



DIMTS
Voice for Justice, Journey to
Healing

JUNE 2026

Gender- Transformative Transitional Justice in Ethiopia

Voices, Learning, and Policy Outcomes



Funded by
the European Union



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This material was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the implementing organizations and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

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1 Executive summary

Ethiopia's transitional justice (TJ) process has evolved over several years, with gender sensitivity as a hard-won but still incomplete achievement. Below is a summary of the journey: the gains, the gaps, and concrete considerations for drafting and approving the binding legal and operational institutional frameworks of the TJ, which are underway pending community consultations.

1.1 The process: how we got here

The journey began with the 2023 Green Paper on TJ policy options, which drew criticism for lacking a gender lens. In response, the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) and the Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA) led a two-tiered participatory process with financial support from the European Union (EU). They engaged over 150 women from grassroots communities in Oromia and the Somali region, in partnership with the Consortium of Self Help Group Approach Promoters (CoSAP), and convened a multi-regional policy workshop. NEWA's member organizations, which later evolved into the civil society organization (CSO) platform, participated actively throughout. This process produced the gender-focused policy brief, *Towards a Gendered Transitional Justice Policy and Implementation Processes in Ethiopia*, which was submitted to the Ministry of Justice's Transitional Justice Working Group (TJWG) and other stakeholders.

In April 2024, Ethiopia adopted its national TJ policy. The policy brief's recommendations had significantly shaped the final adopted text. Building on this, ICTJ, NEWA, the CSO platform, and a broader community of women's rights organizations (WROs) and UN Women convened a strategic consultation in Bishoftu in June 2024. Together, they conducted a thorough assessment of the policy, which provided strategic guidance on sustained engagement, consolidating gains, and proactively shaping the anticipated legal and institutional frameworks.

Drawing on that guidance, NEWA and ICTJ, in partnership with the Advocacy Center for Democracy and Development (ACDD), adopted a three-layered, six-stage iterative model. The model ensures methodological accountability, builds solidarity across diverse women's groups, and centers women with intersecting marginalized identities as the driving voices, while maintaining the adaptive flexibility needed to navigate an uncertain and shifting environment.

Through the CSO platform's facilitation, the project consulted women at the community level across four regions. It also established a Gender Reference Group (GRG), a multidisciplinary expert group of lawyers, gender specialists, and academics, to provide technically grounded input into the upcoming implementing legislation through a gender lens. The GRG's analysis was compiled into a second, more detailed policy and legal brief.

This project is funded by the European Union, with technical assistance from the Advocacy Center for Democracy and Development (ACDD) and International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), and implemented by the Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations.

1.2 Gender-transformative gains in the 2024 TJ Policy: what the framework establishes

The 2024 TJ Policy represents a meaningful advancement over the 2023 Green Paper:

- Gender sensitivity, inclusivity, and participation of marginalized groups are enshrined as core guiding principles.
- The policy recognizes conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and gender-based violence (GBV), framing both as requiring specific responses.
- The policy endorses creating a new, standalone Truth Commission, rather than repurposing existing institutions and risking the reproduction of existing gender inequalities and hierarchies.

- Administrative reparations, the more gender-friendly model for poor and marginalized women, are preferred over court-ordered individual compensation.
- The Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA) is recognized as a key stakeholder in TJ implementation, and CSO engagement is formally acknowledged.
- The concept of intersectionality – accounting for the intersection between multiple social identities like gender, age, ethnicity, disability, and class – is incorporated into the policy framework.
- Draft legislation for the Special Prosecutor's Office and Special Bench includes initial provisions for SGBV-specialized structures and gender-balanced representation, providing a positive foundation for further development.

1.3 What remains to be bridged

Despite this progress, important gaps persist:

- The policy does not specify a quota for women's representation. The brief called for a minimum of 30–50%; the legal and institutional framework must establish a binding minimum of 30%.
- All future legislation must use clear, gender-transformative language that both reflects and implements existing gender equality commitments. This means moving beyond general statements to include specific measures addressing the distinct needs and barriers faced by women and other marginalized groups. For example, rather than stating that 'all citizens have equal access to justice,' legislation could require free legal aid for victims of gender-based violence or mandate trained female officers in reporting processes.
- Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) is not institutionalized as a core legal obligation. All mechanisms involving victims and marginalized groups must include explicit provisions to that effect.
- All legal and institutional frameworks must define victims and GBV broadly enough to encompass all forms of violence, including conflict-related sexual slavery, forced marriage, post-conflict domestic violence, and stigmatization, including institutional and cultural mechanisms that exclude children born of conflict.
- Evidence and procedural standards must be specifically tailored to SGBV cases, with full consideration of cultural context, to prevent secondary victimization.
- Amnesty provisions must explicitly exclude SGBV.
- Compensation, including as part of urgent interim reparations, must be clearly stipulated in accordance with international standards.
- Traditional justice mechanisms are acknowledged in the policy, but they do not mention their lack of gender-sensitivity safeguards, which should be mandatory.
- Young women, persons with disabilities, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) remain insufficiently disaggregated in victim definitions.

1.4 The path forward

The policy framework has made meaningful strides. Its core architecture is gender-aware, and a strong civil society advocacy infrastructure for gender-transformative transitional justice is now in place. The most urgent priority is ensuring that the gender commitments enshrined in the policy are translated into binding, specific, and enforceable provisions across all implementing legislation before promulgation, particularly regarding women's numerical representation, SGBV definitions, evidence standards, MHPSS, and the explicit exclusion of SGBV from amnesty provisions.

Sustained, coordinated engagement by community women, the CSO platform, and the GRG with the Ministry of Justice, MoWSA, and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) remains the most critical leverage point for this transformation.

The table below synthesizes progress achieved, remaining gaps, and proactive recommendations across key justice pillars, principles, and implementation processes, to support the translation of policy intent into practice.

● *Progress achieved* ● *Remaining gap* ● *Proactive recommendation*

TJ pillar	Progress achieved	Remaining gap	Proactive recommendation
Overarching principles & framework	Policy adopts gender sensitivity, inclusivity, and intersectionality as guiding principles; recognizes MoWSA and CSOs.	No numeric women's representation quota; gender commitments not operationalized in implementing legislation.	Explicitly mandate a minimum of 30% of women's representation in all TJ institutions; embed gender-transformative objectives in all legislation with implementation indicators.
Truth-seeking commission	New standalone Truth Commission endorsed; gender-transformative truth-seeking, CRSV focus, and safe testimony procedures incorporated.	Commission composition is gender-neutral; no binding gender benchmarks for commissioners; outreach is not gender-responsive; psychosocial support not legally required.	Mandate a minimum of 30% women commissioners, with either the Chief or Deputy Chief being a woman; require gender-responsive outreach; institutionalize MHPSS as a legal obligation for all hearings.
Reparations	Administrative reparations model preferred over court-ordered compensation, improving accessibility for marginalized women.	Compensation omitted from some provisions; SGBV victims not explicitly listed as beneficiaries; timelines and notification vague; young women and adolescent girls not specifically recognized.	Explicitly include compensation as a form of reparations; establish a dedicated Survivor Reparation and Support Fund for SGBV survivors; extend benefits to children born of conflict-related sexual violence; specify clear notification timelines.
Criminal accountability (special prosecutor & bench)	SGBV recognized in crimes against humanity provisions; initial gender-balanced representation provisions included.	Rape definition too narrow; SGBV evidentiary standards not specified; MHPSS absent; MoWSA excluded from pro-tem council; no explicit bar on amnesty for SGBV; burden of proof not adjusted.	Define rape broadly to include penetration by objects and coercive contexts; establish specialized SOPs for SGBV evidence; shift partial burden of proof to the accused in SGBV cases; explicitly exclude SGBV from amnesty provisions; mandate in-camera hearings.
Institutional reform	Vetting of officials endorsed; commitment to structural reform of security institutions recognized.	No GBV screening for commissioner nominees; no explicit repeal authority for discriminatory laws; cooperation with women's rights organizations not specified; capacity-building not disaggregated by gender.	Screen all nominees for a history of GBV; empower the Institutional Reform Commission to repeal discriminatory laws; mandate explicit cooperation with women's rights organizations; ensure gender-disaggregated staffing and capacity-building at federal and regional levels.
Participation & enabling environment	A critical mass of intersectional women's groups — including the GRG, the expert group,	Young women, women with disabilities, and IDPs underrepresented in practice; WROs and CSOs	Enshrine WRO and CSO roles in monitoring and accountability across all TJ institutions; develop a National Legal Aid

TJ pillar	Progress achieved	Remaining gap	Proactive recommendation
	the CSO platform, and community women — is in place; CSO role formally recognized by the policy.	not assigned formal roles in monitoring and implementation.	Strategy tailored to women's needs; establish free legal aid and childcare provisions for TJ processes; proactively fund and resource women's coalition engagement.
MHPSS & victim-centered procedures	Acknowledgment of trauma in truth-seeking; safe house and peer support recommended in the policy brief.	MHPSS not institutionalized as a legal right; no formal referral system; re-traumatization risks not addressed in court procedures.	Institutionalize MHPSS as a core legal obligation across all TJ mechanisms; specify service providers, referral pathways, and state accountability; mandate trauma-informed procedures for all investigators, prosecutors, and judges.

