



BRIDGING POLICY AND PRACTICE: CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY (WPS) AGENDA IN LESOTHO

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The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda established by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, advocates for inclusion of women in conflict prevention, peace and security processes. In Africa, the success of the agenda relies on the localization through inclusive and context sensitive methods. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) play a significant role in advocacy and mobilization of this agenda but their limited inclusion in formal governance frameworks hinders the implementation of WPS agenda. The paper examines the contribution of the CSOs in advancing WPS in Lesotho and explores how marginalizing women from formal policy making hinders efforts addressing vulnerabilities related to violence and displacement. While Lesotho does not face conflict induced displacement, ongoing issues such as gender based violence, poverty and weak institutions create conditions that disproportionately affect women. Consequently, a gap exists between WPS commitments and practical outcomes. Using qualitative research design, the study draws on document analysis and semi-structured interviews with policymakers and CSOs. Findings reveal that CSOs contribute significantly through advocacy and grassroots peacebuilding. However, their effectiveness is limited by weak state and civil society collaboration, minimal policy influence, and donor dependency. The study argues that strengthening CSO participation is essential for advancing WPS agenda and promotes sustainable peace in Lesotho.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, established by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), is a groundbreaking global framework for addressing gendered dimensions of conflict, violence, and peacebuilding¹. The agenda is structured around four interconnected pillars: Participation, Protection, Prevention, and Relief and Recovery². WPS's four core pillars reinforce women's inclusion in peace processes, protection from violence, prevention of conflict, and assisting women and girls in post-conflict recovery³. Some scholars note that the four core pillars address violence, notably gender-based violence (GBV), which plays a major role in instability and displacement in many African contexts⁴⁵. Despite these normative commitments, the interpretation and implementation of the WPS agenda vary across political and socio-cultural contexts⁶.

Across Africa, persistent forms of violence, such as GBV, political instability, and structural inequalities, continue to exacerbate conditions that lead to displacement and threaten long-term peace⁷. While displacement is frequently connected with armed conflict, contemporary

¹ Cecile de Jonge Oudraat and Michael E Brown, 'Is the Future of Peacekeeping Female? Middle Powers and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda' (2023) 30(3) *International Peacekeeping* 362–388.

² Lubna Yasmin, 'Misreading Women's Nature in the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda: "Prevention Pillar" of the WPS and Violent Extremism with Critical Perspectives from Bangladesh' in *Mapping Feminist International Relations in South Asia* (Routledge India 2024) 138–151 <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003581130-12>.

³ Rita Manchanda, 'Women Go to War! Upending the "Prevention" Pillar of the WPS Agenda: Can a Transformative Peace and Security Be Imagined?' (2025) 81(3) *India Quarterly* 308 <https://doi.org/10.1177/09749284251348538> accessed 22 June 2026.

⁴ Heidi Hudson, 'Gender, Peacebuilding and African Contexts' (2024) 33(1) *African Security Review* 1–14 <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2024.2314567>.

⁵ Paul Kirby and Laura J Shepherd, *Governing the Feminist Peace: The Vitality and Failure of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda* (Columbia University Press 2024).

⁶ Jacqui True, 'Political Economy of Women, Peace and Security' (2023) 49(3) *Review of International Studies* 455–472.

⁷ Natalie George and Laura J Shepherd, 'Women, Peace and Security: Translating Norms into Practice' (2024) 100(2) *International Affairs* 345 <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iaae023> accessed 22 June 2026.

literature increasingly recognises that structural violence and institutional weaknesses can lead to similar patterns of vulnerability and instability⁸. WPS agenda is an important framework for tackling not only conflict-related violence, but also the underlying socio-political factors that contribute to instability and displacement⁹. However, issues with operationalisation, contextual adaptation, and local ownership continue to limit its revolutionary potential.

Lesotho has made attempts to align national policies with the WPS agenda, including legal reforms and gender mainstreaming initiatives however, these formal commitments have not been effectively translated into meaningful action¹⁰. Persistent problems, including high levels of gender-based violence, socio-cultural barriers, and institutional weaknesses, continue to limit women's security and participation in peacebuilding efforts¹¹. Some scholars contend that although Lesotho does not experience large-scale conflict-induced displacement, there is a prevalence of violence that results in vulnerability and instability that can lead to displacement.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) play an important role in bridging the gap between global WPS agenda commitments and local implementation. Recent scholars identify CSOs as critical mediators in translating international norms into context-specific practices through lobbying, community participation, and service delivery¹². Again, women's organisations play a critical role at the grassroots level in combating

⁸ David Musina, 'Militarising Gender: A (Contrapuntal) Reading of Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Applications in EU-Tunisian Security Assemblages' (2023) 32 *European Security* 464 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2023.2233961> accessed 22 June 2026.

⁹ Seember Aondoakura, *A Critical Feminist Assessment of Nigeria's Response to Conflict-Related Sex and Gender-Based Violence in the Light of the United Nations Women Peace and Security Agenda* (DPhil dissertation, University of Ottawa, 2025) <https://doi.org/10.20381/ruor-31497> accessed 22 June 2026.

¹⁰ Teboho Letsie, 'Implementing Security Sector Reform: A Case Study of Lesotho' in *The Elgar Companion to War, Conflict and Peacebuilding in Africa* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2024) 183 <https://www.elgaronline.com/edcollchap/book/9781802207798/book-part-9781802207798-20.xml> accessed 22 June 2026.

¹¹ Lineo Rabele and Sello Shale, 'Impact of Coalitions on Stability in Lesotho' (2024) 53(3) *Africa Insight* 112–130.

¹² Catherine O'Rourke, *Women, Peace and Security* (Cambridge University Press 2024).

violence, assisting vulnerable populations, and encouraging inclusive peacebuilding processes¹³. Similarly, By working directly with communities, CSOs mitigate localised conflict, respond to GBV, and improve social cohesion, all of which are critical to minimising conditions that lead to displacement. Moreover, CSOs serve as crucial intermediates, ensuring that WPS principles are not only adopted at the policy level but also implemented in a variety of sociopolitical contexts¹⁴.

