



ASWAN FORUM

Chairman's Summary
**More than a Seat at the Table: Advancing the Implementation of the Women,
Peace and Security Agenda in Africa**



4-5 September 2019

ACRONYMS

APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture
AU	African Union
CRF	Continental Results Framework
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EAC	East African Community
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FemWise-Africa	Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
GNWP	Global Network of Women Peacebuilders
ICGLR	International Conference on the Great Lakes Region
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NAP	National Action Plan
NDP	National Development Plan
RAP	Regional Action Plan
RECs	Regional Economic Communities
RMs	Regional Mechanisms
SADC	South African Development Community
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCR 1325	United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325
WMC	Women Mediators across the Commonwealth Network
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

THE ASWAN FORUM

Acting in its capacity as the Chairman of the African Union (AU) and the Champion of Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development in Africa, Egypt is taking the initiative to launch the [Aswan Forum for Sustainable Peace and Development](#). Owned by Africa, and supported by international and regional partners, the Forum--to be held annually in December--is a high-level, multi-stakeholder platform that brings heads of states and governments, leaders from national governments, international and regional organizations, financial institutions, private sector, and civil society, together with visionaries, scholars, and prominent experts, for a context-specific, action-oriented, and forward-looking discussion on the opportunities, as well as the threats and challenges, facing the continent. It provides the first-of-its-kind platform in Africa to address the “peace-development nexus”, while championing African solutions to African problems, including through strengthening the links between policy and practice.

THE CAIRO INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION, PEACEKEEPING AND PEACEBUILDING

Founded in 1994, the [Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding \(CCCPA\)](#) is an Egyptian public agency; an AU Center of Excellence in training, capacity building and research; and the Arab world’s leading civilian training center on issues of peace and security. It is a major voice of the Global South on a wide range of topics, including conflict prevention and resolution, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, preventing radicalization and extremism leading to terrorism, combating transnational threats, and the implementation of the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda.

PARTNERSHIPS

Strategic Partners



Partners



Knowledge Partners



Key Messages

- The WPS agenda is not about making war safer for women; it is about preventing conflict from happening in the first place.
- Women's participation should not be measured solely by the number of seats they occupy at the table. Equally important is the impact and quality of their contribution to the entire spectrum of peace interventions (from conflict prevention to sustaining peace).
- National ownership is the key to advancing the implementation of the WPS agenda. And while African states have made good progress in developing strategies, policies and plans, implementation continues to lag behind as a result of structural barriers.
- Enhancing women's contribution to peace and security should be part of a larger strategy that aims at women empowerment and gender equality.
- The commemoration the 75th anniversary of the UN, the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the 20th anniversary of the adoption of UNSCR 1325, provide an opportunity not only to celebrate, but to take stock of the implementation of the WPS agenda and to develop actionable recommendations for overcoming persisting challenges to its implementation.
- Similarly, the ongoing reform efforts at the AU offers a unique opportunity for strategic reflection and institutional restructuring that should aim at introducing a paradigm shift from "conflict management" to "conflict prevention and sustaining peace", as well as advancing the implementation of the WPS agenda.
- As an organ of the AU and its APSA, FemWise-Africa enjoys a unique position, compared to similar networks. This potential, however, is yet to materialize, as the network continues to narrowly interpret its current mandate, as limited to mediation, rather than the full spectrum of peace interventions (from conflict prevention to sustaining peace).
- Initiatives aiming at identifying and overcoming structural barriers to women empowerment, such as the Elsie Initiative, are critical to advancing the comprehensive and meaningful implementation of the WPS agenda.

Key Recommendations

To African Countries

- African countries should not view NAPs as ends, but rather as means to unlocking the WPS agenda's truly transformative impact. States should also pass the necessary legislation that supports the implementation of NAPs.
- African states must ensure that NAPs (i) have realistic objectives, (ii) are aligned with other national strategies and plans, (iii) are developed around a clear theory of change, (iv) have predictable and adequate financing from the government's budget to the various institutions involved in the implementation, and (v) include effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.
- African countries should simplify the jargon of the WPS agenda and NAPs to ensure the necessary buy-in from ordinary citizens, who are ultimate goal of the agenda. The role of education and media is critical in that regard.
- To ensure ownership beyond state institutions, African governments should also facilitate and encourage the participation of civil society and ensure the localization of the WPS agenda.