2 The model of the project

This section presents the methodology developed and applied under the sub-project, DIMTS: *Promoting Inclusive Gender-Sensitive Approaches in the Legal and Institutional Framework of the Transitional Justice Process in Ethiopia*. It is a project outcome, serving as both a practical record and an advocacy tool, designed to be shared with civil society organizations (CSOs), donor partners, and TJ mechanisms, and to inform processes in Ethiopia and beyond.

The methodology is built on a single premise: gender-responsive transitional justice is not the addition of women to an existing process. It is a fundamental redesign of how a process listens, documents, analyzes, drafts, validates, and advocates to shape a gender-transformative TJ process in Ethiopia. This document presents how that redesign was operationalized, not as an abstract principle, but through concrete design choices, facilitation discipline, and a non-negotiable return loop that keeps women at the center from first dialogue to final advocacy.

The model responds directly to a recurring challenge in Ethiopia and across many other contexts: gender advocacy is dismissed by policymakers and elite groups as externally driven, urban, or disconnected from the realities and priorities of women in rural communities. The project addressed this by building a three-layer, six-stage iterative structure that connects women in conflict-affected and non-conflict regions to a national civil society advocacy platform and a multidisciplinary, women-only expert group, speaking in their own languages and paced by their own priorities. Two organizational anchors, NEWA and ICTJ, hold the model together across all stages.

The methodology is grounded in feminist theory and practice, integrated with MHPSS approaches and Do No Harm principles. Across two full cycles of community circles in the Amhara, Oromia, Somali, and Tigray regions, the model was tested, refined, and documented. It produced a disaggregated evidence base, a mandated GRG, a mobilized national CSO advocacy platform, and a set of gender-responsive institutional proposals now in active engagement with MoWSA and EHRC.

This document is offered to CSOs, donors, and transitional justice institutions as a replicable model: locally rooted, politically legitimate, technically grounded, and systematically accountable to women.

2.1 What this is

This is the model used by the project: a practical, replicable framework for a gender-responsive approach, with the potential to contribute to gender-transformative outcomes. It is a design that ensures the meaningful participation of women in their diversity, not as a homogenized group called 'Women.' Legal and institutional frameworks and future mechanisms can draw on the model to ensure women's meaningful participation, complementing it with practical designs and a concrete, tested implementation process grounded in the Ethiopian context and the lived realities of affected communities.

2.2 Why this document matters

In most transitional justice contexts, women are consulted but rarely positioned as the designers, owners, and validators of the processes that shape their lives. Gender provisions in transitional justice frameworks often remain symbolic: a paragraph on inclusion, a gender desk without power, a quota without substance.

DIMTS demonstrates that a bottom-up, feminist, intersectional methodology, one that starts from lived realities, moves through expert analysis, and returns to women for validation before anything is finalized, is not only principled but practical, measurable, and scalable.

Sharing this methodology matters because:

- For CSOs: it shows what centering women looks like week by week, including the design choices, facilitation discipline, and accountability mechanisms that make it real. It also provides a practical framework for strengthening CSOs' capacity to organize, convene, and carry community-grounded priorities into policy spaces, positioning them as sustained advocacy actors rather than simply vehicles for project implementation, and nurturing gender-transformative outcomes.
- For donors: it demonstrates what flexible, adaptive funding enables in a volatile political environment and what is lost when project frameworks are rigid. It illustrates how donor-supported interventions can be locally owned, politically legitimate, and grounded in the priorities of affected communities.
- For transitional justice institutions and mechanisms: it provides a replicable structure for embedding women's voices across the full TJ architecture, from community consultation to institutional drafting and implementation, without flattening the diversity of women's experiences.

3 Methodological framework

Feminist methodology

The project adopted feminist, trauma-informed, and MHPSS-aware approaches as its foundational orientation, applying them not only to program design but also to execution and reporting. This means starting from women's lived realities, treating women as active knowledge-holders and political agents rather than passive beneficiaries, and designing every stage of the process to surface, preserve, and act on what women actually say.

Feminist theory was embedded in the methodology from the start. It shaped who facilitated sessions, how notes were taken, what consent procedures looked like, how feedback was incorporated, and how findings were documented and represented. The project explicitly challenged extractive consultation models, in which women's testimonies are taken without shared control over how they are used or represented.

3.1 Integrated MHPSS and feminist practice

This project understands feminist practice and MHPSS not as separate tracks but as a single integrated orientation. Women who have survived conflict, displacement, sexual violence, or the disappearance of loved ones carry complex psychological and social realities into every engagement. A methodology that ignores this is not feminist; it simply reproduces harm under a different name.

The integration of MHPSS into the feminist design meant:

- Women-only, women-facilitated spaces: every community dialogue circle was held in a setting where women could speak without having to negotiate the presence of men or institutional authorities.
- Pacing by the women: no timetable was externally imposed; participation moved at the speed of trust, not the speed of project reporting.
- Trust-building as methodology: the opening stages of every community circle were dedicated to self-awareness, safety, and relationship-building, before any policy or legal framing was introduced.
- Consent as ongoing practice: consent was not a one-time form but a recurrent conversation, built into every session.
- Local language and cultural embeddedness: all materials, framings, and venues were conducted in Amharic, Afaan Oromo, Somali, and Tigrinya; dialogues were facilitated by women from the same region.
- Confidentiality as a precondition: confidentiality protocols and follow-up safeguards were documented and applied at every session, with MHPSS referral pathways in place where needed.
- Do No Harm applied throughout facilitation and documentation: psychosocial awareness was embedded across all engagement processes to safeguard participants' dignity and well-being while enabling women to articulate their realities and priorities.

This integration is part of the program's epistemological foundation, not a safeguard added around its edges. Women speak most fully and honestly when they are safe, seen, and trusted. That condition must be deliberately built and maintained through context-aware design, not assumed.

3.2 Do No Harm: adaptive design and methodological responsiveness

Do No Harm in this project was not a compliance checklist. It was an active, adaptive commitment: a continuous practice of asking whether a given method serves the women or the institution. When the answer was the latter, the methodology changed.

Shifting from presentation to listening. In the first cycle of community circles, sessions were facilitated through PowerPoint-delivered content. Facilitators observed that this format positioned the institution at the center, not the women. Participants answered within the frame the presenter offered, rather than from their own experiences. In Somali (Jigjiga) and Tigray (Mekelle), the project shifted to low-tech, circle-format listening sessions drawing on adult literacy facilitation methods. Trust-building and self-awareness exercises replaced introductory content. The change was immediate and documented: women spoke more fully, more personally, and more freely.

Adapting to shifting political timelines. When federal parliamentary engagement was no longer available as the primary advocacy entry point due to the outgoing legislative term, the project did not wait. It deepened engagement with MoWSA and EHRC, sharpened its policy briefs, and strengthened regional CSO and community-women foundations, ensuring that when the next parliament is seated, the evidence base and constituency are already in place.

Protecting women from exposure and misrepresentation. Do No Harm governed how testimonies were documented, how findings were attributed, and how advocacy positions were constructed, ensuring that women retained meaningful influence over how their experiences were represented in policy spaces. This commitment was embedded in facilitation manuals and upheld by experienced facilitators throughout.

Do No Harm, in this methodology, is inseparable from feminist practice: both require the practitioner to continuously subordinate institutional convenience to the agency, safety, and integrity of the women they work with.

3.3 Adaptive design: from presentation to listening

The visual contrast between the two session formats carries methodological weight. The shift from PowerPoint-delivered content to circle-format listening sessions is not cosmetic. It reflects the core feminist principle that the process belongs to the women, not to the institution facilitating it.



Somali Region, second cycle: the shift to listening-first, women-centered facilitation created space for fuller, more self-determined engagement.



Tigray (Mekelle), first round community discussion after adopting the facilitation manual from PowerPoint delivery to trauma-informed adult literacy methods



Somali Region (Jigjiga), first round PowerPoint lead community discussion.

3.4 Feminist, MHPSS-aware, and Do No Harm principles in action

The table below captures how feminist principles were operationalized across the project implementation, making the approach measurable and visible, not merely stated.

Principle	What it means	How it was applied in this project
Women as a diverse group	Women are understood as a diverse group, not a homogenized category called 'Women.'	Design and documentation deliberately surfaced the diversity among women across social position, age, religion, and disability, so that their differences were preserved rather than averaged into a single category.
Women as knowledge-holders	Women's lived realities are valid and central sources of evidence on which policies and institutions should be anchored.	Community circles were designed as listening spaces where women defined their priorities, rather than as consultation exercises where institutions sought confirmation. Women's priorities were then captured in policy language and amplified.
Challenging extractive research	Women must retain control over how their voices are used.	The return loop is non-negotiable (see Stage 5: Validate). No advocacy position is finalized without women reviewing and approving it, including validation by national CSO representatives.
Intersectionality	Gender intersects with age, ethnicity, religion, displacement, disability, and livelihood, each shaping a woman's experience differently.	Documentation explicitly tracked intersectional markers across the Amhara, Oromia, Somali, and Tigray regions; diversity was preserved rather than averaged out.

