita Town Council. .

> ***"Most of the conflicts I handle between couples are about money, but I have learned that money is rarely the real problem. Behind the disagreements are often issues of trust, communication, secrecy, and the pressures families face. The training taught me to look beyond the money itself, understand the root causes of the conflict, and help couples find solutions they can both accept." Justine Nakiboneka, Local Peace Committee Member, Masuliita Town Council***

The impact of that learning became evident almost immediately.

Within her first month as a trained Local Peace Committee Member, a woman approached her seeking help after deciding to leave her marriage. The conflict had begun when the wife secretly borrowed UGX 100,000 from village moneylenders to pay her father's hospital bills, using the family's breeding boar as collateral without informing her husband. When the loan fell due, her husband secretly sold the bricks they had moulded together to repay the debt and refused to explain what had happened to the remaining money. By the time the wife reported to Justine, both spouses felt betrayed, communication had completely broken down, and divorce appeared inevitable.

Applying the mediation techniques she had learned during the training, Justine resisted the temptation to determine who was right or wrong. Instead, she carefully reconstructed the sequence of events and helped each spouse understand

the pressures that had influenced the other's decisions. As the discussion progressed, both recognised that secrecy, poor communication, and financial stress—not simply money—had fuelled the conflict. They acknowledged their respective roles, agreed to rebuild trust, and recommitted themselves to their marriage. The Local Peace Committee continued to follow up with the couple to ensure that the commitments they had made were honoured.

Since then, Justine has become one of the trusted mediators in Masuliita Town Council. Community members increasingly seek assistance from the Local Peace Committee before conflicts escalate. Among the cases she has helped resolve was a dangerous dispute involving allegations of witchcraft against a newly settled family. Earlier attempts by local leaders had failed to calm the situation, and the rumours had begun to incite hostility within the community. By facwilitating dialogue, challenging unsubstantiated allegations, and encouraging practical solutions, the committee successfully de-escalated the conflict before it could turn violent.

Today, Justine sees herself differently from when she first assumed public office. She is no longer simply a councillor responding to disputes as they arise. She has become a skilled community mediator who analyses conflicts, identifies their root causes, builds dialogue between opposing parties, and connects vulnerable families to appropriate support when necessary. Her

experience demonstrates how targeted investment in women's leadership equips local leaders with practical skills that strengthen families, prevent violence, and build more peaceful communities.

Case Study 2: Not Every Conflict Needs a Tribunal

Molly, Local Peace Committee, Kakiri Sub County

Before joining the Local Peace Committee, Molly had served her community as a local leader for several years. She was familiar with the conflicts that affected families and neighbours and had witnessed how quickly minor misunderstanding could spiral into major disputes.A disagreement between spouses would often pass through relatives, neighbours, and friends, with each person adding their own opinions until the matter eventually reached the LC I or the police as a much larger conflict than it had been at the beginning. What the community lacked was someone who could intervene while a disagreement was still manageable.

Like many women leaders, Molly had never received formal training in conflict resolution. Her instinct was that disputes had to be taken to formal leaders or resolved through official meetings. The training challenged that assumption. She learned that effective peacebuilding is about choosing the response that best fits the conflict. Some situations require counselling and guidance. Others need structured mediation. More serious cases demand referral to specialised services or formal justice institutions. Equally important, she learned that many disputes can be resolved simply by helping people communicate before mistrust hardens into conflict.



Molly, Local Peace Committee Member, Kakiri Sub County.

"Before the training, many people thought conflicts could only be solved by local councils or the police after they had already escalated. Now people see that they can come to us earlier. Men come to me because they know I will listen to both sides without taking sides. Many family conflicts do not need punishment; they need someone who can help people communicate before the situation gets worse."
Molly, Local Peace Committee Member, Kakiri Sub County.

One case in particular demonstrated the value of this new approach.

In November 2024, a husband came directly to Molly seeking help. The visit itself reflected a growing level of trust in the Local Peace Committee. Rather than reporting his wife to the LC I or the police, he chose to seek assistance from a woman community mediator.

Earlier that day, he had returned home to find the house empty. Unable to

reach his wife, he became increasingly anxious. As the hours passed, anxiety gave way to suspicion, and by the time she returned home he was convinced that she had deliberately abandoned the family. A heated argument followed, with both spouses feeling misunderstood and unheard.