To the African Union and Member States

- The AU and RECs/RMs should incentivize, support and monitor member states' implementation of the WPS agenda, including by utilizing tools such as the CRF. They should also play an important role in capacity building and providing technical assistance to member states.
- The AU and member states should leverage the unique position of FemWise-Africa and facilitate the realization of its full potential. Acting within its current mandate, FemWise and its members should play a key role in (1) advancing the comprehensive and meaningful implementation of the WPS agenda members, across the spectrum of AU peace interventions (conflict prevention, mediation, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, etc.), and (2) advocating and supporting the national and regional implementation of the WPS agenda.
- Related to the above, FemWise-Africa should also broaden and diversify its membership, to include local peacebuilders, African women peacekeepers, etc.
- The AU and its members states should encourage women's participation in its peace support operations, including by developing and implementing an AU strategy on gender parity.
- African training centers of excellence should ensure that women have equal training opportunities to perform all roles in AU Peace Support Operations, including leadership positions.
- African (and international) research centers should give priority to examining the persisting structural barriers to advancing the WPS agenda, so as to bridge knowledge gaps and develop context-specific recommendations for overcoming them.

To Partners

In addition to financial support, partner countries and organization should:

- reassess their funding modalities in a manner that reinforces national ownership of the design, implementation and evaluation of NAPs. provide technical assistance and support to capacity development for African countries and organizations
- increase support to initiatives aiming at overcoming structural barriers to the comprehensive and meaningful implementation of the APWS agenda, such as the Elsie Initiative.
- Systemically invest in experience-sharing through networks, such as the Nordic Women Mediators Network and the Women Mediators across the Commonwealth.
- avoid duplication of efforts through better coordination, complementarity and coherence of donor efforts.

INTRODUCTION

The contribution of women as a powerful force for peace has long been acknowledged. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) landmark resolution 1325 not only highlighted the differentiated impact of conflict on men and women, but also emphasized the significant role of women in the prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts. Since 2000, eight additional UNSC resolutions have been adopted, together constituting the WPS agenda.

Nevertheless, the WPS agenda remains an underutilized tool for shaping effective responses to today's conflicts in Africa. The representation of African women and their meaningful participation in peace processes remains limited. African women continue to be exposed to serious threats or actual violence, including sexual and gender-based violence

Against this backdrop, and in the lead up to the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325, CCCPA, acting in its capacity as the Secretariat of the [Aswan Forum for Sustainable Peace and Development](#), organized an expert workshop titled: “**Advancing the Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Africa: Overcoming Challenges and Seizing Opportunities**”, on 4-5 September 2019, in Cairo, Egypt.

The workshop brought together experts from the local, national, regional, continental and international levels to take stock of the implementation of the WPS agenda in Africa, identify opportunities and challenges facing its full and meaningful implementation, and suggest concrete and action-oriented recommendations to be considered by African leaders during the Aswan Forum and beyond. Discussions explored the operational and programmatic linkages between the WPS, conflict prevention, sustaining peace and sustainable development agendas, as well as the lessons learned and best practices from the development and implementation of African National Action Plans (NAPs). The workshop highlighted opportunities for enhancing the AU's contribution to advancing the comprehensive and meaningful implementation of the WPS agenda across the full spectrum of peace and security interventions¹.

This Chairman's Summary captures the key messages and recommendations emerging from the workshop discussions. It highlights critical dimensions of the WPS agenda, with a particular focus on the participation pillar--namely enhancing national ownership, including through (i) the development, funding, implementation, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of high-impact National Action Plans (NAPs); (ii) strengthening the role of the AU and regional economic communities and mechanisms (RECs/RMs) in advancing the comprehensive and meaningful implementation of the WPS agenda across the spectrum of peace interventions--from conflict prevention to sustaining peace; (iii) promoting the role of the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise-Africa) and other regional and international

¹ Participating humanitarian, development, peace and security actors included officials from African countries: Cote D'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, and Tunisia. They were joined by officials from other partner countries: Canada, Japan, United Kingdom, and Sweden. The workshop also featured representation from the Office of the AU WPS Special Envoy, Panel of the Wise Secretariat, and FemWise-Africa. It was also attended by representatives from the Global Network for Women Peacekeepers (GNWP), the United Nations Development Programme, UN Women, the National Council for Women in Egypt, Réseau Paix et Sécurité des Femmes de L'Espace CEDEAO, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the African Development Bank, the Institute for Inclusive Security, the Institute for Security Studies, La Plateforme des Femmes du G5 Sahel, Women Mediators across the Commonwealth (WMC), and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency .

Women Mediators Networks in Africa; and (iv) enhancing African women's participation in United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping and AU Peace Support Operations.