Principle	What it means	How it was applied in this project
Women-only and women-facilitated	Safe spaces require deliberate structural choices, not just good intentions.	Every community circle was women-only, facilitated by women trained from the same region, and held in the local language.
Feminist epistemology	How we know what we know must be tested and redesigned.	Session formats shifted from PowerPoint delivery to low-tech listening circles when the former was found to center the institution rather than the women.
Pacing participants by	Women decide the speed and depth of engagement.	No externally imposed timetable; trust-building and self-awareness came before policy framing in every circle.
Consent as continuous practice	Consent is not a one-time signature but an ongoing relationship.	Consent was revisited at each stage; participants noted the consent process as meaningful and respectful.
Intergenerational inclusion	Young women's voices must not be subsumed by senior representation.	The GRG is explicitly intergenerational: younger experts challenge, question, and sit alongside senior cohort members.
Reflexivity	Practitioners examine their own positionality and its effect on the process.	Facilitation debrief protocols documented facilitator observations about power dynamics, participation patterns, and methodological adjustments. All sessions are followed by debriefs among facilitators, note-takers, and MHPSS support staff, while project-level debriefings take place after each session with concrete adjustments identified for the next.
Do No Harm	Methods, processes, and outputs must not compromise women's safety, dignity, agency, or integrity for institutional convenience or program objectives.	Facilitation, documentation, attribution, validation, and advocacy processes were designed to safeguard dignity, confidentiality, and agency, and to ensure women retained meaningful influence over how their experiences and priorities were represented and used.
Adaptive design as feminist practice	When a method no longer serves the women, it is changed.	The pivot from PowerPoint to circle format and from parliamentary to executive-track advocacy both reflect this commitment in practice.
Bottom-up advocacy	Justice agendas are defined by women from below, not handed down from above.	Community voices shaped the evidence base; the CSO advocacy platform translated them; the GRG grounded them technically; policy proposals carried women's priorities, not institutional assumptions.

4 The model: three layers of engagement¹

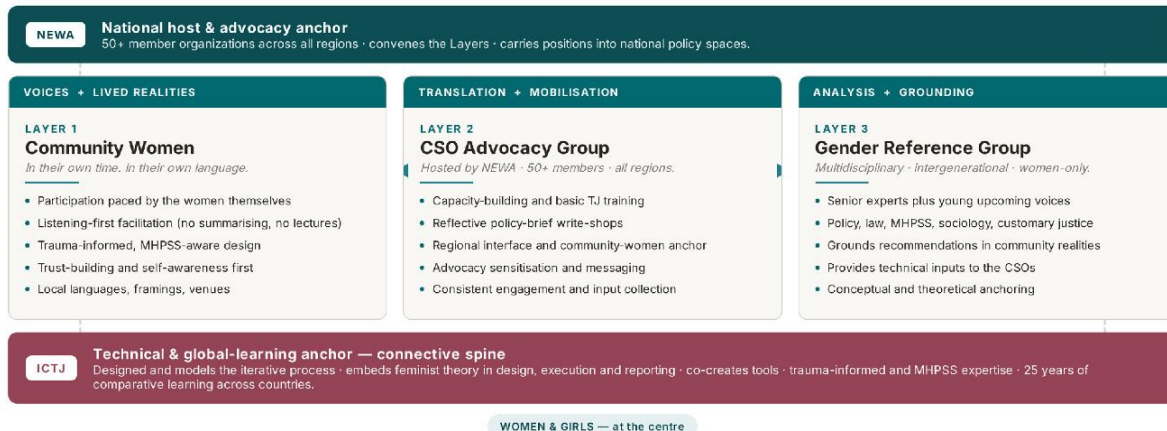
Three layers of women. Two organizational anchors. One shared center: women and girls in Ethiopia.

The model connects three distinct groups of women, each with a defined role and a shared center of gravity: the lived realities of women in Ethiopia.

GRAPHIC 1

The three-Layer engagement model

Three Layers of women. Two organizational anchors. One shared centre — women and girls in Ethiopia.



Solid lines indicate the continuous two-way flow of voices, evidence and technical input across the three Layers. The two organizational anchors — NEWA (national host) at the top and ICTJ (technical and global-learning hub) at the bottom — run underneath every Layer at every stage. Strategic interlocutors (MoWSA, EHRC, federal Parliament) sit outside the model and are engaged through NEWA and ICTJ.

4.1 Layer 1: community women — voices and lived realities

Community women participate in dialogue circles held in their own spaces, in their own languages, and at their own pace. These are women from conflict-affected and non-conflict areas across the Amhara, Oromia, Somali, and Tigray regions, including women who have survived displacement, sexual violence, the disappearance of loved ones, and the collapse of livelihoods and community structures.

The facilitation design is deliberately non-instructional. Facilitators listen. They do not summarize, paraphrase, lecture, or correct what women say. The first sessions are dedicated to trust-building and self-awareness. Policy and legal framing, in accessible, plain language, enters only after women have established a safe, shared space. Women who have experienced conflict rarely speak fully in mixed, male-dominated, or public settings. Layer 1 is what makes everything else credible. If it is rushed or compromised, every subsequent layer loses its anchor.

4.2 Layer 2: civil society advocacy group — translation and mobilization

The civil society advocacy group is hosted by NEWA, drawn from its 50+ member organizations across all regions and engaged consistently across the full project cycle. This layer bridges community voices and national policy spaces. Around eight CSO members participate directly, while seventeen NEWA member organizations receive broader capacity-building in transitional justice, gender, and the Ethiopian TJ architecture. The group convenes reflective policy-brief write-shops, maintains regional

¹ The full document outlining the model can be found [here](#).

interfaces, and carries advocacy messages and structured community input into national dialogue, making it harder to dismiss women's demands as urban, elite, or externally generated.

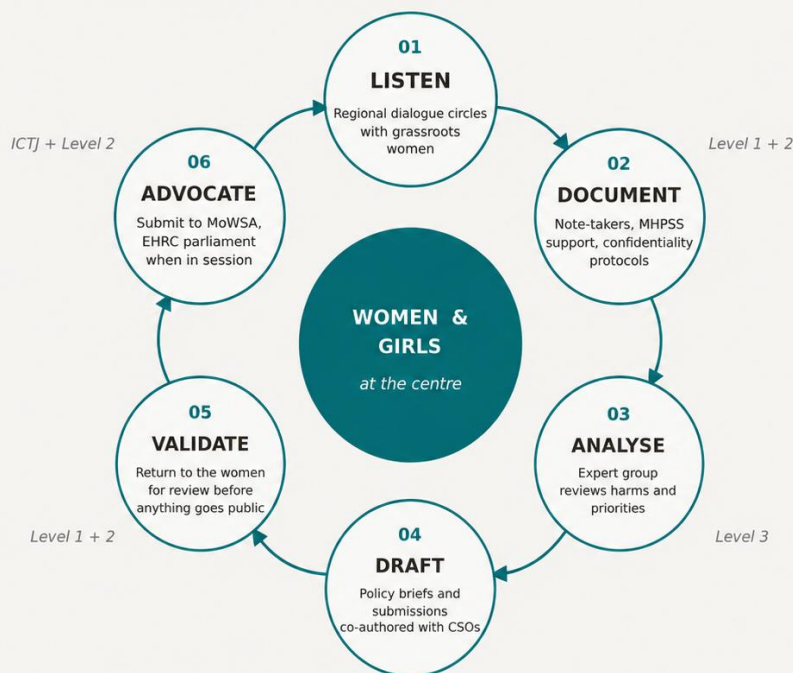
4.3 Layer 3: the Gender Reference Group — analysis and grounding

The GRG is a multidisciplinary, intergenerational, women-only expert hub that serves as the project's knowledge anchor. Mandated by the CSO platform, it brings together senior and young women experts with conceptual and theoretical grounding; deep contextual knowledge of Ethiopia's political, historical, social, and sectoral realities; and analytical lenses spanning gender and women's rights, transitional justice, public law, MHPSS, sociology, customary justice, economics, and public policy. Its intergenerational composition is deliberate: younger experts learn alongside and challenge the senior cohort, ensuring the GRG reflects the diversity of women's expertise it aims to represent.

5 The six stages of the iterative cycle

AN ITERATIVE PROCESS — NOT A LINEAR ONE

Each stage feeds the next, and every loop returns to the women.



The loop is never closed at Advocate — each cycle returns to Listen, carrying back what advocacy did or did not move.

Listening-first

Trauma-informed

Local language

Intergenerational

Adaptive and flexible

Each stage feeds the next, and every loop returns to the women. The loop is never closed at Advocate: each cycle returns to Listen, carrying back what advocacy did or did not move.