Despite their important role, CSOs suffer considerable structural, financial, and institutional constraints that limit their effectiveness¹⁵. Limited access to resources, exclusion from official governance and decision-making processes, and inadequate institutional support limit their ability to influence policy execution and address the root causes of violence¹⁶. These limits not only undermine the WPS agenda's localisation, but also limit its ability to effectively respond to violence and minimise displacement-related vulnerabilities. Such institutional restrictions undermine the long-term viability and impact of peacebuilding projects¹⁷. Building on these debates, this study investigates how CSOs in Lesotho advance the WPS agenda to bridge the policy-practice divide, notably in addressing violence and alleviating situations that contribute to instability and displacement. Drawing on qualitative data from document analysis and semi-structured interviews with civil society actors and policymakers,

¹³ Maria Martin de Almagro Iniesta and Madeleine Benson, *Gender Backlash and Rising Authoritarianism in Fragile Contexts* (REFRACT Research Paper Series, Ghent University 2025) <https://www.refract-psp.be/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2025/05/Gender-Backlash-and-Rising-Authoritarianism-in-Fragile-Contexts.pdf> accessed 22 June 2026

¹⁴ Katrina Leclerc, 'Localising Women, Peace, and Security: Community Agency and Ownership Beyond National Policies' (2025) *Development in Practice* 1–11 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2025.2565609>

¹⁵ Kateryna Zarembo and Emily Martin, 'Civil Society and Sense of Community in Ukraine: From Dormancy to Action' (2024) 26(2) *European Societies* 203–229 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2023.2292334>.

¹⁶ Sudipto Mondal, 'Women, Peace, and Security: Evaluating the Impact of UNSCR 1325 through National Action Plans' (2026) 44(2) *Development Policy Review* e70064 <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.70064>.

¹⁷ Clare Castillejo and Pilar Domingo, *The Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Breaking Down Silos* (ODI Synthesis Report, Overseas Development Institute 2022) <https://odi.org/en/publications/the-women-peace-and-security-agenda-breaking-down-silos-synthesis-report/> accessed 22 June 2026

the study investigates CSOs' contributions and restrictions in putting WPS principles into practice at the community level. The study argues that while CSOs are critical in translating global frameworks to local context, their ability to contribute significantly to long-term and gender-responsive peace is limited by resource constraints, socio-cultural barriers, and inadequate institutional coordination.

This paper is organised into six sections. Following this introduction, the second section reviews the literature on the Women, Peace and Security agenda, its localisation, and the role of civil society in peacebuilding. The third section presents the theoretical framework underpinning the study, drawing on Localisation Theory and Civil Society Theory to explain the relationship between global WPS norms and local implementation. The fourth section outlines the research methodology, including the research design, sampling procedures, data collection methods, and data analysis. The fifth section presents and discusses the empirical findings on the role of civil society organisations in localising the WPS agenda in Lesotho. The final section concludes the article by summarising the key findings, discussing their implications for policy and practice, and offering recommendations for strengthening civil society engagement in the localisation and implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda in Lesotho.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Historical Foundations of the WPS Agenda

Globally, the WPS agenda reflects significant progress despite ongoing operational challenges, underscoring the disconnection between policy development and realistic outcomes¹⁸. The UNSCR adopted resolution 1325 in October 2000, effectively establishing the WPS agenda¹⁹. This historic resolution was the first to acknowledge the disproportionate

¹⁸ Prosper Bazaanah and Pride Ngcobo, 'Shadow of Justice: Review on Women's Struggle against Gender-Based Violence in Ghana and South Africa' (2024) 4(7) SN Social Sciences 126 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-024-00926-5>

¹⁹ United Nations, Women, Peace and Security: Advancing Equality and Building Peace (5 March 2025) <https://www.un.org/en/peace-and-security/page/women-peace-and-security> accessed 22 June 2026.

impact of armed conflicts on women and the essential role women play in preventing armed conflict, building peace, and supporting post-conflict recovery²⁰. Some scholars indicate that the WPS agenda was the result of prolonged campaigns by global feminist movements, CSOs, and international organisations advocating for gender equality within the peace and security arena²¹. After the agenda was adopted, the United Nations strengthened its implementation through the Interagency Taskforce on WPS, which brought together UN entities to mainstream gender in peace and security initiatives²². Moreover, subsequent reports by the Secretary-General, as well as subsequent resolutions, have expanded and formalised the WPS agenda, placing it at the centre of global peace and governance²³.

While significant progress has been made in advancing the WPS agenda globally, translating this commitment varies. For instance, some scholars argue that while the European Gendarmerie Force has implemented policies supportive of the WPS agenda, their implementation is hampered by poor institutional capacity, insufficient resources, and the lack of gender integration into operational structures²⁴. Additionally, the literature persistently show that problems for the United States and its international partners, highlighting difficulties with WPS commitments within complex, bureaucratic institutional systems²⁵. Collectively, these

²⁰ Chantal de Jonge Oudraat and Michael E Brown, 'The WPS Agenda Beyond 2025: Time for a WPS Treaty' (2025) 21(3) *Politics & Gender* 718–725 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X25100421>

²¹ Noha Shawki, 'Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda' (2017) 3(4–5) *Global Affairs* 455–467 <https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2017.1440751>

²² Women, Peace and Security Focal Points Network, UN Frameworks <https://wpsfocalpointnetwork.org/un-frameworks/> accessed 22 June 2026.

²³ International Peace Institute, *Reflecting on 25 Years of the WPS Agenda: Lessons Learned from Gender Research and UN Peace Operations* (9 October 2025) <https://www.ipinst.org/2025/10/25-years-of-wps-lessons-from-gender-research-and-un-peace-ops> accessed 1st June 2026.

²⁴ Luís Malheiro, Fernando Bessa, João Reis and others, 'The Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda in the European Gendarmerie Forces' (2024) 26(1) *International Journal of Police Science & Management* 78–93 <https://doi.org/10.1177/14613557231199329>

²⁵ Hyeran Hur, 'Women, Peace, and Security in the Indo-Pacific' (2023) 6(6) *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/> accessed 22 June 2026.

studies reflect a broader structural concern: that the presence of formal frameworks does not ensure successful, long-term, or groundbreaking outcomes.

African states began to formally adopt the WPS agenda shortly after its establishment in 2000. Within African contexts, this framework gained much of its popularity and significance through its inclusion in peacekeeping and security operations²⁶. The WPS agenda was further localised in Africa through the development of National Action Plans and regional strategies by bodies such as SADC and ECOWAS²⁷. It is further noted that these strategies were targeted at translating WPS commitments into context-specific interventions.