WPS in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities on the National Level

The responsibility of designing and implementing NAPs to advance the comprehensive and meaningful implementation of the WPS agenda in Africa lies, first and foremost, with states through inclusive and participatory planning and programming approaches. These should ensure the involvement of local authorities, civil society, the private sector, local communities, and other key stakeholders.

NAPs translate the objectives of UNSCR 1325—and the WPS agenda at large—on the national and local levels. Developing NAPs allow national stakeholders to identify WPS priorities, determine responsibilities and authorities, and allocate resources to initiate and pursue strategic actions within a defined timeframe. They also ensure the implementation of agreed-upon legal and policy frameworks on WPS in a context-specific manner, and mainstream gender into national peace and security structures and processes. Moreover, they provide a basis around which external support can be garnered and organized, hence advancing both national ownership and effective partnerships.

NAPs are not only critical to countries emerging from conflict, but also to those at peace. They allow countries to raise awareness of the crucial role of women in the society and to establish/further augment the foundations of women's rights and gender equality. For example, a NAP that has increasing the country's women contribution in peacekeeping as one of its objectives, can ensure the political commitment to strategically address the need to include women in national peace and security structures in the first place. NAPs also provide a platform through which governments and civil society can collaborate on vital peace and security matters.

To date, 25 African countries have developed NAPs to advance the implementation of the WPS agenda; at least 3 more, Egypt, South Africa, and Somalia are developing their first. Other countries have developed broader gender strategies to advance gender equality and women empowerment. **Despite these advancements, persisting challenges hinder the ability of these strategies and plans to have a truly transformative impact.**

Beyond the development of NAPs, only a few African countries have advanced to the implementation phase. Some governments view NAPs as a box-checking exercise, not meant for implementation. In some cases, this is due to the lack of political will to translate commitments into action. A case in point is the fact that half of the existing NAPs have no budgets; very few are structured around a clear theory of change; many are formulated with a pillar-focus; and very few incorporate high-impact elements.

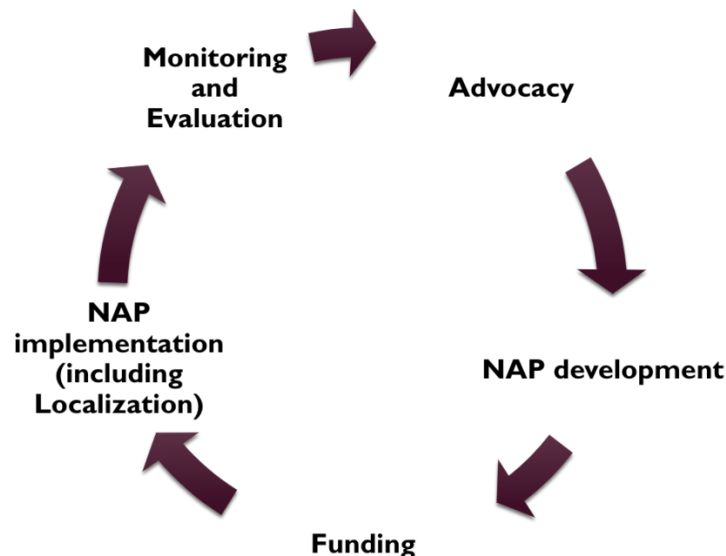
Even when political will and national ownership exist, structural and operational challenges persist, impeding meaningful implementation. Structural challenges include the unequal distribution of power within societies among men and women, stereotypes, social norms, and legal barriers which slow down the implementation of NAPs. Operational challenges include lack of or inadequate capacity, the absence of mechanisms that effectively engage civil society actors and local communities, as well as the lack of sustainable funding to execute planned activities.

The unsustainability and unpredictability of funding stands out as a critical obstacle. **Funding is often available for the design phase, but not necessarily for implementation.** The design and implementation phases of NAPs have often been assigned to gender ministries and mechanisms, which are usually among the least endowed of government entities, and in many cases lack the necessary authority and mandate to advance meaningful implementation.

To overcome these challenges, **a whole-of-state approach is key to the development, funding, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of NAPs.** They should not be viewed as a project or an end in themselves, but rather as a process; a long-term process. At their core, NAPs should be about empowering women and addressing gender inequality as a root cause. **As such, they must be regarded as an exercise of good governance. Adequate structures and resources should be put in place to ensure effective implementation and high impact.**

In “Creating National Action Plans: A Guide to Implementing Resolution 1325”, Inclusive Security identifies the **key pillars of high-impact NAPs:** political will; design; coordination across ministries; CSOs engagement; M&E; and funding. These pillars enable the integration of the WPS agenda in NAPs and ensure efficient implementation that shifts the focus from process to impact.