Each of the six stages is owned by a layer but reinforces the others. The Validate stage is non-negotiable: no advocacy position is finalized without returning to community circles and the CSO platform.

Stage	Core action	Feminist features	Policy and institutional impact
01. Listen	Women's circles and regional dialogues	Women speak in their own languages; women-only spaces; MHPSS-aware; rural and marginalized voices centered; women treated as knowledge-holders, not beneficiaries.	Defines the starting point for TJ design in women's lived realities; surfaces community-defined priorities and harms.
02. Document	Ethical recording of inputs	Consent-based documentation; intersectionality made explicit across age, region, ethnicity, displacement, disability, and livelihood.	Produces a robust, disaggregated evidence base to inform laws, policies, and institutional reform.
03. Analyze	GRG multidisciplinary expert review	Intergenerational women experts across gender, law, MHPSS, sociology, economics, and customary justice; narratives read alongside national context and international standards.	Translates women's experiences into technically grounded policy options aligned with women's rights and Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) normative standards.
04. Draft	GRG and CSO platform draft messages, principles, and proposals for TJ institutional and legal design	Women's priorities embedded at the center; focus on representation, safety, access, and intersectional inclusion; pushes beyond tokenistic gender paragraphs.	Generates concrete proposals for gender-responsive institutions, procedures, and safeguards in the TJ architecture.
05. Validate	Take drafts back to women	Non-negotiable return loop; women review, contest, and amend; reinforces shared ownership and political legitimacy.	Ensures final advocacy positions are accountable to women through their organizations and carry a demonstrable mandate from communities.
06. Advocate	Multi-level advocacy and follow-up	CSO platform and WROs from all regions speak collectively; GRG anchors technical continuity.	Embeds women's voices in policy spaces at community, national, and regional levels; creates a scalable, sustainable model for influence beyond one project cycle.

The return loop is the methodological innovation that distinguishes this model from extractive consultation. Before any advocacy position is finalized, drafts are taken back to the CSO platform for validation, correction, and refinement. Women retain meaningful influence over how their experiences and priorities are represented: not only in the listening stage, but in what is ultimately carried into policy spaces in their name.

6 The two organizational anchors

Two organizations provide the connective spine that holds the three layers together across all six stages.

6.1 NEWA: national host and advocacy anchor

NEWA is Ethiopia's primary national network of women's associations, bringing together more than 50 member organizations across all regions. With over two decades of evidence-based advocacy on

gender equality, GBV, and women's participation in peace and governance, NEWA provides the institutional trust and political legitimacy that makes the model viable. In this methodology, NEWA hosts the civil society advocacy layer, mobilizes the national network to demonstrate that women's positions span the country and cannot be dismissed as niche, and carries collective positions into national policy spaces as a recognized interlocutor with MoWSA, EHRC, and the federal Parliament.

6.2 ICTJ: technical and global-learning anchor

ICTJ designed the iterative methodology, embedded feminist theory into its architecture, and accompanied implementation across all three layers, functioning as co-designer, learning partner, and methodological guarantor. Specifically, ICTJ:

designed the overall iterative process and embedded feminist theory into methodology, execution, and reporting;

- Embedded an MHPSS-aware orientation across every activity from mobilization through validation;
- Provided technical training;
- Designed implementation tools, including facilitation manuals, note-taking guidelines, and the conceptual framing for the three-layer design;
- Accompanied implementation across all layers to maintain methodological consistency and ethical safeguards; and
- Brought 25 years of comparative experience in gender and transitional justice from over 50 countries.

ICTJ's accompaniment enabled NEWA to design, learn, and adapt in a politically volatile and culturally complex environment: conditions under which a feminist, bottom-up methodology can only function with sustained technical partnership.

6.3 Coordination, design, and process

The coordination design operationalizes the three-layer model into a functioning, multi-actor process across four regions.

Community women provide foundational evidence in Layer 1. The CSO advocacy platform in Layer 2 translates and organizes that evidence into structured input. The GRG in Layer 3 subjects that input to multidisciplinary technical analysis. The return loop brings outputs back to the CSO platform before anything enters public or policy spaces.

NEWA and ICTJ coordinate this cycle continuously, not only at formal stage transitions. Their coordination responsibilities include:

- Convening and facilitating layer interactions and inter-layer exchanges;
- Maintaining methodological consistency across regions with diverse conflict contexts, languages, and social dynamics;
- Ensuring that note-taking, consent recording, and debrief processes meet feminist and MHPSS-integrated standards;
- Aligning GRG outputs, CSO advocacy products, and community positions so they speak with coherence; and
- Sustaining trust-based relationships with MoWSA, EHRC, and, when in session, the federal parliament.

ACDD supports advocacy infrastructure and dialogue facilitation in a co-convenor role. Strategic interlocutors, namely MoWSA, EHRC, and the federal Parliament, sit outside the three-layer model and are engaged through NEWA and ICTJ/ACDD as primary advocacy targets.

6.4 Stakeholders and entry points

Stakeholder	Role in the methodology	Engagement led by
Community women in the Amhara, Oromia, Somali, and Tigray regions	Source of lived realities, priorities, and preferred mechanisms.	NEWA member organizations, trained women facilitators, ICTJ.
NEWA member organizations (50+)	Host the CSO advocacy group; mobilize regional representation; carry national advocacy.	NEWA secretariat, CSO platform.
Gender Reference Group (GRG)	Analyze, ground, and translate inputs into policy- and institution-ready recommendations.	NEWA convening; ICTJ accompaniment and technical support.
Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA)	Primary executive interlocutor on gender mainstreaming in the TJ framework.	ICTJ, NEWA, GRG, CSO.
Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)	Constitutionally mandated to educate, raise awareness, and monitor; a key ally in advancing women's rights priorities in the TJ process.	ICTJ, NEWA, GRG, CSO platform.
Federal Parliament (when in session)	Legislative target for the draft TJ proclamations.	NEWA-led parliamentary outreach and legislative advocacy, with ICTJ technical support, building on foundational work to sustain engagement beyond the project cycle.
ACDD	Co-convenor and National Operational Implementer; supports advocacy infrastructure and dialogue facilitation.	Joint co-implementer of the project in Ethiopia, alongside NEWA and ICTJ.

7 Achievements, challenges, and mitigation measures

7.1 Key achievements

Achievement	What was delivered
The three-layer, six-stage grounded and tested model (replicable)	A six-stage, three-layer iterative model designed, tested, and refined across two full cycles of community circles in four regions.
Gender Reference Group	A national, multidisciplinary, intergenerational GRG convened and mandated.
CSO advocacy platform	A CSO advocacy platform mobilized across all regions through NEWA's membership base, equipped with TJ-specific capacity-building, write-shops, and advocacy messaging tools.
Established a critical mass of women (expandable)	A broad and expandable infrastructure of women's constituencies capable of sustaining long-term follow-up, reflecting the long-term nature of TJ processes.
Institutional engagement: strategic alliance with state institutions	Sustained, trust-based engagement with MoWSA and EHRC as primary executive and constitutional interlocutors.

Achievement	What was delivered
Documentation system: institutional anchors	A documentation system comprising facilitation manuals, note-taking and documentation guidelines, debrief notes, and consent protocols, replicable for other CSOs and TJ processes.
Inclusive evidence base	A disaggregated, intersectional evidence base from community circles, analyzed through the GRG's expert lenses and available for sustained advocacy and gender-transformative TJ design.
Global knowledge contribution and advocacy: voices from the South shaping global discourse through an international anchor	A locally rooted, politically legitimate, technically grounded model that contributes to comparative gender and TJ discourse and informs international policy decisions.

7.2 Common challenges and mitigation adopted

Challenge	What it involved	Mitigation adopted
Volatile political environment	Slipping legislative timelines and shifting policy windows required continuous adaptation.	Adaptive, iterative design that accommodates timeline shifts without compromising the participation core.
Safety, protection, and pacing	Surfacing women's lived experiences, particularly in conflict-affected regions, demands time, MHPSS support, and confidentiality that conventional project timelines do not accommodate.	Secured MHPSS support as a dedicated resource at the project level and developed a referral pathway system within the existing infrastructure.
Sustaining the return loop	The return loop is resource-intensive and slows reporting cycles, creating tension with standard program management expectations and project timelines.	Built the return loop into the model as non-negotiable and protected the time and resources it requires.
Risk of tokenism: business as usual	Pushing institutions beyond symbolic inclusion toward substantive gender-responsive architecture requires continuous, long-term engagement beyond a standard project cycle.	An organization-focused approach that builds on what has been achieved, with local organizations' full ownership as the central programmatic focus, sustained across varied funding sources (Phase I and Phase II).
Coordination load	Three layers, two anchors, multiple regions, and several strategic interlocutors create significant demands on coordination capacity.	Close monitoring, dedicated coordination manuals and communications protocols, institutionalizing coordination, and reflecting it in the budget.
Funding flexibility	Adaptive design depends on donors' willingness to accept timeline shifts and budget reallocation as the political environment evolves.	Close follow-up and established, trusted strategic donor engagement sustained beyond project cycles.
Sustaining the critical mass: the three layers	Community women, the GRG, and the CSO platform exist beyond this project, but institutionalizing them requires continued investment.	Continued investment framed as a long-term commitment, anchored in local ownership.