Despite these gains, contemporary literature reveals that the implementation of WPS in Africa is deeply affected, as many programs are donor-driven, weakly institutionalised, and lack ownership²⁸. Moreover, insufficient funding and poor coordination are repeatedly impeding successful implementation across the African continent²⁹. In Lesotho, there has been growing institutional recognition of the importance of advancing gender perspectives in peace and governance processes, thereby fulfilling WPS principles³⁰. Lesotho collaborates with development partners, including UN Women itself, which plays an important role in raising awareness of gender-based violence and encouraging women to participate in peacebuilding efforts³¹.

²⁶ Valerie M Hudson, 'whither Women and Peace and Security?' (2025) 21(3) *Politics & Gender* 726–731 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X25100408>.

²⁷ Sokhna M Diouf, 'Progress, Challenges, and Opportunities: Enacting National Action Plans on Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa' in [Editor's Name] (ed), *Youth Leading Change* (Palgrave Macmillan 2025) 161–173.

²⁸ Dumisani Chigudu, 'Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Africa' (2024) 11(2) *PCD Journal* 377–410.

²⁹ S Phakathi, 'Civil Society and Policy Engagement' (2023) 40(3) *Development Southern Africa* 400–415.

³⁰ UN Women Moldova, *Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund Annual Progress Report 2025* (Republic of Moldova) (UN Women Moldova 2025) https://mptf.undp.org/sites/default/files/documents/2026-03/moldova-wphf_annual_report_2025_mar_14_2026_final_0.pdf accessed 10th June 2026.

³¹ UN Women Moldova, *Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund Annual Progress Report 2025* (Republic of Moldova) (UN Women Moldova 2025)

These attempts to advance the WPS agenda have emerged in a socio-political context in Lesotho characterised by repeated governance challenges, economic barriers, and political instability³². Recent initiatives, including efforts to develop a National Action Plan (NAP), indicate growing institutional recognition of the importance of the WPS agenda³³. The country of Lesotho has not experienced large-scale armed conflict; however, the continuous instability in politics due to coalition government and significant levels of gender based violence in rural areas demonstrate the need for advancement of the WPS agenda.

Despite this progress, the WPS agenda's implementation in Lesotho continues to face significant challenges. The gap between legislative commitments and actual practice is a major concern, as critical initiatives, such as Nap development, remain unfunded and lack of coordination and monitoring procedures³⁴. Moreover, the localisation of the WPS agenda has been criticised for relying on external organisations, raising concerns about sustainability and national ownership.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Civil Society Theory and Localisation Theory to examine the role of CSOs in bridging the gap between policy commitments and the implementation of the WPS agenda in Lesotho. Civil Society Theory conceptualises civil society as a sphere of organised social life comprising voluntary associations, networks, and organisations that operate between the state and citizens to promote collective interests and public participation³⁵. Civil society strengthens democratic governance by enhancing accountability, encouraging citizen

https://mptf.undp.org/sites/default/files/documents/2026-03/moldova-wphf_annual_report_2025_mar_14_2026_final_0.pdf accessed 23 June 2026.

³² Fako Makoa, 'Governance and Civil Society in Lesotho' (2024) 50(1) *Journal of Southern African Studies* 55–72.

³³ T Mokhothu and M Thamae, 'Peacebuilding and Gender in Lesotho' (2024) 14(1) *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review* 88–105.

³⁴ Selibeng, 'Consultancy for District Action Plans (DAPs) on Women/Youth Peace and Security at LCN' (31 March 2026) <https://selibeng.com/dap-consult-lcn/> accessed 23 June 2026

³⁵ Michael Edwards, *Civil Society* (4th edn, Polity Press 2023).

participation, and influencing policymaking processes³⁶. Scholars further argue that CSOs function as intermediaries between governments and communities by advocating for policy reforms, facilitating participation, and amplifying marginalised voices³⁷. In the context of the WPS agenda, the theory provides a useful lens for understanding how CSOs promote women's participation, advocate for gender-responsive governance, and hold institutions accountable for implementing gender equality commitments³⁸. In Lesotho, CSOs serve as important actors linking national policy frameworks with community realities through advocacy, awareness-raising, and peacebuilding initiatives³⁹.

The study also draws on Localisation Theory, which explains how global norms and policy frameworks are adapted, interpreted, and implemented within local political, cultural, and institutional contexts. Localisation is defined as the process through which external norms gain acceptance by being reshaped to align with local values and realities⁴⁰. Contemporary scholars emphasise that localisation is an active process involving negotiation, adaptation, and local ownership rather than passive adoption of international norms⁴¹. Within the WPS agenda, Localisation Theory helps explain how global commitments to women's participation, gender equality, and peacebuilding are translated into practical actions at national and community levels. In Lesotho, CSOs act as key localisation agents by adapting WPS principles to local realities, promoting community

³⁶ Larry Diamond, 'Rethinking Civil Society: Toward Democratic Consolidation' (1994) 5(3) *Journal of Democracy* 4–17 <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1994.0041>

³⁷ Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA), *Empowering Civil Society: A Policy Brief Prepared by the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA) for the Kagiso Trust* (MISTRA 2023) <https://mistra.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Kagiso-Trust-Report.pdf> accessed 23 June 2026

³⁸ Lorenzo Fioramonti, *Civil Society and World Politics: A Critical Approach* (Routledge 2023).

³⁹ Moeketsi Kali, 'The Untold Story of Civil Society Organizations' Contribution to Peacebuilding in Lesotho' (2022) 59(6) *International Politics* 1082–1100 <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-021-00345-w>

⁴⁰ Amitav Acharya, *Constructing Global Order: Agency and Norm Localisation in World Politics* (Cambridge University Press 2023) <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316756768>.

⁴¹ Hans Peter Schmitz and George E Mitchell, 'A Framework for Understanding and Evaluating Localization: The Case of HelpAge International' (2025) *Public Administration and Development* <https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.2103>

participation, and ensuring that implementation reflects the lived experiences of women⁴². Together, these theories provide a strong analytical framework for examining how CSOs contribute to the localisation and implementation of the WPS agenda in Lesotho.