NAPs should be designed along the full cycle of WPS implementation: advocacy, NAP development, ensuring sustainable funding, implementation at the national and local levels, and M&E.



NAPs should be viewed as tools to address women’s right to equality and empowerment. To achieve this, NAPs should be aligned and integrated with other gender-sensitive national strategies, including national development and security, human rights, climate change, and counterterrorism strategies and policies. This ensures integration, coherence and complementarity of national efforts.²

² Somalia’s first NAP is currently being developed. In 2019, Somalia developed and adopted its women’s charter, which clearly lays out a comprehensive agenda for advancing WPS issues and commits to developing a NAP. The Somali National

Building flexibility in NAP design is critical. The NAP design process must be effectively customized to ground the WPS into national and local contexts. NAPs cannot, and should not, be exact replicas that follow a standard template.

Critical to the quality of a NAP, is clearly outlining specific and achievable priorities and objectives, assigning responsibility for achieving them, identifying the resources needed and the timeline for accomplishing them, and developing indicators to measure progress over time and promote accountability³.

Consultation and inclusion of local stakeholders and communities should not take place after a NAP is developed; this should be part of the design phase. NAPs create space for governments to engage civil society, the private sector, local communities and other stakeholders to work together in the service of a shared vision. A NAP could be perfect on paper, but unless it accurately reflects and addresses the real, diverse and pressing experiences of women on the ground, it is useless⁴. This localization is key to inclusive and high-impact NAPs.

Related to the above, there is a **need to simplify the jargon and language of NAPs and their pillars to ordinary people.** Ordinary citizens are vital for the implementation of a NAP, and it is only when they understand the benefits of inclusion that they assume its ownership, because they feel they have a real stake in the process.

Transparency and effective communication are also vital to ensure the success of NAPs. Information should be routinely disseminated and shared with the public, especially information on the status of implementation by different actors involved. This communicates results, explains the benefits to citizens, and reassures stakeholders and partners.

NAPs must be structured around a “theory of change” to ensure that they go beyond being a mere laundry list of priorities. The desired impact or objective (i.e. what the country aims to achieve within the allotted timeframe) should be at the forefront of a NAP framework. To that end, all NAP steps should be structured as intermediate goals aimed at realizing the overarching objective.

Objectives must be realistic and tangible. States often fall into the trap of overpromising and under delivering. A NAP theory of change must be structured in a logical way and should aim for relevance rather than quantity. To achieve this, states must limit the NAP’s objectives to those that can be realistically attained given the limited resources available.

Development Plan (NDP) highlights this commitment as a priority for the Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development, with “Pillar 9” of the NDP focusing on integrating CSOs, UN agencies, as well as federal government ministries in the development phase, to ensure that the process is both inclusive and consultative. The development of Somalia’s first NAP provides a good example of efforts to align the WPS agenda with national development goals.

³ Uganda has taken positive steps to ensure that proper legislation and accountability mechanisms are in place. For example, it launched a gender and equity budgeting tool which obliges key sectors (education, health, justice, law and order...) to comply to gender and equity requirements in order for their annual budgets to be approved.

⁴ The South Sudan NAP, launched in in 2015, became a critical tool for facilitating the participation of women and the incorporation of their voices and concerns. The governance structure of the NAP employed a whole-of-government approach, and CSOs played a pivotal role in the creation and signing of the Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, thus generating momentum for implementation of the NAP.

In the absence of financing, NAPs remain as promises on paper. Predictable and sustainable financing, through costing and allocation of national resources, is critical for NAP implementation. The Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 recommends that NAPs be adequately costed and financed, starting with the design and planning phase.

NAPs are national security documents that should be nationally funded, not only to ensure sustainability, but also to ensure national ownership. Governments must steer away from overreliance on external funding sources and instead dedicate funds from national budgets for NAP implementation. Among the successful models of financing is **sectoral costing and budgeting of the NAP and including it in the ministerial budgets; this makes it a collective responsibility**⁵. Most of Africa's NAPs, however, are largely dependent on donor funding for implementation. Over-reliance on donor financing for NAP development and implementation impedes national ownership.

GNWP has developed a detailed manual on costing and budgeting to help member states design and implement well-costed and reliably budgeted NAPs that allow for long-term planning and continuity of interventions. The GNWP costing and budgeting methodology was developed, not just as a technical tool, but also to help governments decide on priorities to focus on.