Challenge	What it involved	Mitigation adopted
Trained facilitators	Community-level facilitation that genuinely integrates MHPSS-informed feminist skills requires significant investment in selection, training, and ongoing support.	Significant, sustained investment in facilitator selection, training, and ongoing support.

8 Call to action

8.1 For program and project implementers

Women's roles in Ethiopia's TJ process are not niche, not urban, not alien to the culture. This project documented a three-layer process that connects women in communities across conflict-affected and non-conflict regions to a national CSO platform and a multidisciplinary expert group, developing advocacy positions that are then returned to the women for validation before reaching any policy space. Advocacy work anchored in a similar model provides a credible, legitimate process for amplifying women's collective voice and sustaining engagement across the long arc of transitional justice.

- Make the return loop non-negotiable: no advocacy position leaves the process without going back to community women for validation.
- Pace participation to the women themselves: invest in trust-building, self-awareness, and emotional preparedness before introducing any policy framing.
- Build a multidisciplinary, intergenerational expert layer alongside the advocacy layer so that community voices reach policy tables with both legitimacy and technical depth.

8.2 For state institutions, particularly transitional justice mechanisms

Engagement with similar models gives institutions a stable, technically grounded interlocutor across political cycles: not a single project, but a sustained constituency. The evidence base is disaggregated, intersectional, and traceable. Gender-responsive provisions in the TJ architecture carry a documented mandate from women across the country.

Gender-responsive institutional design, anchored in representation, safety, access, intersectional inclusion, and reparations, is operationally feasible and measurable. The foundational findings and insights from this process are ready to inform proclamations, regulations, and institutional procedures and protocols.

- Draw on community-grounded, intersectional, and traceable evidence generated through participatory processes, ensuring that women's priorities are not only heard but reflected in institutional design, procedures, and practice.
- Recognize organized women's constituencies, CSO platforms, and multidisciplinary expertise as part of the connective infrastructure that enables continuity, legitimacy, and accountability across political and institutional transitions.
- Embed representation, safety, access, intersectional inclusion, and reparative measures into the TJ architecture from the outset, treating gender responsiveness as a design and implementation question rather than a standalone component.
- Build participation processes that are paced by women, supported by trust-building and psychosocial awareness, and designed to protect women's agency throughout consultation, validation, and advocacy.

8.3 For international partners and donors

Flexible, adaptive funding is what enables women to enter rights-based and policy-level conversations on their own terms. In a volatile sociopolitical environment, rigid project frameworks force CSOs to either skip the return loop or miss the policy moment, and neither outcome is acceptable when the goal is the institutional and sociocultural change that gender-transformative TJ requires.

- Implement flexible, adaptive funding systems that respond to the changing sociopolitical environment and accommodate women's safety and pacing priorities.

- Ensure sufficient funding for local-language adaptation, women-only facilitation, MHPSS-integrated support, and the time required for trust-building and the return loop.
- Make long-horizon investments in the connective infrastructure: NEWA's national convening capacity, the CSO platform, the GRG, and ICTJ's technical accompaniment, so that the critical mass survives and the cycle continues beyond a single funded project.
- Recognize that political legitimacy is built through process, not announced through outputs.
- Adopt flexible timelines that follow the women and their engagement, not the other way around.

9 Women's priorities from the Amhara, Oromia, Somali, and Tigray regions

Between June 2025 and May 2026, the project convened Women's Dialogue Circles in four conflict-affected regions of Ethiopia.² Each circle ran over two days, in a women-only space, with women facilitators and MHPSS support available throughout. The conversations were guided by the TJ Policy of April 2024 and Article 35 of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Constitution. What follows is an attempt to render participants' voices in their own words, with as little translation as the report can manage. Sessions were facilitated using an ICTJ-developed facilitation manual and ethical note-taking guidelines.

9.1 Participant profile

Participants in NEWA and ICTJ's transitional justice community discussions across Amhara, Oromia, Tigray, and Somali were mainly women from conflict-affected areas, chosen for their independence and ability to share lived experiences. They highlighted displacement, gender-based violence, resilience practices, and traditional peace networks, ensuring that survivors' voices and grassroots perspectives are included in Ethiopia's transitional justice process.

The circles were structured around the same ten-session methodology: safe-space building, self-awareness, gendered harm, mapping of harms, women and public space, truth-seeking, traditional justice, reparations, participation, and closing reflections. The convergence across the four regions is striking. So is the regional specificity. This section presents each region in turn, then closes with cross-regional points of convergence and divergence.

9.1.1 Participant selection and rationale

Women were selected from the Amhara, Oromia, Somali, and Tigray regions based on clear criteria: they were politically unaffiliated, able to express themselves freely, and had lived experience in conflict-affected areas. The rationale was 1) to ensure that women from grassroots communities, often excluded from policy conversations, could voice their needs and priorities, and 2) to strengthen advocacy pathways by linking community perspectives with urban and institutional centers. This approach aimed to empower women to speak for themselves and shape strategies that reflect local realities.

9.1.2 Role of regional CSOs

Sessions were facilitated by regional CSO members affiliated with NEWA, who are well known in their communities. Their familiarity with local contexts enabled them to identify participants according to agreed criteria and ensure inclusivity.

9.1.3 Participant demographics

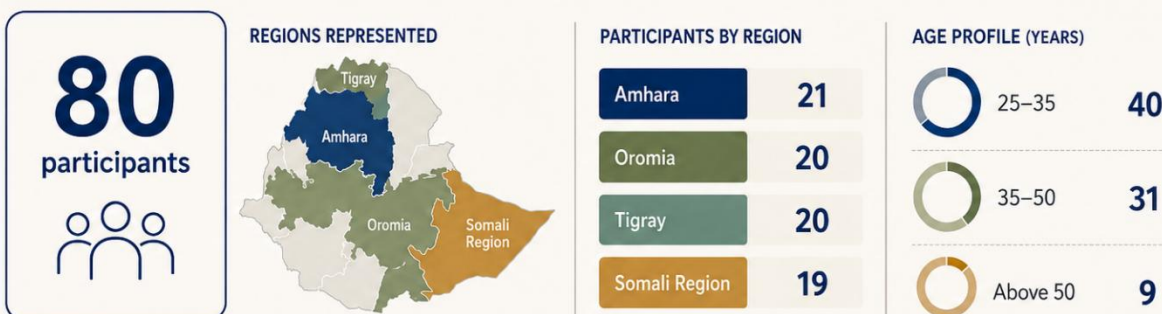
Across all regions, most participants were women between the ages of 25 and 50, representing a middle generation that balances household responsibilities with active community leadership roles. Their participation reflected a range of intersecting factors, including literacy levels, mobility constraints, livelihood backgrounds, and regional identities, that shaped both opportunities for and barriers to engagement. In contrast, the representation of women over the age of 50 was comparatively lower, pointing to generational disparities that may be influenced by these overlapping social, economic, and contextual challenges.

² The full community discussion report can be found [here](#).

Community Discussion Participants

 Community women participants

Who participated in the regional dialogue circles



REPORTED PROFILE INDICATORS

Education		Religion		Livelihood	
Basic	46	Orthodox	60	Employee	25
High School	29	Muslim	35	Housewife	27
Degree	7	Protestant	7	Trader	15
				Other Jobs	36



The community dialogue circles brought together women from four regions with diverse age, education, religion, and livelihood backgrounds.

9.2 Tigray region: Mekelle Women's Dialogue Circle

Mekelle, the capital of the Tigray region, was at the center of the 2020–2022 conflict. Women in the dialogue circle came from Mekelle and the surrounding woredas. The conflict's scale, the documented pattern of CRSV, and the layered crisis of return, food insecurity, and displacement shape every conversation in Mekelle. Participants demonstrated deep awareness of the rights framework and equally deep frustration that those rights have not protected them.



Tigray region second round community discussion

9.2.1 What women in Tigray prioritized

- Justice, safety, and recognition as victims were the most urgent priorities, named explicitly across multiple sessions.
 - Accountability for documented atrocities: gang rape, killings in religious institutions, attacks in front of family members, killings of dependents, and destruction of homes and livelihoods.
 - Family reunification for women whose husbands, sons, and brothers were detained, disappeared, or killed.
 - Free healthcare for survivors, including reproductive health, MHPSS, and trauma counseling.
 - Livelihood restoration through vocational training, small business support, farming assistance, and access to financial resources.
 - Land and property restitution with legal support for women whose property was seized by relatives or others during the conflict.
 - Reform of customary justice: Dibarto (women-led mediation) preserved and strengthened; Abogereb (male-dominated elders' mediation) reformed to include women and stop pressuring SGBV victims to forgive.

A combined formal and traditional justice system, not a choice between them.