Drawing on the skills she had acquired during the training, Molly recognised that the dispute did not require a formal mediation panel or legal intervention. At its core, the conflict stemmed from poor communication rather than deliberate wrongdoing. She met with the couple, encouraged each person to explain what had happened, and helped them listen to one another without interruption or blame.

Through the discussion, the misunderstanding became clear. Together, the couple developed practical agreements to prevent similar conflicts in the future. They agreed to inform each other whenever they would be away from home for extended periods, to communicate openly before making assumptions, and to allow each other an opportunity to explain before reaching conclusions. Although the agreement was simple, it addressed the real source of the conflict.

Recognising that reconciliation is strengthened through continued support, Molly followed up with the family over the following two weeks. The couple reported that communication had improved, trust was gradually being rebuilt, and no further disputes had arisen.

Cases such as this rarely appear in police records or court files because they are resolved before reaching that stage. Yet it is precisely these quiet interventions that demonstrate the value of community-based peacebuilding. By helping families address

misunderstandings early, Molly prevents minor disagreements from escalating into violence, separation, or costly legal disputes.

Today, Molly is recognised within Kakiri Sub-county as someone who listens carefully, remains impartial, and helps people find practical solutions before conflicts become crises. Local leaders increasingly refer appropriate cases to the Local Peace Committee, while community members now seek assistance much earlier than they did before. Her experience illustrates that effective peacebuilding is not measured by the number of disputes taken to court, but by the number of conflicts prevented from ever reaching one.

Case Study 3: Keeping Peace Where the Road Ends

Sandra, Local Peace Committee, Bussi Sub County (Islands)

For Sandra, serving as a community leader on the islands of Bussi has always meant working in a place where distance shapes almost every aspect of people's lives. Police stations, justice services, and district offices are located across open water, making them difficult and costly to reach. For many island residents, especially women experiencing violence or family conflict, seeking help often meant waiting until a situation had become a crisis or finding that assistance was simply beyond their reach.

Before joining the Local Peace Committee, Sandra had witnessed many conflicts escalate because there was no trained mediator living within the community. Minor disagreements could remain unresolved for weeks or months, while survivors of

violence often had very limited options for obtaining timely support.

The training transformed Sandra's role. She gained practical skills in conflict analysis, mediation, dialogue, negotiation, and referral pathways, equipping her to respond appropriately to a wide range of disputes. Just as importantly, the project enabled the Local Peace Committee to adapt its work to the realities of island communities. Working closely with the Woman Councillor, community leaders, and local radio stations, the committee created ways of reaching residents even when poor weather or transport challenges prevented travel between islands.



Sandra, LPC member from Bussi Sub-county, shares her experiences supporting conflict prevention and resolution in island communities during

a community engagement session.

"On the islands, conflicts can easily escalate when people have nowhere to turn for help. As a member of the Local Peace Committee, I see my role as listening to people, bringing them together, and helping them find solutions before situations become worse. The greatest change is that support is now within the community itself, people know they can come to us, be heard, and work towards peace together." *Sandra, Local Peace Committee Member, Bussi Sub County.*

One case demonstrated both the importance of having trusted local peace structures and the need to recognise when mediation alone is not enough.

In October 2024, a woman arrived at the office of the Woman Councillor bleeding after being violently assaulted by her husband. During the assault, their young son had also been attacked, and the woman had lost a tooth. The incident had reportedly begun with an argument over a misplaced hammer but had quickly escalated into serious physical violence.

Sandra immediately worked alongside the Woman Councillor to support the survivor and assess the situation. Recognising that the case involved domestic violence and presented ongoing safety risks, she understood that it required more than community dialogue. Drawing on the referral procedures introduced through the project, the Local Peace Committee ensured that the matter was formally documented, coordinated with the relevant authorities, and put in place clear protection measures for the family.

As part of the intervention, the husband signed a written undertaking committing himself to end all violence against his wife and child. He was informed that any further acts of violence would result in immediate police action. He also accepted responsibility for meeting the medical expenses arising from the assault. To ensure the family's continued safety, the Local Peace Committee maintained regular follow-up visits while keeping the option of formal police intervention active should the agreement be breached.