2.3 Advocacy and Policy Influence of CSOs in Lesotho

CSOs in Lesotho have played an important but overlooked role in advocacy and policy impact, particularly in peacebuilding⁴³. They have been effective in building trust, tolerance and cooperation across conflicting groups, establishing them as crucial grassroots actors capable of addressing the main causes of regular political instability. Some scholars contend that CSOs are very crucial in peacebuilding efforts because they are key actors in initiating community development at grassroots advocacy⁴⁴. This is done through capacity building efforts, service delivery and empowerment programs. Similarly, some scholars observe that CSOs as intermediaries between citizens and the state, notably in advocacy and policy processes⁴⁵. Their role as intermediaries connecting the state with the citizens allows them to enhance the representation of marginalised voices, especially women, and to play a part in influencing the national dialogues on peace, security and gender equality.

Despite their important role, the ability of CSOs to execute the implementation of the WPS agenda in Lesotho is restricted by a number of structural and institutional obstacles. The literature indicates that most CSOs in Lesotho are facing serious financial and technical constraints, they depend on donor funding, and this can redirect their priorities and

⁴² Mwami M, 'Women in Lesotho: Overcoming Socioeconomic Barriers' (2024) 2(2) Spicer Adventist University Research Articles Journal <http://www.sauraj.in/index.php/SAURAJ/article/view/201> accessed 23 June 2026

⁴³ Moeketsi Kali, 'The Untold Story of Civil Society Organizations' Contribution to Peacebuilding in Lesotho' (2022) 59(6) International Politics 1082–1100 <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-021-00345-w>

⁴⁴ Doris Asante, 'Civil Society and Counter-Terrorism Governance: Implementing the WPS Agenda in Nigeria' (2023) 37(3) Global Society 420–443 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2022.212330>

⁴⁵ Sohela Nazneen and Maheen Sultan, 'Civil Society and Women's Empowerment' (2024) 55(1) Development and Change 45–62.

jeopardise long-term sustainability⁴⁶. While CSOs are key stakeholders in Lesotho, their participation in formal policy making and implementation processes is often restricted, limiting their capacity to affect decision-making at higher governance levels. The wider socio-economic landscape, featuring poverty and unemployment, and deeply rooted patriarchal standards, further complicates CSOs attempts to advance gender equality and promote meaningful involvement of women in peace and security processes⁴⁷. Despite their importance, CSOs' effectiveness is constrained by persistent challenges.

2.4 Grassroots Engagement and Community-Level Peacebuilding

One of the most significant roles of CSOs in Lesotho is their engagement at the grassroots level. CSOs' grassroots engagement is a vital pillar for effectively localising the WPS agenda because, while global and national frameworks give normative guidance, these ideas are put into action at the community level⁴⁸. Additionally, CSOs, particularly the ones based within the local communities, play an important role in promoting inclusive participation, promoting underrepresented perspectives, and building trust among conflict-affected populations. CSOs promote the bottom-up approach at the grassroots level through community dialogues, awareness campaigns and capacity building projects, which help to reshape gender norms and encourage women's active participation in peace processes⁴⁹.

⁴⁶ Moeketsi Kali, 'The Untold Story of Civil Society Organizations' Contribution to Peacebuilding in Lesotho' (2022) 59(6) *International Politics* 1082–1100 <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-021-00345-w>.

⁴⁷ Matsilo Elizabeth Nkabane and Nengieh Lizzie Wantchami, 'Assessment of Challenges of Governance and Democratic Consolidation in Lesotho, 1993–2022' (2024) 5(2) *PanAfrican Journal of Governance and Development* 3–26 <https://doi.org/10.46404/panjogov.v5i2.5699>

⁴⁸ Thania Paffenholz, 'Civil Society Participation in Peace Processes' (2023) 60(4) *Journal of Peace Research* 567–581.

⁴⁹ Tainá Galvão, Mairon G Bastos Lima and Renata Ramiro, 'Bottom-Up Regionality and the Sustainable Development Goals: Civil Society Organizations Shaping 2030 Agenda Implementation in Latin America' (2023) 66(2) *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* e021 <https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7329202300221>

At the same time, the literature highlights that CSOs face challenges when addressing grassroots peacebuilding⁵⁰. Structural inequalities, inadequate resources and social and cultural barriers frequently restrict the effectiveness of the community-level interventions⁵¹. In Lesotho, where patriarchal practices and political instability remain, CSOs have an important role in managing complex power dynamics while campaigning for gender inclusive peacebuilding⁵². Despite these problems, CSOs play a significant role in bridging the gap between formal policy frameworks and practical implementation at the community level.

2.5 Gender Inequality and Barriers to Women's Participation

Gender equality is an integral part of the discourse of the WPS agenda. Despite global commitments to gender equality, Lesotho has strongly established patriarchal norms that continue to restrict women's access to leadership positions, political representation and peace talks⁵³. Again, socio-cultural practices that allocate women to household tasks while promoting men in public and political domains exacerbate the structural inequalities⁵⁴. These dynamics are exacerbated by restricted access to education, economic resources and institutional support, all of which impair women's ability to participate actively in peace and security processes.

In addition to structural impediments, there are institutional and systematic challenges to women's participation in the WPS agenda. As a

⁵⁰ Galvão T, Lima MGB and Ramiro R, 'Bottom-Up Regionality and the Sustainable Development Goals: Civil Society Organizations Shaping 2030 Agenda Implementation in Latin America' (2023) 66(2) *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* e021 <https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7329202300221>

⁵¹ John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (United States Institute of Peace Press 1997)

⁵² Lithlare Rabele, 'Performance of Women-led Political Parties in Lesotho's 2022 National Elections' (2024) 43(2) *Politeia* <https://doi.org/10.25159/2663-6689/14267>

⁵³ Mukurunge and Takura Bhila, 'Gender Inequality in Politics (Lesotho)' (2019) 3(2) *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development* 429–433 <https://doi.org/10.31142/ijtsrd21401>

⁵⁴ Mamello Rakolobe, 'An Analysis of Gender Equality Provisions in Political Parties' Manifestos for Lesotho's 2022 General Elections' (2024) 13(1) *African Journal of Gender, Society & Development* 181–203 <https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-3622/2024/v13n1a9>

result, development is frequently hampered by poor implementation and a lack of political will. The existing literature highlights that increasing women's participation in peace and conflict spaces requires more than just formal policies; they are insufficient to achieve substantive change⁵⁵. CSOs have attempted to address these disparities by campaigning for inclusive legislation, offering leadership training and establishing platforms for women's voices at the community level⁵⁶.