“They tell us, ‘Forgive him, for the sake of the children.’ But the children are watching. What lesson are we teaching them?”

Participant, Mekelle Dialogue Circle — on customary mediation in SGBV cases

9.2.2 How women in Tigray want to participate

Regarding truth-seeking processes and the Truth Commission, Tigrayan women were emphatic: most preferred confidential, private approaches. Specifically, they asked for written testimonies submitted through trusted individuals, anonymous testimony, and private conversations with women facilitators. Confidentiality, emotional safety, and protection from retaliation were repeatedly named as essential preconditions for participation. Women who had children as a result of CRSV described layered social exclusion that the Truth Commission must explicitly recognize.

“I will tell you what happened. But I will not stand in a public hall and say it. I will write about it. Or I will whisper it. But it will be the truth.”

Participant, Mekelle Dialogue Circle — on truth-telling preferences

9.2.3 Barriers to participation: Tigray

Practical barriers, such as childcare, household duties, transportation costs, and long distances, frequently prevented women from attending existing consultations. Social barriers, fear of gossip, shame, and public identification prevented those who could attend from speaking. Safety concerns, including fear of retaliation and re-traumatization, added a third layer. The solutions women proposed included: women-only consultations, women facilitators and translators, transportation support, childcare services, and stronger confidentiality guarantees.

9.3 Amhara region: Desse Women's Dialogue Circle

Desse, in South Wollo of the Amhara region, has been on the front line of multiple cycles of conflict since 2021, involving federal forces, Tigrayan forces, and Fano militia formations. The dialogue circle in Desse drew fifteen women from urban and peri-urban areas, with MHPSS support available throughout. The conversations were facilitated in Amharic. Women in Desse described a layered conflict with multiple actors, repeated displacement, and a particular weight of widowhood and female-headed households.



Women Community discussion in Dessie, Amhara Region

9.3.1 What women in Desse prioritized

- Recognition of women's burdens: the invisible labor, post-conflict economic responsibility, and caregiving for traumatized family members.
- Sexual violence and stigma are named as the heaviest gendered harm of the conflict, with explicit reference to the silence and shame surrounding it.
- Economic destruction of female-headed households — destruction of homes, farmland, livestock, and businesses — pushing women into poverty and dependency.
- Torture and detention are documented as a category of harm affecting women indirectly, through husbands, sons, and brothers who were detained or disappeared.
- Post-conflict marginalization: exclusion from recovery programs, leadership opportunities, and decision-making structures, despite carrying disproportionate responsibilities.
- Reparations:
 - Healthcare and MHPSS are the top priority.
 - Livelihood and economic recovery as the second priority, framed as restoring dignity.
 - Education for women and children as a third priority, explicitly named as a reparation, not a separate sectoral matter.
 - Safe housing and land access as a fourth priority.

“My burdens and contributions are invisible. I work from before sunrise to after the children sleep. Nobody sees it. Nobody counts it.”

Participant, Desse Dialogue Circle, Amhara region

9.3.2 How women in Desse want to participate

Women in Desse drew the same map as women in Tigray and the Somali region: cultural norms discourage women from speaking publicly; long-term exclusion has cost women confidence; mobility, caregiving, and financial constraints reduce participation; and some women feel actively unsafe in formal public spaces. The recommendations they made were practical and replicable: women-friendly consultation environments; transport and childcare; active outreach; local-language communication; and women's leadership opportunities at the community level.

9.3.3 On customary and formal justice

Women in Desse valued the restorative aspects of community-based justice but were direct about its risks. They asked for: women's representation in customary structures; alignment of customary mechanisms with constitutional and human rights standards; explicit accountability for SGBV; and stronger collaboration between formal and traditional systems. They did not want one or the other — they wanted both, reformed and connected.

9.3.4 Barriers to reparations: Desse

The women named lack of awareness of rights, fear of stigma and retaliation, weak institutional trust; concerns about corruption, geographic and financial obstacles, and limited documentation and evidence as the implementation barriers that the reparations proclamation must design around.

9.4 Oromia region: Women's Dialogue Circle



Community women discussion in TJ in Arsi Bakoji, Ethiopia

The Arsi-Bekoji dialogue circle took place on 21–22 April 2026 in Bekoji town, Arsi zone, Oromia region. Oromia has been the site of long-running insurgent activity, government counterinsurgency, ethnic-political tensions, and overlapping disputes over land, language, and political representation.

Bekoji women came from agricultural communities; the conversations were conducted in Afaan Oromoo, with Article 35 of the FDRE Constitution and the TJ Policy as anchor texts.



Community women discussion in TJ in Arsi Bakoji, Oromia Ethiopia

9.4.1 What women in Oromia prioritized

- Recognition and dignity are named as a precondition for any further engagement with the TJ process.
- Five categories of gendered harm are consistently named: destruction of property and economic harm; sexual violence and stigma; post-conflict marginalization; torture and detention; and family separation.
- Sexual violence is severely under-reported because of stigma and fear, with women asking explicitly that the Truth Commission and Special Prosecutor account for under-reporting in their methodology.
- Reparations:
 - MHPSS as the top priority, ahead of economic and material reparations.
 - Livelihood and economic recovery as the second priority.
 - Education for women and children as a third priority.
 - Safe housing and land access as a fourth priority.

Confidential testimony preferred by some, public acknowledgment preferred by others: the proclamations must allow both.

“We hope for training that we can carry back to other women. We carry it home. We share it. That is how change starts in our village.”

Participant, Bekoji Dialogue Circle, Oromia region — on the purpose of consultation

9.4.2 Truth-seeking and traditional justice

Women in Bekoji asked for documentation of women's stories for future generations. They were clear that truth-seeking must be both victim-centered and trauma-sensitive, and that it must recognize emotional, social, and economic harms in addition to physical violence. On traditional justice, they valued the restorative dimensions of community mechanisms but asked for: women's representation in customary structures; alignment with constitutional and human rights standards; stronger accountability for SGBV; and a clear collaboration between formal and customary systems, not a choice between them.

9.4.3 Barriers to participation: Oromia

The women named eight barriers to participation: patriarchal social norms; limited access to education and information; economic hardship; caregiving responsibilities; fear of retaliation or criticism; low confidence resulting from historical exclusion; lack of institutional support; and limited transportation.

The remedies they proposed are consistent with those in the other regions: leadership and confidence-building training, safe consultation spaces, transport and childcare, women facilitators, and an active outreach posture from EHRC and MoWSA, not a wait-and-see approach.

9.5 Somali region: Women's Dialogue Circle



Discussion with women from the community in Jigjiga, Somali region

The Somali region's dialogue circle drew women from communities with experience of multiple, overlapping conflicts, including historic counterinsurgency, drought, displacement, and continuing

tensions over resources and political representation. The women established their own ground rules at the start: punctuality, respectful phone use, respect for elders, and encouragement of quieter voices. They demonstrated strong solidarity throughout the two-day process. The framework anchor was the TJ Policy, with explicit attention to Articles 1.5.11 and 2.8 on customary mechanisms.

9.5.1 What women in the Somali region prioritized

- Government support and recognition of women's contributions, named as a structural ask, not a sentimental one.
- The cascade effect: when husbands die or disappear, wives face loss of property, forced remarriage, and exposure to further violence. When wives die, husbands remarry quickly and children suffer. The asymmetry is the structural harm.
- Sexual violence during displacement and conflict, combined with stigma in the aftermath, named as a continuing threat.
- Denial of inheritance, named as a specific harm that the reparations framework must address.
- Exclusion from public spaces — elders' councils, kebele meetings, courts, and police stations — with concrete accounts of corruption in police stations and lack of privacy in hospitals.
- Pressure to forgive in male-dominated customary councils, with women asking for explicit safeguards.
- Women's councils that exist but lack enforcement authority: women asked for the authority, not new structures.
- Anonymous reporting, written documentation, and women-only groups as preferred truth-telling channels.

“There are women’s councils. We meet. We agree. But when we go to the men’s council, our decision means nothing. We need authority, not another meeting.”

Participant, Somali region Dialogue Circle

9.5.2 Justice gaps in the Somali region

The women documented concrete justice gaps: corruption and exclusion in police stations; absence of female professionals in justice institutions; lack of privacy in hospitals; intimidation; and systemic bias. They highlighted the gap between the provision of safe spaces in women's councils and decision-making authority within male-dominated structures. The lesson they drew: inclusion of women in traditional structures and proper record systems are both critical for fairness, and neither is optional.

9.6 What the four regions converge on

When the four reports are read side by side, the convergence is striking. Across the Amhara, Oromia, Somali, and Tigray regions, women have arrived at remarkably similar conclusions about what justice requires, what reparations must include, and how participation must be redesigned. The differences are textural: the specific name of the customary mechanism, the local stigma, the economic structure. The architecture of priorities is the same.

Theme	What the four regions converge on
Truth-telling format	Confidential, anonymous, written, and women-facilitated as the default; with optional public acknowledgment for those who choose it.