Additionally, **choosing a strategic timing for the NAP to be adopted and implemented is also key to ensuring that NAP implementation is not too heavily associated with one party or election cycle.** NAPs should identify specific timeframes for full plan periods--usually around four to five years--and ensure that domestic political election cycles are accounted for in such planning.

In addition to securing adequate and sustainable funding, and ensuring strategic timing, **sectoral coordination across various government entities, civil society, the private sector, and regional and international stakeholders is key for effective implementation and monitoring.** NAPs must adopt a whole-of-government approach.

Situating the responsibility for NAP implementation at higher levels of authority--such as the prime minister level--has led to stronger ownership and leadership, more effective coordination, as well as a greater ability to incentivize action and collaboration on implementation. The highest levels of management in each entity must own the activities relevant to the WPS agenda to allow effective coordination and move away from working in silos, and duplicating efforts.

Once a state has developed appropriate outcomes for the NAP, it must put in place adequate indicators to measure progress. Impact measurement is paramount for successful and meaningful implementation of the WPS agenda and NAPs. It is the responsibility of states to develop their reporting and evaluation modalities to ensure continuous monitoring and evaluation, which is among the main pillars for high impact NAPs.

Adequate M&E systems make it possible to identify implementation gaps, such as political will, institutional leadership and financing at all levels, which when addressed, can contribute to

⁵ Kenya also provides a good example. Despite being partially dependent on donor funding, its NAP is mainstreamed and reflected in sectorial budgets. Mali also used an innovative pool funding mechanism to secure financial support for its NAP. These models ensure that all processes from design to implementation will be reliably, sustainably and domestically funded.

the realization of the WPS agenda goals within the predetermined timeframes. They also help improve policies and programs, strengthen actors' commitment and partnerships and build a solid basis for sustainable investment by various actors. They facilitate the sequencing of interventions and linking various steps to each other, assigning responsibilities, and providing measurable qualitative and quantitative indicators that render measuring implementation progress much easier. Moreover, **they also ensure holding relevant actors accountable.** In short, employing results-based M&E mechanisms is crucial for holding actors accountable and guaranteeing the overall transparency of the process.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) general recommendation no. 30 is considered one of the bodies to which member states report on the implementation of NAPs; however, it is still the primary responsibility of member states to decide on their reporting modality. Regular monitoring is among the pillars for high-impact NAPs and must therefore be incorporated all throughout the NAP process. **A common misconception is that M&E only comes into play at the final stage of the NAP--this could not be farther from the truth.** An effective M&E system must be established at the earliest phases of design and planning to ensure that system-wide WPS commitments are translated into actionable and measurable policies and strategies.

NAPs, especially first-generation ones, should not be too ambitious so as not to stretch national resources too thin. They must set realistic goals and target tangible outcomes. NAPs should also be constantly revised and updated. On the other hand, second-generation NAPs afford countries the opportunity to tackle and address persisting gaps and challenges that faced the implementation of the first NAP.

In developing new NAPs, **African countries should benefit from the continent's experiences and lessons learned from designing, implementing and measuring the impact of existing national and regional NAPs.** The WPS Focal Points Network, currently chaired by Namibia, provides an important tool for member states and regional organizations to share good practices and lessons learned on NAP implementation.

An innovative approach to NAP development and implementation is "twinning". **Twinning allows for two or more countries that have developed NAPs, or are in the process of developing new NAPs, to collaborate and share relevant experience and resources.** For example, Finland twinned its first NAP with Nepal. Exchanges are taking place between Jordan and Finland, and between Jordan and Tunisia. Twinning highlights the significance of engagement by global champions of WPS to support policy processes in countries with less developed NAPs, not only to provide mentorship and technical expertise, but also to learn from their experiences.

The Role of the AU, RECs and RMs in Advancing the WPS Agenda

While recognizing the imperative for national ownership for advancing the comprehensive and meaningful implementation of the WPS agenda in Africa, it is also important to recognize the vital role that the AU and RECs/RMs do and can play in supporting national efforts.

Gender equality and women empowerment are well enshrined in the AU's constitutive documents. The AU Constitutive Act of 2002 stipulates that that the AU's organs will function

in accordance with the principle of gender equality. **Agenda 2063** calls for realizing the full potential of women and youth, boys and girls, with freedom from fear, disease and want. The 2004 **Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa** calls for the full and effective participation and representation of African women across the spectrum of peace interventions, from prevention, to conflict resolution and management, as well as post-conflict reconstruction and development. The **2005 Maputo Protocol** called on African states to take all appropriate measures to ensure women's participation in "the structures and processes for conflict prevention, management and resolution at local, national, regional, continental and international levels"; and "in all aspects of planning, formulation and implementation of post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation."