2.6 Government and Civil Society Collaboration in the WPS Agenda

Collaboration between government institutions and CSOs plays an important role in the execution of the WPS agenda. The collaboration between these two actors is critical for turning global WPS commitments into locally relevant practices⁵⁷. CSOs support government initiatives by mobilising communities, promoting inclusive participation and incorporating women's voices in peace processes⁵⁸. Through advocacy, service delivery and grassroots participation, CSOs help to improve responsiveness and inclusivity of WPS implementation⁵⁹. In the context of Lesotho, CSOs play an important role in bridging the gap between policy framework and community realities, as the government's capacity may be constrained by limited financial and human resources and poor institutional coordination⁶⁰.

⁵⁵ Anne Marie Goetz, 'Gender Equality and Political Participation' (2023) 161 *World Development* 106091 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2022.106091>

⁵⁶ Soumita Basu, *Women, Peace and Security: Reimagining Global Governance* (Bristol University Press 2024).

⁵⁷ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Development Co-operation Report 2023: Debating the Aid System* (OECD Publishing 2023) <https://doi.org/10.1787/f6edc3c2-en>

⁵⁸ Simone Datzberger, 'Civil Society and Peacebuilding: Critical Review' in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Peace and Conflict Studies* (Palgrave Macmillan 2022) https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11795-5_210-1.

⁵⁹ Thomas Carothers and Diane de Gramont, *Development Aid Confronts Politics: The Almost Revolution* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2013) <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2013/04/development-aid-confronts-politics-the-almost-revolution> accessed 25 June 2026.

⁶⁰ Amina Mama, 'Feminist Politics and African Development' (2023) 2(1) *Feminist Africa* 10–25.

A successful partnership between government and CSOs improves coordination, accountability and policy effectiveness⁶¹. The government provides the institutional policy while CSOs provide contextual knowledge, community trust and innovative approaches to peacebuilding⁶². In Lesotho, such collaborations have the potential to promote more long-term and gender responsive peace measures by aligning government priorities with local needs. Some scholars emphasise the necessity of institutionalising participatory procedures, enhancing communication channels and providing proper support to civil society actors⁶³.

2.7 Donor Dependency and Sustainability of CSO Engagement

Donor dependency is a perennial issue in CSOs' engagement in the WPS agenda, particularly in poor countries⁶⁴. Many CSOs primarily rely on external funding from international donors to carry out peacebuilding and gender related programs⁶⁵. While the international donors significantly played a major role with funding assistance to advance the WPS agenda, they frequently influence the direction, scope and sustainability of interventions⁶⁶. Moreover, donor- driven agendas may focus on short-term project-based outcomes above long-term structural transformation, resulting in fragmented programming and insufficient continuity⁶⁷. Again,

⁶¹ Lorenzo Fioramonti, *Civil Society and World Politics: A Critical Approach* (Routledge 2023)

⁶³ N Koali, 'Donor Dependency and Civil Society Sustainability in Lesotho' (2023) 40(5) *Development Southern Africa* 650–665.

⁶⁴ Karin Backman, *Investing in Activism and Harnessing Expertise: Gendered and Postcolonial Constructs of Civil Society in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda* (Master's thesis, Lund University 2017) <https://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/record/8913389> accessed 25 June 2026.

⁶⁵ Vendela Permatz Hammarbäck, *Navigating Change: Analyzing CSOs' Perceptions on the Evolving Swedish Aid Policy and Its Impacts on Civil Society* (Master's thesis, Linnaeus University 2024) <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:lnu:diva-131172> accessed 25 June 2026

⁶⁶ Banks N, Hulme D and Edwards M, 'NGOs, States, and Donors Revisited: Still Too Close for Comfort?' (2015) 66 *World Development* 707–718 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2014.09.028>

⁶⁷ N Koali, 'Donor Dependency and Civil Society Sustainability in Lesotho' (2023) 40(5) *Development Southern Africa* 650–665

funding for CSOs is limited in Lesotho and, depending on international donors, may weaken local ownership and CSOs' ability to set priorities aligned with community needs⁶⁸.

CSOs face challenges like retaining qualified workers and maintaining long-term community partnerships due to inconsistent funding cycles. The literature emphasizes that ensuring the long-term efficacy of CSOs' contribution to the WPS agenda necessitates a stronger emphasis on sustainable finance models, more domestic support and more flexible donor frameworks that prioritise local context⁶⁹.

2.8 Civil Society and the Policy Practice Gap in Lesotho

A common theme in the literature on the WPS agenda is the ongoing gap between formal policy commitments and real implementation outcomes. Lesotho has this gap, and it is shaped by a combination of institutional shortcomings, political instability, and deeply ingrained socio-cultural restrictions⁷⁰. These challenges collectively impede the translation of WPS concepts into successful and long-term community interventions. In this regard, CSOs play an important role in bridging the link between policy frameworks and local realities.

While CSOs make substantial contributions to implementation through grassroots participation and service delivery, their limited influence on national policy processes limits their total impact. This imbalance reflects deeper systemic disparities in power and access, which limit civil society actors' ability to influence policy outcomes⁷¹. The dual position of CSOs

⁶⁸ Paseka Andrew Mosia and Malephoto Niko Lephoto, 'Non-governmental and Community-Based Organisations as Enablers of Inclusion in Education' in Dipane Hlalele and Tsediso Michael Makoelle (eds), *Inclusion in Southern African Education: Understanding, Challenges and Enablement* (Springer International Publishing 2023) 209–221 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-43752-6_15

⁶⁹ Michael Edwards, *Civil Society* (4th edn, Polity Press 2023).

⁷⁰ Phakathi, S. (2023). "Civil society and policy engagement." *Development Southern Africa*, 40(3), 400–415.

⁷¹ Huimin Cheng, Ye Wang, Ping Ma and Amanda Murdie, 'Communities and Brokers: How the Transnational Advocacy Network Simultaneously Provides Social Power and Exacerbates Global Inequalities' (2021) 65(3) *International Studies Quarterly* 724–738 <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqab037>

as implementers and advocates underscores the complexities of their involvement in the WPS agenda⁷². It also highlights the difficulties of negotiating fragmented institutional frameworks while promoting gender-responsive peacebuilding⁷³. Finally, the meaningful realisation of the WPS agenda in Lesotho will be determined by the effectiveness with which civil society continues to bridge the gap between policy commitments and community lived realities, ensuring that peace and security efforts are not only articulated in frameworks but also experienced in everyday life.