Theme	What the four regions converge on
Top reparations priorities	Healthcare and MHPSS · Livelihood restoration · Education · Housing and land restitution · Public acknowledgment.
Sexual violence	Severely under-reported because of stigma. Must be codified, prosecuted, and explicitly excluded from amnesty provisions.
Customary justice	Valued for its accessibility and restorative dimensions. Must be reformed to give women authority and prohibit reconciliation pressure on SGBV survivors.
Public participation	Practical, social, and safety barriers persist across all regions. Remedies: women-only spaces, women facilitators, transport, childcare, local-language communication, and active outreach.
Documentation and data	Lack of systematic record-keeping is a structural failure. Sex-disaggregated data is needed across all institutions.
Combined justice systems	Not a choice between formal and customary systems. Both, connected and reformed, with women's authority recognized in each.
Survivor definition	Must expand to include indirect and gendered harm: widows, female-headed households, women born of conflict-related sexual violence, and women whose dependents were lost.

9.7 Where the four regions diverge: why this matters for design

The divergences are not minor. The reparations design, the customary safeguards, and the truth-seeking modalities must each be regionally tailored. Four examples illustrate why a single national template will not work.

Tigray. The documented scale of CRSV and the existence of children born of CRSV produce a specific reparations and Truth Commission challenge: how to recognize and resource MHPSS and economic support for victims and their children without re-stigmatizing them.

Amhara. Multiple armed actors and repeated displacement create a layered set of perpetrators and a more complicated narrative of harm. The Truth Commission must allow for sequential and overlapping patterns of harm.

Oromia (Arsi-Bekoji). Ongoing low-intensity conflict means that recognition of recurring harm, security guarantees for participants, and the integration of transitional justice with conflict-prevention programming are all unavoidable design requirements.

Somali region. The existence of strong women-led traditional councils that lack enforcement authority requires the customary reform task: not to create new structures, but to give existing women's structures statutory recognition and authority.

IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

National provisions, regional implementation

The five proclamations should establish a uniform national floor: representation quotas, exclusion of CRSV from amnesty, MHPSS as a legal right, customary safeguards, a

statutory CSO role, sex-disaggregated data requirements, survivor-friendly evidence standards, and an expanded victim definition.

Implementation regulations and the Truth Commission's methodology should then be regionally tailored, with regional women's consultation panels owning the local design.

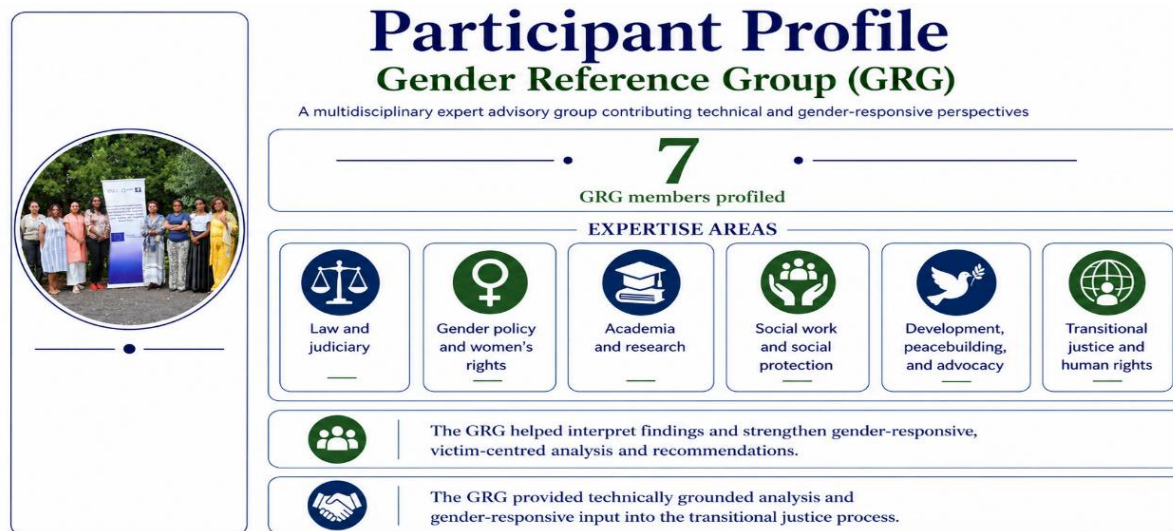
EHRC's monitoring should operate at regional as well as national level, with sex-disaggregated indicators that allow comparison and course correction.

10 The ten consolidated legislative asks

The GRG, a multidisciplinary, intergenerational group convened by NEWA and ICTJ, has reviewed the five draft proclamations and produced a consolidated policy brief. This section sets out, proclamation by proclamation, the ten legislative asks that emerge from that work.

10.1 The Gender Reference Group

The Gender Reference Group (GRG) is a multidisciplinary advisory body composed of seven experts drawn from diverse fields, including law and judiciary, gender policy and women's rights, academia and research, social work and protection, peacebuilding and advocacy, and transitional justice and human rights. The GRG, convened by NEWA in partnership with ICTJ, performs a critical function often overlooked in policy circles: technical translation. While grassroots experience and high-level policy are frequently treated as separate worlds, the GRG mandates their convergence



The group acts as a bridge, synthesizing narratives from diverse communities into sophisticated, actionable policy options. This ensures that the transitional process aligns with the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, a global normative framework that recognizes women's participation as indispensable to lasting peace and national security.

The GRG analyzes inputs, grounds them in policy, historical, and sectoral context, and provides technical recommendations. This process translates women's experiences into policy options aligned with national and international rights standards and WPS normative frameworks.

The GRG's authority is rooted in its intersectional expertise. It is not a monolith of activists, but a high-level advisory body comprising leading figures from law, academia, and social science, including Judge Etmet Assefa, Edom Genet, Lensa Beyena, Inku Asnake, Hebret Abahoy, Zebiba Musema, Meseret Techane, and Wudassie Ayele.



GRG and CSO (policy advocate for the TJ) validation workshop.

By blending legal scrutiny with social work and peacebuilding, the GRG ensures a holistic approach to justice. Its expertise spans:

- The judiciary and human rights law: ensuring legal rigor and robust accountability.
- Academia and policy advocacy: providing historical context and theoretical grounding for national reform.
- Social protection and social work: addressing the human dimension of healing and reparations.
- International development and peacebuilding: aligning national efforts with global standards for sustainable stability and gender equality.

Unlike traditional advocacy groups that operate from the periphery, the GRG uses an inside-outside strategy. Operating as a national advisory body, it provides direct technical analysis of draft TJ laws to the state's most influential institutions. Through active engagement with the Ministry of Justice, the GRG ensures that gender-responsive recommendations are embedded in the foundational pillars of the transition: truth-seeking, reparations, and accountability mechanisms.



Gender reference group draft transitional laws in review meeting

10.2 Draft proclamations — 2025

The April 2024 TJ Policy will be operationalized through legally binding instruments. The process was initiated with a skeletal zero-draft legal framework. Though the drafting process is at different stages across the five proclamations, the GRG has grounded its work in contributing to and shaping a gender-responsive TJ framework and has produced detailed gender-responsive commentary that can serve as a proactive reference for legislative advocacy and community consultations on the drafts in the near future.

10.3 The ten consolidated legislative asks

Across the five proclamations, the GRG³ and the four regional women's dialogue circles have converged on ten consolidated legislative asks. Each is drafted as a specific, justiciable provision that should appear in the relevant proclamation.

Ask 1: A minimum of 30% women in every TJ institution

GOES IN: ALL FIVE PROCLAMATIONS

Mandatory representation quotas, not aspirational targets

³ The summarized biography of the GRG can be found [here](#).

Each proclamation establishing a TJ institution shall provide that the institution's commissioners, judges, senior prosecutors, investigators, and senior staff shall be composed of women in a proportion with a minimum of 30%.

Selection panels shall be sex-balanced. Reporting on composition shall be public, sex-disaggregated, and annual. Failure to meet the quota shall trigger a public corrective process led by EHRC.

Regional, ethnic, and intergenerational balance shall be respected within the quota.

Ask 2: No amnesty for conflict-related sexual violence

GOES IN: FUNDAMENTAL CRIMES PROCLAMATION + SPECIAL PROSECUTOR PROCLAMATION

CRSV codified as a fundamental crime, explicitly excluded from amnesty

The Fundamental Crimes Proclamation shall enumerate sexual violence, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy, forced marriage, forced sterilization, sexual harassment, and any other form of sexual violence as fundamental crimes when committed in connection with armed conflict or as part of a widespread or systematic attack.

The proclamation shall explicitly provide that no conditional amnesty may apply to fundamental crimes of sexual violence, in line with the African Union Transitional Justice Policy and the Rome Statute.

The Special Prosecutor's Office shall include a dedicated SGBV unit with specialist investigators, prosecutors, and trauma-trained interviewers.

Ask 3: Gender-responsive reparations with dedicated financing

GOES IN: REPARATIONS PROVISIONS (TRUTH COMMISSION + DEDICATED REGULATION)

A dedicated reparations stream, designed by and with survivors

Reparations shall include individual, collective, symbolic, restitution, rehabilitation, and guarantees-of-non-repetition forms, each with specified eligibility and disbursement mechanisms.