The case reinforced an important lesson for Sandra: effective peacebuilding is not measured by resolving every conflict through mediation. It is measured by recognising the nature of the conflict, protecting those at risk, and ensuring that the right response is provided at the right time.

Since completing the training, Sandra has become one of the most trusted conflict-resolution practitioners on the islands. The Local Peace Committee now handles a wide range of disputes unique to island communities, including disagreements over fishing activities, boat operations, land ownership, and kibanja arrangements. Community leaders increasingly invite the committee to support local dialogue, and both women and men now participate in mediation sessions, reflecting growing confidence in the committee's impartiality and effectiveness

Sandra's experience demonstrates that investing in women leaders brings justice and peacebuilding closer to communities that are often beyond the easy reach of formal institutions. In places where the road ends and the water begins, trusted local women are helping ensure that conflict does not become violence simply because help is too far away.

Case Study 4: A Committee, the Community writes letters to

The Local Peace Committee of Mende Sub County

When the five women who would become the Mende Local Peace Committee signed their volunteer agreements in mid-2024, they were simply individual community leaders committed to promoting peace in their communities. Although they had received training in conflict analysis, mediation, dialogue, negotiation, documentation, and referral, they had yet to earn the confidence of the people they hoped to serve.

At the time, Mende Sub-county had no organised community peace structure where residents could report disputes before they escalated. Domestic conflicts, land disagreements, neighbourhood disputes, and wider community grievances were handled through different informal channels or left unresolved until they reached the LC I, the police, or the courts. The committee recognised that, to be effective, it first had to establish itself as a credible and trusted institution.

The members therefore committed themselves to working in a structured and accountable manner. They held monthly planning meetings on the 24th of every month, developed monthly work plans, documented every case using standard reporting tools, and ensured that mediations were conducted by more than one committee member to promote impartiality and public confidence. Cases that exceeded their mandate were referred to the Community Development Officer

(CDO), the Child and Family Protection Unit (CFPU) of the Uganda Police Force, or the Wakiso District Human Rights Committee, demonstrating that the committee understood both its responsibilities and its limits.

> ***"Community members started treating us as an institution because we were consistent. We met regularly, listened to everyone fairly, documented matters we could not handle ourselves. Over time, community members saw that we were not just volunteers holding meetings we were helping them solve real problems. When residents began bringing cases to us and even writing formal letters requesting our support, we knew that trust had been built."***
>
> Mende LPC



Members of the Mende Local Peace Committee present their work and share experiences during a community engagement session.

The committee's transformation became most visible in August 2024. Residents affected by blasting from a nearby stone quarry in Buwera–Bakka organised themselves and submitted a formal written request asking the committee to intervene. For the members, the letter represented far more than a request for assistance. It demonstrated that, within only a few months, the community had come to recognise the Local Peace Committee as a legitimate and trusted institution capable of addressing collective concerns.

The same pattern of growing confidence emerged across many aspects of community life. The LC I Defence Secretary began mobilising community members to attend committee mediation sessions and assisted with follow-up after agreements had been reached. Neighbouring villages outside the project's target area invited the committee to conduct community awareness sessions on peaceful conflict resolution. Perhaps most significantly, men who had initially been reluctant to engage with women mediators increasingly began reporting disputes directly to the committee and participating in dialogue sessions alongside their wives.

Throughout 2024 and 2025, the committee handled a steady stream of domestic disputes, land conflicts, neighbourhood disagreements, and wider community grievances. Many were successfully resolved through mediation, while more complex cases were referred to the appropriate authorities. By maintaining consistent procedures, remaining impartial, documenting their work, and following up on agreements, the committee steadily strengthened public confidence in its services.

Today, the Mende Local Peace Committee has become the

first point of contact for many community members seeking help with conflict. What began as five trained volunteers has evolved into a respected community institution that provides accessible, trusted, and accountable conflict resolution. Its experience demonstrates that community trust is not created through training alone. It is earned through consistency, fairness, transparency, and a sustained commitment to serving the community.

The story also illustrates an important lesson about sustainability. When local peace structures operate professionally, work collaboratively with formal institutions, and consistently deliver results, communities begin to rely on them long after project activities have ended. In Mende, the clearest evidence of success was not simply the number of cases resolved it was the moment when the community itself chose to write to the committee, recognising it as its own institution for dialogue, mediation, and peaceful conflict resolution.