Institutionally, the AU has taken major steps in advancing the implementation of the WPS agenda. It is the first regional organization to apply parity at its highest executive level, with the appointment of five women commissioners. It appointed a **Special Envoy on WPS in 2014**, mandated to "ensure that the voices of women and the vulnerable are heard much more clearly in peacebuilding and conflict resolution". A **Gender, Peace and Security Program (2015-2020)** was adopted with the aim of mainstreaming gender in all peace and security programs. The establishment of FemWise-Africa in July 2017 promised another breakthrough.

Moreover, the **AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) for 2018-2028** sets out a plan for the realization of Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063 through the mitigation and elimination of the major constraints hindering GEWE. The **AU's Women, Gender and Development Directorate** leads and coordinates the Union's efforts on gender equality and development, and ensures implementation of GEWE as well as member states' compliance with the AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa.

Moreover, in 2019, the Office of the Special Envoy launched **the Continental Results Framework (CRF)** as a tool for monitoring efforts to advance the implementation of the WPS agenda. In addition, a policy on preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse in AU peace support operations was recently released.

The AU's approach to the WPS should focus on operationalizing its normative frameworks, rather than creating new ones, while updating those frameworks as the need arises. More focus should be given to equipping member states with the necessary knowledge and tools to implement the WPS agenda, and to facilitate related activities and programs by RECs/RMs.

The appointment and activities of the AU Special Envoy on WPS is a major milestone in that regard. The **AU CRF for Monitoring and Reporting on the Implementation of the WPS Agenda in Africa (2018-2028)** provides African member states with a common point of reference for WPS implementation. It puts forward 28 monitoring and tracking indicators that are built around the 4 core pillars of UNSCR 1325: prevention, participation, protection, relief and recovery. As such, it **presents an indispensable tool to bridge the gaps between policy and practice by providing systematic and focused monitoring of WPS implementation.** The CRF also introduces an additional theme crucial to the African context: "WPS in the context of emerging security threats". This theme ensures that WPS principles are integrated into efforts to prevent and respond to emerging security threats, such as extremism conducive to terrorism.

Violence against women, gender-based violence, and sexual exploitation and abuse, along with other types of challenges facing women and triggering conflicts should be integrated as gender-sensitive indicators in continental early warning systems (to prevent conflict from erupting and ensure that women's needs are properly addressed). Gender-segregated data analysis is also imperative to sustaining results.

RECs/RMs also play an instrumental role in advancing the implementation of the WPS agenda in Africa. On the normative level, Africa is home to the highest number of regional strategies and plans on WPS in the world (a total of six to date): ECOWAS, IGAD, EAC, SADC, ICGLR and ECCAS all have regional action plans. IGAD is on track to having all member states adopt NAPs or equivalents by 2020.

Regional action plans incentivize member states to develop and implement NAPs. Furthermore, the AU works closely with member states, RECs, civil society organizations, the private sector, as well as other partners to study the gaps and synergies. For example, since the implementation of the IGAD Gender Policy Framework (2012-2020), and the adoption of the Gender-Responsive IGAD Peace and Security Strategy, **the number of IGAD member states with NAPs has increased from one to four.** South Sudan and Djibouti's NAPs are under implementation and approaching midterm reviews, while Uganda and Kenya are currently engaged in preparing their next-generation NAPs (third-generation NAP for Uganda and second-generation for Kenya).

*More than a Seat at the Table:
The Role of Continental and Regional Women Networks*

Despite African traditions that acknowledge women's roles as peacemakers and peacebuilders, there is strong trend for overemphasizing women's victimhood as a result of conflict, and for overstating the impediments that stand in the way of their effective participation in peace processes.

This is not to downplay the many structural barriers that impede women's meaningful participation. Illiteracy, for instance, is one of the most common challenges to women's empowerment and political participation. To address this issue, concerted efforts are needed to address discriminatory practices in education, to encourage girls' equal competence in all subjects, and to contribute to growing a bigger pool of potential female capacities.

Women's participation should not be measured by the number of seats they occupy at the table, rather by the quality of their contribution and the impact they are able to achieve. Women mediators' networks provide valuable opportunities for building capacities and knowledge transfer, conducive to effective participation in peace processes, both formal and informal.