A dedicated reparations trust fund shall be established with a named federal funding source and the possibility of additional contributions from international partners and a victim compensation fund.

The design of the reparations program shall be conducted through victim consultation panels with women in the majority, drawing on the four regional women's dialogue circles and equivalent processes.

Specific reparations categories shall include healthcare and MHPSS, livelihood restoration, education for victims and children, housing and land restitution, and public acknowledgment.

Ask 4: MHPSS as a legal right

GOES IN: ALL FIVE PROCLAMATIONS + MINISTRY OF HEALTH IMPLEMENTING REGULATION

Mental health and psychosocial support codified as a right, not a service

Each proclamation shall provide that victims and witnesses of fundamental crimes have a right to MHPSS before, during, and after their interaction with any TJ institution.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) shall be designated as the lead implementing ministry, with EHRC as monitoring authority.

MHPSS shall be funded as a non-discretionary component of the TJ budget, not as a service provided where capacity permits.

Ask 5: Customary and religious justice safeguards and inclusion

GOES IN: INSTITUTIONAL REFORM PROCLAMATION + TRUTH COMMISSION PROCLAMATION

A reformed customary track with mandatory women's authority and SGBV safeguards

Customary and religious justice mechanisms recognized under Articles 1.5.11 and 2.8 of the TJ Policy shall, where they receive any state recognition or referral, comply with a set of mandatory statutory safeguards:

- No reconciliation, mediation, or forgiveness procedure for SGBV cases;
- Women's representation of a minimum of 30%;
- Prohibition of decisions that pressure women to remain in or return to abusive relationships;
- Written record-keeping with confidentiality safeguards;
- Right of appeal to the formal justice system.

EHRC shall monitor and report annually on customary justice compliance.

Ask 6: Statutory CSO role for monitoring and gender audit

GOES IN: TRUTH COMMISSION PROCLAMATION + INSTITUTIONAL REFORM PROCLAMATION

A formal seat for women's rights civil society in design, monitoring, and reporting

Each TJ institution shall include a statutory civil society advisory body, with women's rights organizations represented in a proportion with a minimum of 30% with rights to: receive draft regulations for comment; receive sex-disaggregated implementation data; submit shadow reports; and trigger public consultations on emerging issues.

NEWA and equivalent women's rights platforms shall have automatic membership; additional CSOs shall be selected through a transparent process.

Ask 7: Sex-disaggregated data and gender indicators

GOES IN: INSTITUTIONAL REFORM PROCLAMATION + ALL PROCLAMATIONS

Sex-disaggregated data as a statutory obligation, not a best practice

Each TJ institution shall collect, publish, and act on sex-disaggregated data on victims and witnesses; perpetrators; cases prosecuted and outcomes; reparations awarded and disbursed; testimony given; participation in consultations; and staffing.

EHRC shall publish an annual gender audit of the TJ process with concrete remedial recommendations.

Each TJ institution shall develop a gender mainstreaming strategy within six months of establishment.

Ask 8: Survivor-friendly evidence and procedure

GOES IN: SPECIAL PROSECUTOR PROCLAMATION + SPECIAL BENCH PROCLAMATION

Evidence rules redesigned for SGBV survivors

The Special Bench Proclamation shall provide for: in-camera testimony for sexual violence offenses as the default; closed-circuit video testimony where requested; anonymous testimony where security so requires; protection of identity in public records; pseudonyms; and witness protection orders.

The proclamation shall prohibit cross-examination on sexual history; require no corroboration of sexual violence testimony; and exclude consent as a defense where there is a coercive circumstance, threat of force, abuse of power, or armed conflict context.

All Special Bench judges, prosecutors, and registrars handling SGBV cases shall receive mandatory specialist training.

Ask 9: Expanded victim definition

GOES IN: TRUTH COMMISSION PROCLAMATION + REPARATIONS PROVISIONS

Survivors include those who carry the consequence, not only those who suffered the act

The definition of 'survivor' for purposes of recognition, reparations, and participation shall include: persons directly subjected to a fundamental crime; widows and female-headed households whose dependents were killed, disappeared, or detained; women whose property was destroyed or expropriated; children born of CRSV and their families; women displaced or forcibly relocated; and women whose access to livelihood, healthcare, or education was destroyed by the conflict.

The Truth Commission shall actively seek out and document indirect and gendered harm.

Ask 10: Gender-responsive prosecution policy

GOES IN: SPECIAL PROSECUTOR PROCLAMATION

A published prosecution policy developed with gender expertise

The Special Prosecutor shall publish a written prosecution policy during establishment, setting out: case selection criteria; SGBV prioritization; victim consultation procedures; protective measures; investigative standards; and the use of joint expert teams for SGBV cases.

The prosecution policy shall be developed with the dedicated SGBV unit, the civil society advisory body, and the Truth Commission gender chamber.

Annual reporting on SGBV case selection, prosecutions, convictions, and reparations referrals shall be public.

11 Strategic alliance with mandated institutions

11.1 The mandated ministries under the TJ Policy

The Policy distributes mandate across several federal organs. Each will need internal gender capacity, dedicated budget lines, and clear coordination protocols with the others. The mandates set out below reflect the Policy text and the working understanding among project partners. As anchor organizations, NEWA and ICTJ/ACDD aim to facilitate strategic coordination, support capacity-building and training of personnel, and speak collectively to ensure a gender-transformative TJ process and a sustainable, cohesive society that protects women from structural and systemic discrimination and marginalization.

11.2 Process summary: engagements with EHRC and MoWSA

This initiative advanced gender-transformative TJ in Ethiopia through strategic institutional engagement with MoWSA and EHRC. Capacity-building workshops in Bishoftu trained 30 senior officials, 60% of whom were women, facilitated by the GRG to ensure technical depth and contextual relevance. Parallel regional workshops with EHRC frontline staff emphasized trauma-informed care, stress management, and victim-centered approaches. These engagements combined international best practices with Ethiopia's lived realities, creating meaningful synergy between civil society organizations (NEWA, ICTJ) and state institutions.

11.3 Rationale, challenges, and opportunities

The rationale was to embed gender-transformative approaches into Ethiopia's TJ framework, moving beyond nominal gender neutrality to actively dismantling systemic inequalities. MoWSA's leadership was positioned as a strategic necessity to ensure that women's lived experiences shape national justice policy. Challenges included sociocultural silence around sexual violence, deficits in the meaningful participation of women, and gaps in operational guidance within draft TJ proclamations. While MoWSA and EHRC demonstrate political will, their technical and logistical systems remain underdeveloped, risking slow or uneven implementation. Opportunities emerged through strong political buy-in, alignment with UNSCR 1325 frameworks, and participatory tools such as the Gender Power Walk, which surfaced intersectional vulnerabilities and informed policy design.

11.4 Final outlook

The report concludes that Ethiopia's TJ process cannot succeed without the meaningful participation of women as decision-makers. Next steps include cascading regional training, conducting gender-transformative audits of draft TJ laws, and strengthening referral pathways for survivors. The EHRC's Call to Action, including representation quotas, safe-space documentation, and recognition of children born of CRSV, signals genuine potential for transformation. By centering women's voices and building sustainable alliances between civil society and state institutions, Ethiopia can ensure its TJ process is not a hollow legal exercise but a truly inclusive and equitable one.

Ministry / institution	Mandate under the TJ Policy	Key gender obligation
Ministry of Justice	Lead on the five draft proclamations; oversee the Special Prosecutor; coordinate institutional reform legislation.	Drafting gender provisions into each proclamation; SGBV unit in the Special Prosecutor's Office; survivor-friendly evidence rules.
Ministry of Women and Social Affairs	Lead on gender mainstreaming across the TJ process; coordinate women's participation; lead on the design of women's reparations.	Gender mainstreaming strategy for the TJ process; coordination of women's consultation panels; reparations gender chamber.

Ministry / institution	Mandate under the TJ Policy	Key gender obligation
Ministry of Health	Lead on MHPSS provision for victims and witnesses; reproductive health response for SGBV survivors.	MHPSS as a legal right; integration of trauma services with TJ institutions; victim-centered reproductive health.
Ethiopian Human Rights Commission	Independent constitutional monitoring of the TJ process; promotion and protection of human rights, with a focus on women, children, and persons with disabilities.	Annual gender audit; monitoring of customary justice compliance; sex-disaggregated public reporting.
Federal House of Peoples' Representatives	Legislative adoption of the five draft proclamations.	Public consultation on gender provisions; sex-balanced legislative committees; women's caucus engagement.
Federal Supreme Court / Special Bench	Adjudicate fundamental crimes once the Special Bench is established.	Sex-balanced judicial panel; mandatory gender training; survivor-protective procedure.
Federal Civil Service Commission	Vetting and institutional reform of the civil service and security sector.	Gender-aware vetting criteria; sex-balanced reformed institutions; women's leadership pipeline.