Women's Leadership in Action

At the heart of this project is a simple but powerful transformation: women who were elected to represent their communities are now recognised as trusted leaders in preventing conflict, resolving disputes, and connecting vulnerable families to protection and justice services.

Before the project, the 40 women leaders from Busiro North, East, and South held elected positions but had received little or no formal training in conflict prevention and resolution. Although community members often

approached them with disputes, many lacked the knowledge, confidence, and practical tools needed to analyse conflicts, facilitate dialogue, document cases, or make appropriate referrals. Most conflicts were left to Local Council leaders, the police, religious leaders, or family elders, often after they had already escalated.

Through training in conflict analysis, mediation, negotiation, dialogue, documentation, early warning, and referral pathways, these women assumed a new role within their communities.

They became trusted first responders leaders who could identify the early signs of conflict, intervene before disputes escalated, and ensure that cases requiring specialised support were referred to the appropriate authorities. The stories in this bulletin demonstrate how that transformation has taken shape in practice.

Justine learned that conflicts about money are rarely about money alone. By identifying the underlying issues of trust, communication, and financial pressure, she helped families resolve disputes that might otherwise have ended in separation. Molly demonstrated that not every disagreement requires formal mediation or legal action. By helping couples communicate before mistrust became entrenched, she prevented minor misunderstandings from escalating into major conflicts. Sandra showed that women leaders can provide life-saving support in geographically isolated communities by combining mediation with timely referral whenever protection concerns arise. In Mende, five trained women transformed themselves from individual volunteers into a respected Local Peace Committee that residents now approach through formal written requests for assistance.

Perhaps the most significant change has been the shift in community attitudes towards women's leadership. Men who had previously been reluctant to seek support from women leaders now voluntarily bring family disputes to them. Community members increasingly refer neighbours to the Local Peace Committees before conflicts become crises. Local Council leaders, Community Development Officers, police officers, and other stakeholders now work alongside the women as partners in promoting peace and resolving disputes.

These changes reflect more than improved conflict resolution skills. They demonstrate increased confidence, credibility, and influence for women within local governance. The women are no longer viewed solely as representatives of women's interests. They are recognised as impartial mediators, trusted advisors, community mobilisers, and leaders capable of guiding families and communities through difficult situations.

Their experience provides practical evidence of what meaningful participation under the Women, Peace and Security Agenda looks like at the community level. The experience from Busiro North, East, and South demonstrates that when women leaders are equipped with the right skills and supported through functional community peace structures, they become catalysts for peaceful change. Their leadership strengthens families, builds confidence in local governance, improves access to justice, and contributes to more peaceful, inclusive, and resilient communities.

Conclusion

The evidence in this bulletin supports a specific claim, that a women-led, community-based early warning and response system measurably interrupts the conflict-to-violence pathway before formal justice or protection systems are engaged. Across the eight cases in Section A, the pattern holds consistently early detection by a trusted actor, rapid mediation at the lowest appropriate level, and escalation to police, CFPU or district structures only where risk indicators crossed a threshold the LPCs were trained to recognise.

This matters directly for the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. UNSCR 1325 and its successor resolutions call for women's meaningful participation in conflict prevention and peacebuilding at the local level not as beneficiaries of protection, but as its architects. The trained 40 women council leaders are the operational expression of that mandate: women who were elected but structurally unequipped to lead, now functioning as the first responders their communities write formal letters to. Mende's committee receiving an unsolicited letter from quarry-affected residents, or men in Bussi and Masuliita bringing domestic disputes to a woman leader by choice rather than default, are leading indicators of something the WPS Agenda has long struggled to evidence at sub-national level: that community trust in women's leadership on conflict and security is not assumed but built, and it is built through training, consistency, and follow-through.

For an early warning and response system specifically, the relevant evaluative question is not “were conflicts resolved” but “did the system

catch what would otherwise have escalated." Wamala's witchcraft accusation, where two neighbours demanded his house be destroyed; Rita's case, where controlling behaviour was correctly read as a precursor to violence rather than a private marital matter these are the system performing its core function: converting early, ambiguous warning signs into timely, proportionate response. The referral discipline shown across cases is itself evidence of a mature system, not an improvised one.