While they share many experiences, women are not a homogenous group. They, like all societal groups, are divided along economic, ethnic, class, and religious lines. Their representation, therefore, should reflect that diversity. In other words, understanding women's needs and bringing them to the table requires women, at all levels, to be engaged, and empowered to share their experiences and play meaningful roles. The integration of young women, in particular, into women mediators' networks is important. Participation must be

diversified to ensure that female representation is actually indicative of the real needs of everyday women and not just a privileged few. This has been noted as one of the limitations of FemWise-Africa.

Moreover, advancing women's meaningful participation requires selection based on qualifications rather than gender. In order for women to be more actively engaged in conflict resolution and prevention, **participatory processes should be adopted--incorporating both "elite" well-educated women, as well as women at the grassroots levels whose challenges to participation are equally important, and need to be acknowledged and addressed.** Women should not solely focus on advocating for women and gender issues. As such, the WPS agenda is about empowering women to have meaningful contributions to peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding, rather than limiting their influence to gender and women issues. Women should be empowered through having access to peace processes, and through training and capacity-building to discuss substantial and political issues.

Women mediators and peacebuilders networks are powerful instruments to enhance women's meaningful participation--a main pillar of UNSCR 1325. They create a pool of qualified women who take part in conflict prevention and peace processes, and are deployed in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions. **They are also important platforms for experience and knowledge sharing⁶.**

Despite their enormous potential, women networks remain an under-utilized tool for advancing the WPS agenda on the national, regional and continental levels. The establishment of FemWise-Africa⁷ in July 2017 promised a breakthrough.

The network brings together African women involved in conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding, from across the continent. FemWise-Africa aims at "1. Professionalizing the role of women in preventive diplomacy and mediation at Tracks 1, 2 and 3 levels; 2. Ensuring a channel for women's meaningful and effective participation in peace processes, including as heads of official high-level mediation missions; 3. Initiating women's action that will catalyse and mainstream the engagement of women in mediation in line with the African Union's "Agenda 2063" and the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); 4. Bridging the gap between Tracks 1, 2 and 3 mediation and synergizing efforts towards inclusive peace processes with sustainable outcomes. 5. Strengthening the mediation interventions of FemWise-Africa with the facilitation of Quick Impact Projects and the establishment of local and national peace infrastructures as foundations and Launchpad for medium and longer term initiatives that will ensure that stability and development take root."⁸

⁶ Networks like WMC bring together women from different experiences of mediating conflict to learn from each other, thus effectively reinforcing female mediation capacities. They connect formal and informal peace processes and support women's engagement in post-peace agreement phases, be it in the elections or implementation phase, or in preventing the relapse into conflict by enhancing the national infrastructure for peace. WMC deployed women mediators to Sudan and strengthened AU efforts on the ground by complementing them through practical capacity building activities and field visits to conflict areas. Its activities range from community level mediation to civil society, national, regional and international mediation.

⁷ Similarly, African women leaders have come together to launch the African Women Leaders Network, an action-oriented initiative that seeks to enhance the involvement and leadership of women in peace, security and development issues in the continent. National Chapters of the African Women Leaders Network are currently being established, to ensure the translation of international and regional goals to specific national contexts.

⁸ AU Final Concept note on "Operationalization of "FemWise-Africa", 2017 <http://www.peaceau.org/uploads/final-concept-note-femwise-sept-15-short-version-clean-4-flyer.pdf>

Compared to other regional networks, FemWise-Africa is uniquely **positioned as a component of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) to play critical roles: first as a locomotive for advancing the full and comprehensive implementation of the WPS agenda across the continuum of AU peace interventions--from conflict prevention to sustaining peace; and second, as a platform for strategic advocacy of the WPS agenda on the national and regional levels. That potential, however, is far from fully realized. The ongoing reform efforts at the AU present an opportunity to address some of these challenges.**

On one hand, the network’s potential role in mediation is hindered by persisting capacity gaps, with only half of its members having completed the induction training. This must be urgently addressed. On the other hand, and despite its clear conflict prevention and peacebuilding mandate, much of the focus of the network has been on mediation.

Women’s contribution to conflict prevention and sustaining peace goes beyond their effective contribution to mediation and peace processes. Equally important is their contribution to the totality of efforts aimed at “preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation, and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development”.⁹

Acting within its current mandate, FemWise-Africa can play an important role in this regard. Special attention should be given to operationalizing its stated objectives, namely the contribution of the network to the establishment of local and national peace infrastructures, as foundations and launchpads for medium and longer-term initiatives that will ensure that stability and development take root, including through facilitation of Quick Impact Projects.

