What unique roles do women have in making and sustaining peace in communities across the world? How might their contributions be better understood and mobilized to foster more sustainably peaceful societies?

This is the focus of the new program on Women, Peace and Security being developed by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and Liberian activist Leymah Gbowee, at the Advanced Consortium on Cooperation, Conflict and Complexity (AC4) at Columbia University’s Earth Institute.

Women’s Roles in Peacebuilding

Across the globe, women are disproportionally affected by violent conflict, poverty and structural inequalities, and environmental crises. At the same time, they are vastly underrepresented in formal peace negotiations and related political and governance processes -- as negotiators, mediators, signatories or witnesses.

Despite this, women continue to make vital and often unrecognized contributions to transforming conflict and building and sustaining peace worldwide. These efforts have been regularly discounted and ignored. Yet, as the experience from cases around the globe reveals -- from Yemen, to Guatemala, to Sierra Leone, to the United States -- women often play a crucial and under-studied role in waging peace and advancing security. They play integral roles in lessening violence, challenging and changing systems of injustice, educating for peace, and promoting human security in their communities every day.

All of this highlights the need for robust research and innovative analytical tools in the field. And it drives the mission of the Women, Peace and Security program at Columbia University.

The Program’s Mission

The program seeks to contribute to greater understanding of why, how and in what ways women have been able to successfully influence sustainable peace through everyday activism. To achieve this mission, the program believes in the need to document knowledge and expertise from women peacemakers themselves, while also leveraging opportunities to magnify their impact through capacity building programs, research and education, and building networks of practitioners.

Centered on the knowledge and experiences of women peace activists from around the globe, the program will:

1) Create opportunities for knowledge generation and capacity building with advocates and activists through the sharing of resources, good practices and lessons learned.

2) Provide Columbia graduate students with real-life peace building experience, interdisciplinary knowledge, and practical skillsets through their interactions with women peacebuilding practitioners.

3) Provide faculty and students with opportunities to study and document the myriad of formal and informal roles women play in conflict resolution, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, state building and human security.

4) Chronicle and share the narratives, experiences, and histories of the advocates and activists themselves.

5) Inform policy and public discourse based on the knowledge and expertise of traditional and non-traditional women peace-builders and practitioners.
Simultaneously, the program will train Columbia graduate students to learn from peace activists and advocates, and gain lessons to effect positive change in their communities.

The program is unique in the ways it centers the expertise and knowledge of global women practitioners themselves, in partnership and collaboration with leading scholars in the field, as the basis for its curriculum and mission. Directed by Nobel Peace Laureate Leymah Gbowee, whose peace work and activism with women in Liberia is world-renowned, the program is grounded in an understanding of the need to showcase multiple types of knowledge and action when considering peace.

Advanced Consortium on Cooperation, Conflict and Complexity (AC⁴) strives to foster sustainable peace through innovation and integration. We work to enable and support integrative research and practice on sustainable peace, constructive conflict engagement, and sustainable development. This is built on an understanding that building peaceful and sustainable societies requires a systemic approach, leveraging the expertise and knowledge of scientists and practitioners from across disciplines and areas of practice. By connecting thought leaders at Columbia University and around the world, AC⁴ works to build opportunities to apply leading-edge science to generate solutions for some of our most pressing social and environmental challenges.