Uganda's National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS and the Wakiso District Local Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security give this evidence a structural home.

The stories presented in this bulletin demonstrate that conflict prevention is most effective when it begins within communities, long before disputes reach the police, the courts, or other formal justice institutions. Across the eight community case studies, a consistent pattern emerges. Trusted women leaders identified conflicts early, analysed their underlying causes, facilitated dialogue where appropriate, referred high-risk cases through established protection pathways, and followed up to ensure that agreements were honoured. In doing so, they interrupted the pathway from disagreement to violence and strengthened the resilience of families and communities.

The experiences of the Local Peace Committees also demonstrate that community-based early warning and early response systems are not abstract concepts but practical mechanisms that save relationships, prevent violence, and improve access to justice. Whether responding to domestic disputes, land conflicts, rumours of witchcraft, paternity disputes, or risks

of gender-based violence, the committees consistently applied the principle of using the right response for the right conflict. Cases suitable for mediation were resolved through dialogue, while situations involving violence or significant protection risks were referred promptly to the Child and Family Protection Unit, the police, Community Development Officers, or other appropriate institutions. This disciplined use of referral pathways reflects a mature community protection system rather than an informal or improvised approach to conflict resolution.

Equally important, the bulletin demonstrates the transformative impact of investing in women's leadership. Before the project, the 40 elected women council leaders had legitimacy within their communities but limited training, few practical tools, and no organised mechanism for preventing conflict. Today, they serve as trusted first responders, mediators, and connectors between communities and formal justice institutions. The stories of Justine, Molly, Sandra, and the Mende Local Peace Committee show that communities increasingly seek out women leaders to resolve disputes, provide guidance, and facilitate access to protection services. The fact that residents now write formal letters requesting support from Local Peace Committees and that men voluntarily bring family disputes to women mediators reflects a significant shift in community confidence and acceptance of women's leadership in peacebuilding.

These outcomes directly advance the objectives of the global Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions call for women's meaningful participation in conflict

prevention, peacebuilding, and decision-making at all levels. This project demonstrates what meaningful participation looks like in practice. Women are not merely beneficiaries of protection; they are preventing violence, strengthening social cohesion, improving access to justice, and building peaceful communities from the ground up.

The findings also contribute to the implementation of Uganda's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security and the Wakiso District Local Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. By establishing functional Local Peace Committees led by trained women councillors, strengthening referral pathways between communities and formal institutions, and promoting early warning and early response, the project provides a practical, community-based model for operationalising national WPS commitments at the local level.

Perhaps the most important lesson from this bulletin is that sustainable peace is rarely built through dramatic interventions. It is built through countless small actions: a conversation facilitated before mistrust becomes violence; a rumour challenged before it destroys a family; a survivor referred before abuse escalates; a community dispute resolved before it reaches the courts. These are the often-unseen investments that strengthen social cohesion and make communities safer.

Call to action

The evidence from Busiro North, East, and South demonstrates that investing in women-led, community-based peace structures delivers tangible results. Building on these lessons requires sustained commitment from government, development partners, civil society, and local governments.

First, Local Peace Committees should be formally recognised and integrated into local governance and community justice systems as frontline mechanisms for early warning, conflict prevention, and referral.

Second, continued investment is needed to strengthen the capacity of women leaders through ongoing training, mentoring, supervision, and learning exchanges so that they can continue responding effectively to emerging conflicts.

Third, referral pathways between Local Peace Committees, Community Development Officers, the Uganda Police Force, Child and Family Protection Units, health services, and other protection actors should be institutionalised to ensure that survivors and high-risk cases receive timely and coordinated support.

Finally, the experience from Wakiso demonstrates a scalable model for implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda at the local level. Expanding similar women-led community peace structures across other districts would strengthen access to justice, improve community resilience, prevent violence, and ensure that women continue to play a meaningful role in building peaceful, inclusive, and secure communities.

The women featured in this bulletin have shown that peace is not built only in conference rooms or courtrooms. It is built every day in homes, villages, markets, landing sites, and neighbourhoods by trusted local leaders who recognise the first signs of conflict and act before violence takes hold. Their work offers a practical and proven pathway for strengthening community peacebuilding in Uganda.

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