African women’s contributions should flow through all of the AU’s pillars, including APSA and the African Governance Architecture. **Beyond mediation and peacebuilding, FemWise Africa’s expertise in the broader WPS agenda presents an untapped potential to advance implementation across the full spectrum of AU peace interventions--from streamlining gender-sensitivity in early warning (through the Continental Early Warning System) to increasing female participation in AU-led peace support operations.** The network can also play an important role in developing, updating and operationalizing the AU’s normative frameworks for the protection of women in armed conflict, including, but not limited to, the recently released AU policy on preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse in AU peace support operations.

To complement the above, the network can also play an important role in supporting efforts by its own members (and others) to advance the implementation of the WPS agenda on the national and regional levels. This can be achieved **through advancing the development, implementation, and evaluation of high-impact national and regional action plans (NAPs, RECs/RMs), and** accelerating the establishment of national networks.

Enhancing African Women’s Role in Peacekeeping

⁹ [S/2017/76 - Security Council Report – Report of the Peacebuilding Commission on its tenth session](#)

Women and men have the equal right to participate in peacekeeping. Equally important, the participation of women in peacekeeping improves the overall operational effectiveness of a mission. It ensures the integration of a gender perspective, improves communication and outreach with local communities.¹⁰ UNSCR 2436 (2018) reaffirms the importance of ensuring the full, effective and meaningful participation of women in all aspects of peacekeeping.

Nevertheless, women’s participation continues to be underrepresented in peacekeeping operations. As a result, the UN Department of Peace Operations launched the Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018-2028. **An equivalent strategy should be developed by the AU to enhance women’s participation in peace support operations.**

While numbers matter, **women are still seen as needing protection rather than being protectors.** Women’s capabilities continue to be viewed as innate, traditional, and stereotypically feminine, irrespective of their qualifications or training. **Policies calling for increased women’s participation must clarify the benefits of providing more qualified women peacekeepers and leaders and focus on the quality of their participation. Women’s roles must not be reduced to “soft” tasks that cater to preconceived gendered assumptions.** Instead, meaningful participation by women includes combat roles, community engagement, information gathering, and planning operations. **Women must be given an equal opportunity to perform tasks without being evaluated based on their gender. A change in the mindset is crucial.**

Changing these attitudes starts at the national level. The limited number of women in the national security sector reduces the potential for women’s participation in peacekeeping operations. **Quotas have not necessarily translated into the substantive and equal participation of women in security positions and spheres.** Rwanda is a good example for aligning national efforts with the WPS agenda: Women represent 21% of the national police in the country, allowing it to significantly enhance its contribution to UN peacekeeping operations (2nd largest contributor of female police personnel).

States must work to remove the obstacles standing in the way of women’s participation within the security sector. Military and police forces do not always provide a working environment that is conducive to women’s participation. They should provide separate and secure accommodation facilities, create childcare options for mothers, and design equipment and uniforms that fit women. **Peacekeeping missions should tailor the requirements and deployment criteria to suit both men and women.** Moreover, a mechanism should be put in place in national institutions to ensure that the application for deployment is widely circulated, and that the selection procedures are transparent and consistent.

Women’s participation in peacekeeping operations cannot be pursued through quick-fixes, but rather by means of concerted efforts built on analysis, research and proper financial planning. The government of Canada has launched its groundbreaking “Elsie Initiative” as a multilateral pilot project that aims to develop, apply and test a combination of approaches to help study and overcome barriers to increasing women’s meaningful participation in peace operations.

¹⁰ For example, and despite its unfortunate prevalence, incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse continue to be under-reported because female victims fear reporting their cases to male investigators. Having women peacekeepers encourages women to report incidents and provide information that can help condemn the perpetrator and increase accountability.

Efforts to increase women’s participation in peacekeeping operations should not be siloed. For instance, the media can play a powerful role in mitigating negative conceptions of women in security forces. Furthermore, it can be used as a tool to provide young women with role models, especially those who have occupied senior positions as peacekeepers.

Continental, regional and international actors play a pivotal role in this process. The AU and UN should ensure that recruitment and training policies are inclusive and gender-sensitive, with clear policy guidelines and strategies for recruitment. Women should be trained to take on leading roles and senior positions in peacekeeping operations.

On the national level, NAPs for the implementation of the WPS agenda should serve as a concrete commitment for institutions to work on achieving women’s participation in peacekeeping operations, through ensuring accountability and ownership by various stakeholders tasked with implementation and realization of that objective within a specific timeframe.

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