2.9 Identified Gaps in the Literature

Despite the rising amount of research on the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda and the role of civil society, numerous key gaps remain, particularly in the context of Lesotho.

1. There is little empirical research on the implementation of the WPS agenda in Lesotho, leading to an absence of context-specific evidence on policy outcomes and problems.
2. The existing literature lacks understanding of the relationship between civil society organisations and state institutions in peacebuilding and governance.
3. Grassroots women's experiences and perspectives are underrepresented, despite their crucial role in local peacebuilding and implementing WPS principles.
4. Inadequate integration of governance, gender, and security studies limits understanding of their interactions in practice. These limitations demonstrate the need for context-specific and empirically grounded research that highlights the intricacies of civil society engagement and the challenges of connecting policy and practice in Lesotho.

⁷² Yaser Alashqar, 'Civil Society and Peacebuilding: Critical Review' in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Peace and Conflict Studies* (Palgrave Macmillan 2022) https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11795-5_210-1

⁷³ Jacqui True and Yolanda Riveros-Morales, 'Civil Society and WPS Implementation' (2023) 19(4) *Politics & Gender* 789–806.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

A research methodology sets out a general framework, strategy, and techniques for data collection and analysis, allowing researchers to achieve their study objectives in a systematic manner⁷⁴. This study adopted a qualitative research approach using the case study of Lesotho. The qualitative research approach is suitable for this study because it deals with the lived experiences, perspectives and interpretations of CSOs' engagement in bridging a gap between the policy of the WPS agenda and the practice at the community levels.

This study adopted an interpretivist research paradigm, which focuses on understanding social phenomena through the meanings, experiences, and interpretations that people assign to them within their social settings⁷⁵. The interpretivist approach is primarily based on grasping the complexities of human experiences and relationships within specific social settings⁷⁶. As a result, the interpretivist paradigm was chosen because it allowed for a more in-depth understanding of the role of CSOs in bridging the gap between policy and practice by emphasizing subjective experiences and contextual realities.

This study used both primary and secondary data to examine CSOs' role in bridging the gap between policy and practice of the implementation of the WPS agenda in Lesotho. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Interviews enabled an in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives, while document analysis provided contextual understanding from policy documents and

⁷⁴ Beata Smela, Mondher Toumi, Karolina Świerk, Clément François, Małgorzata Biernikiewicz, Emilie Clay and Laurent Boyer, 'Rapid Literature Review: Definition and Methodology' (2023) 11(1) *Journal of Market Access & Health Policy* 2241234 <https://doi.org/10.1080/20016689.2023.2241234>

⁷⁵ Husam Helmi Alharahsheh and Abraham Pius, 'A Review of Key Paradigms: Positivism VS Interpretivism' (2020) 2(3) *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 39–43 <https://doi.org/10.36348/gajhss.2020.v02i03.001>

⁷⁶ Putnam LL and Banghart S, 'Interpretive Approaches' in Craig R Scott and Laurie Lewis (eds), *The International Encyclopedia of Organizational Communication* (John Wiley & Sons 2017) 1–17 <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118955567.wbieoc115>

institutional reports⁷⁷. Semi-structured interviews allow the flexibility in dialogue, enabling participants to articulate their thoughts and feelings in their own terms while still allowing the researcher to probe specific areas of interest⁷⁸. Through this analysis, the researcher identified patterns, articulated themes, and comprehended the structural challenges that influence civil society engagement in peace processes. Relying on semi-structured interviews and document analysis facilitates a rich, nuanced exploration of the WPS agenda.

Purposive sampling was used to select CSOs with direct involvement in gender, peacebuilding, and WPS-related processes. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because it allows researchers to select participants with rich knowledge of WPS and CSOs, best suited to provide thorough and relevant insights into the phenomenon under inquiry⁷⁹. A total of 5 participants from five different CSOs were included in the study. The sample size was determined by the principle of data saturation, whereby no new themes or insights emerged from additional data collection. This ensured the inclusion of participants with rich information, capable of providing relevant and in-depth insights.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 CSOs as Bridging Actors Between Policy and Practice

The findings demonstrate that CSOs play an important role in bridging the gap between policy commitments and actual implementation of the WPS agenda in Lesotho. Participants emphasized that CSOs serve as intermediates between government institutions and local communities, converting national and international WPS promises into community-level action. This role is especially significant in situations where

⁷⁷ Allen I Huffcutt and Sara A Murphy, 'Structured Interviews: Moving Beyond Mean Validity' (2023) 16(3) *Industrial and Organizational Psychology* 344–348 <https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2023.42>

⁷⁸ Belina, A., 2023. Semi-structured interviewing as a tool for understanding informal civil society. *Voluntary Sector Review*, 14(2), pp.331-347.

⁷⁹ Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S., Bywaters, D. and Walker, K., 2020. Purposive sampling: complex or simple? Research case examples. *Journal of research in Nursing*, 25(8), pp.652-661.

governmental institutions have little capacity to reach rural regions and disadvantaged populations. As one participant stated, "we take what is written in policy and try to make it real for communities, because government does not always reach the grassroots level communities" (CSO-3). This conclusion implies that CSOs play an important role in ensuring that policy commitments are translated into practical solutions that address local realities. This finding is consistent with existing literature, which recognises CSOs as key actors in localising the WPS agenda by integrating it into context-specific initiatives, encouraging community participation, and connecting grassroots realities to national policy processes^{80 81 82}. According to the literature, the effectiveness of WPS implementation is dependent not just on government commitment, but also on the ability of civil society actors to foster engagement between policymakers and local community members.

The findings can further be analyzed using Civil Society Theory, which views civil society as an intermediary sphere between citizens and the state. According to this perspective, CSOs promote governance by increasing involvement, representation, and accountability. The findings show that CSOs in Lesotho perform this task by expressing community concerns to policymakers and disseminating policy knowledge to local communities. The findings are also consistent with Localisation Theory, which emphasises the adaptation of global standards to local environments via the action of local actors⁸³ CSOs help to localise the WPS agenda and ensure that international commitments are based on local realities through awareness campaigns, lobbying activities, and community engagement programmes. Despite these achievements, some scholars are against exploiting CSOs for dysfunctional governmental institutions. CSOs frequently operate in situations characterised by low resources, donor

⁸⁰ Jacqui True and Yolanda Riveros-Morales, 'Civil Society and WPS Implementation' (2023) 19(4) *Politics & Gender* 789–806.

⁸¹ True J and Riveros-Morales Y, 'Civil Society and WPS Implementation' (2023) 19(4) *Politics & Gender* 789–806.

⁸² Thania Paffenholz, 'Civil Society Participation in Peace Processes' (2023) 60(4) *Journal of Peace Research* 567–581.

⁸³ Amitav Acharya, *Constructing Global Order: Agency and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge University Press 2018)

dependency, and unequal power relations, which hinder their potential to effect long-term structural change⁸⁴.

The literature reveals that excessive dependence on CSOs may unintentionally transfer responsibility for WPS agenda implementation away from governments, so undermining state accountability⁸⁵. These criticisms are especially important in Lesotho, where CSOs frequently assume responsibilities that would normally be performed by the government. Overall, the findings indicate that CSOs are critical actors in linking policy and practice for effective WPS agenda's implementation in Lesotho.

4.2 Advocacy and Limited Policy Influence

According to the findings, CSOs are actively involved in advocacy projects targeted at improving gender equality and promoting the WPS agenda in Lesotho. Participants from CSOs reported taking part in policy consultations, awareness initiatives, and national reform efforts. Despite their visibility in these procedures, their impact on real policymaking is minimal. One participant stated that "we are invited to consultations, but we feel like decisions are already made before the actual meetings" (CSO-1). This conclusion implies that civil society participation is generally advisory rather than really participatory, limiting CSOs' potential to impact policy outcomes and influence strategic decision-making.

This finding is consistent with literature that contends that, while CSOs are increasingly recognized as important stakeholders in peacebuilding and governance, their participation is frequently symbolic rather than

⁸⁴ Barnes and Feargal Cochrane, *Civil Society and Peacebuilding in Fragile Contexts* (Routledge 2024).

⁸⁵ Lorenzo Fioramonti, *Civil Society and World Politics: A Critical Approach* (Routledge 2023)

substantive⁸⁶ ⁸⁷ ⁸⁸. According to Civil Society Theory, meaningful involvement necessitates a shift from consultation to active participation in policy formation and decision-making processes⁸⁹. The findings thus highlight a contradiction in Lesotho's localisation of the WPS agenda: while CSOs are intended to promote community-level implementation, they are mostly excluded from policy-making decisions.

Scholars argue that such exclusion undermines both democratic government and effective WPS implementation since policies implemented without civil society participation frequently fail to reflect local realities and community goals⁹⁰ ⁹¹. The findings imply that CSOs' limited policy engagement is a significant barrier to the localisation of the WPS agenda in Lesotho. Strengthening CSOs' roles in policymaking will not only improve accountability and inclusion but will also ensure that WPS initiatives are influenced by the experiences and needs of the people they are intended to serve.

4.3 Donor Dependency and Sustainability

The findings reveal that donor dependency continues to be a significant issue for the sustainability of CSOs involved in the implementation of Lesotho's Women, Peace, and Security agenda. Participants stated that many CSOs rely largely on external funds to finance their operations and program activities. While donor support is critical for furthering gender equality and peacebuilding projects, it frequently shapes organisational objectives and inhibits local program ownership. As one participant stated, "we rely on donors, so sometimes we follow their priorities instead of

⁸⁶ Valerie M Hudson, 'whither Women and Peace and Security?' (2025) 21(3) *Politics & Gender* 726–731 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X25100408>

⁸⁷ Paul Kirby and Laura J Shepherd, *Governing the Feminist Peace: The Vitality and Failure of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda* (Columbia University Press 2024).

⁸⁸ Chantal de Jonge Oudraat and Michael E Brown, 'The WPS Agenda Beyond 2025: Time for a WPS Treaty' (2025) 21(3) *Politics & Gender* 718–725 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X25100421>.

⁸⁹ Michael Edwards, *Civil Society* (4th edn, Polity Press 2020)

⁹⁰ Thania Paffenholz, 'Civil Society Participation in Peace Processes' (2023) 60(4) *Journal of Peace Research* 567–581.

⁹¹ Catherine O'Rourke, *Women, Peace and Security* (Cambridge University Press 2024).

what communities really need" (CSO-4). This study implies that CSOs' financial reliance on external players may limit their ability to respond effectively to community-specific needs and achieve long-term strategic goals.

These findings are consistent with previous research, which has identified donor dependency as one of the most significant barriers to long-term WPS implementation in developing countries. Scholars believe that donor-driven programming usually prioritises short-term, measurable outcomes over long-term structural reform, limiting the viability of peacebuilding programs. According to Localisation Theory, an overreliance on foreign finance can damage local ownership by transferring decision-making authority away from local players and towards international funders⁹². As a result, while donor funding remains crucial for resource-constrained groups, it can unintentionally undermine the localization process by limiting CSOs' ability to establish their own priorities and tactics.

Some scholars also argue that donor dependency generates organisational vulnerabilities, particularly when financing cycles are short and unexpected⁹³. Such constraints frequently push CSOs to constantly adapt to shifting donor objectives, jeopardizing program continuity and long-term impact. According to the findings, long-term execution of the WPS agenda in Lesotho necessitates the creation of alternative financial structures that increase organisational independence and local ownership. Without sustainable funding sources, CSOs' ability to contribute significantly to peacebuilding and gender equality programs may be hampered, reducing the WPS agenda's long-term efficacy.

4.4 Weak State Civil Coordination

According to the findings, poor coordination between CSOs and government institutions continues in Lesotho are the key barrier to the implementation of the WPS agenda. Participants stated that collaboration between the two sectors is frequently irregular, informal, and heavily

⁹² Amitav Acharya, *Constructing Global Order: Agency and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge University Press 2018)

reliant on specific initiatives or persons rather than institutionalised procedures. As one participant pointed out, "there is no clear system for collaboration with government, so efforts are often duplicated or disconnected" (CSO-2). This conclusion implies that the lack of established coordination channels restricts information sharing, collaborative planning, and collective action, lowering the effectiveness of WPS interventions.

This finding is consistent with previous research, which has identified insufficient institutional coordination as a major barrier to the successful implementation of the WPS agenda⁹⁴. Scholars contend that effective WPS implementation necessitates extensive collaboration between state and non-state actors to achieve policy consistency, resource optimisation, and coordinated action across sectors. According to Civil Society Theory, collaborative interactions between governments and civil society organisations are crucial for promoting democratic governance and improving policy effectiveness⁹⁵. The findings show that the lack of coordination found in Lesotho affects both actors' ability to collectively advance WPS objectives and respond effectively to local peace and security challenges.

According to the literature, fragmented interactions between governments and CSOs frequently result in activity duplication, resource competition, and poor implementation outcomes. Such difficulties are reflected in the current findings, as participants highlighted disjointed attempts and the lack of formal institutions for interaction. The findings reveals that building institutional coordination mechanisms between government and civil society should be prioritised in order to improve the localization and durability of the WPS agenda in Lesotho. Without formal collaboration and shared implementation frameworks, the transformative potential of WPS interventions is likely to be limited.

⁹⁴ Chantal de Jonge Oudraat and Michael E Brown, 'The WPS Agenda Beyond 2025: Time for a WPS Treaty' (2025) 21(3) *Politics & Gender* 718–725 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X25100421>

⁹⁵ Michael Edwards, *Civil Society* (4th edn, Polity Press 2020)

4.5 Gender Inequality as a Persistent Barrier

The findings demonstrate that gender inequality continues to be a key barrier to the effective implementation of the WPS agenda in Lesotho. Participants repeatedly stated that deeply ingrained patriarchal norms and sociocultural practices continue to limit women's participation in peacebuilding, governance, and decision-making processes. Although legislation and legal frameworks promoting gender equality have been established, participants reported that their implementation is usually hampered by prevalent cultural attitudes and gender stereotypes. One participant noted that "women are still expected to stay silent in decision-making spaces, even when policies say otherwise" (CSO-1). This implies that legal promises to gender equality have not fully translated into changes in social norms and power dynamics that impact women's daily lives.

This finding resonates with previous research, which asserts that patriarchal structures remain one of the most significant barriers to women's meaningful participation in peace and security processes, despite the gender-responsive policies and international frameworks (Hudson, 2025; Basu, 2024; Cornwall, 2023; Rakolobe, 2021). Scholars argue that while legislative reforms may generate chances for women's engagement, deeply ingrained cultural norms frequently continue to elevate male authority and marginalize women's voices in political and community decision-making arenas. According to Localisation Theory, these findings show that the implementation of global gender norms is frequently shaped and constrained by local socio-cultural contexts, and feminist perspectives highlight how patriarchal power relations continue to reproduce gender inequalities despite formal policy commitments.

4.6 Strong Grassroots Engagement and Community Impact

The findings suggest that CSOs play an important role in promoting peacebuilding and social cohesion at the local level. Participants noted that CSOs are actively involved in awareness campaigns, gender-based violence (GBV) interventions, community dialogues, and conflict resolution activities to address local peace and security issues. These

activities were viewed as significant, especially when the government officials are absent or have little capacity to respond effectively to community needs. As one participant stated, "at the community level, people trust us more than formal institutions, so we can address issues like violence and conflict directly" (CSO-5). This study implies that CSOs have built close relationships with communities, allowing them to better respond to local peacebuilding and protection needs.

This finding is consistent with previous research, which has identified grassroots engagement as an essential component of long-term peacebuilding and effective WPS implementation. Scholars suggest that community-based organizations are frequently better positioned to recognize local security concerns, foster trust among community members, and facilitate inclusive participation in peacebuilding efforts⁹⁶. According to Civil Society Theory, CSOs promote social cohesiveness by providing opportunities for debate, involvement, and collaborative issue solving. The findings show that grassroots engagement allows CSOs to make a meaningful contribution to conflict prevention, GBV response, and the promotion of peaceful coexistence within communities.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study investigated how CSOs bridge the gap between policies on the implementation of the WPS agenda in Lesotho. The findings demonstrate that CSOs play an important role as intermediates, converting global policy commitments into locally relevant peacebuilding activities and encouraging gender-responsive approaches at the community level. However, the study also finds that CSOs' effectiveness is hampered by a range of structural, institutional, and socio-cultural factors, including limited power in policymaking, poor state-civil society coordination, donor dependence, and ingrained patriarchal norms. These limitations lead to the ongoing gap between formal policy frameworks and real outcomes.

⁹⁶ Barnes and Feargal Cochrane, *Civil Society and Peacebuilding in Fragile Contexts* (Routledge 2024).

The study indicates that while CSOs are critical actors in advancing the WPS agenda in Lesotho, closing the policy-practice gap requires a more comprehensive and inclusive approach. To achieve the WPS agenda's transformative potential, institutional structures must be strengthened, collaboration improved, locally led initiatives supported, and underlying social disparities addressed. Finally, attaining long-term, gender-responsive peace in Lesotho requires not only policy commitments, but also their meaningful implementation through coordinated action by state and civil society actors grounded in community grassroots realities.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations are made to improve the implementation of the WPS agenda in Lesotho. First, there is a need to improve institutionalised engagement between the state and civil society organisations. Formal coordination mechanisms, such as multi-stakeholder platforms or WPS-specific committees, would improve communication, reduce fragmentation, and increase policy coherence. Second, the government should prioritise the creation and successful execution of a National Action Plan (NAP) for WPS. A well-funded and inclusive NAP would provide a systematic framework for aligning national policies with global commitments while assuring active engagement from civil society and grassroots actors.

Third, efforts should be made to increase long-term support for CSOs, notably through diverse funding approaches that limit reliance on outside donors. Strengthening local finance systems would increase CSO autonomy, improve long-term planning, and ensure initiatives are tailored to community needs. Fourth, socio-cultural barriers to women's participation must be addressed through targeted awareness campaigns, community engagement, and educational programs. These initiatives should centre on altering patriarchal attitudes and fostering gender equality at both the institutional and community levels. Finally, CSOs should aim to improve sector-wide coordination and collaboration. Creating networks, alliances, and partnerships would strengthen collective lobbying, improve resource sharing, and raise overall policy influence.