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Ulf Engel

**Women, Peace,
and Security in Africa:
An Agenda beyond a
Place at the Peace Table?**

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Women, Peace, and Security in Africa: An Agenda beyond a Place at the Peace Table?*

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Abstract

Already in 1993, the forerunner of the African Union (AU), the Organization of African Unity (OAU, 1963–2001), was instrumental in establishing what became known as the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. This theme was further developed by the 4th United Nations World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) and finally led to the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on the role of women in the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict. Since then, two debates have dominated the field: (1) the prevention of sexual violence against women and children in armed conflict and post-conflict situations and (2) the full, equal, and effective participation of women at all stages of peace processes. In practice, the AU Panel of the Wise was key to establishing institutions and launching related AU policies. In 2014, the Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace, and Security (OSE WPS) was established, a five-year Gender Peace and Security Programme (GPSP) was launched, and the African Network of Women in Conflict Prevention and Peace Mediation (FemWise-Africa) was founded.

This working paper reviews the development and relevance of the WPS agenda in the wider field of non-military AU conflict interventions.¹ In the next section of the paper, the emergence of the international WPS norm is briefly discussed. In the third section, the institutionalization of the WPS agenda by the AU is reconstructed. In the fourth section, the management of the agenda is examined. And, finally, the implementation of the WPS agenda is analysed with an empirical view on (1) women participation in peacebuilding and (2) recent debates around sexual harassment, abuse, and exploitation. This is followed by conclusions.

1 For a background, see U. Engel, "African Union Non-Military Conflict Interventions", in: F. Onditi et al. (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Diplomatic Thought & Practice in the Changing World*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming 2023.

Introduction

In response to the fact that women and girls have increasingly been targeted as victims in violent conflict and with the aim of increasing the representation of women in processes of conflict management and resolution, the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda has taken shape over the past c. 25 years.² Today, the agenda has become a norm in African continental relations as well as intrastate policies. But it remains unfinished business at many levels: the situation of women and girls in violent conflict and post-conflict situations has not really changed; by and large, women remain excluded from many peace-building activities, and the underlying mechanisms of patriarchal power relations have mainly been left untouched.

In the last decade, the literature has increasingly highlighted sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) not only in violent conflicts but also in daily life on the African continent.³ The role of women as perpetrators in violent conflicts, on the other hand, has only recently been studied scientifically.⁴ A more recent debate is on the role of peace-keeping missions in the sexual exploitation and harassment of female refugees and camp inmates.⁵ With regard to WPS and the African Union's (AU) African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), important contributions have been made on the role of women in conflict mediation.⁶ Despite progress in some areas, however, the overall ratings are cautious.⁷

Depending on the feminist school authors relate to, significant "norm diffusion" and progress has been recognized in the way the United Nations (UN) or the African Union nowadays think about WPS. But from a critical feminist perspective, there is the view that "the WPS architecture has left gendered power relations largely unchallenged".⁸ Most observers have recognized a severe implementation gap, including a narrowing down of the agenda on the "inclusion of women into peace and security institutions and processes without a deeper reflection of what their participation may mean for legitimizing post-conflict patriarchal and militarized orders".⁹ Likewise, the South African academic Cheryl Hendricks calls for "more holistic and groundbreaking responses for the types of challenges

2 F. N. Aoláin et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Conflict*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018; S. E. Davies and J. True (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

3 See, for example, D. Buss et al. (eds.), *Sexual Violence in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies: International Agendas and African Contexts*, London: Routledge, 2017; S. Buckley-Zistel and U. Krause (eds.), *Gender, Violence, Refugees*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2019; O. Yacob-Haliso and T. Falola (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook on Women's Studies*, vol. 1, *Research & Knowledge Production, Politics, Conflict, and Violence*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021; and A. Budoo-Scholtz and E. C. Lubaale (eds.), *Sexual Violence and Vulnerability*, vol. 2, *Violence Against Women and Criminal Justice in Africa*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.

4 See, for example, N. A. David and M. S. Lawal, "Gender, counterterrorism and counterinsurgency in North-East Nigeria", in: U. A. Tar (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook on Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency in Africa*, London: Routledge, 2021, pp. 628–640.

5 R. Burke, "Due Diligence and UN Support for African Union Security Forces: Peacekeeper Sexual Violence Exploitation and Abuse", *Journal of International Peacekeeping* 21, no. 1 (2017), pp. 1–61.

6 S. Desmidt, P. Apiko, and K. F. Sævarsson, "Women and Mediation in Africa under the APSA and the AGA", Maastricht: European Centre for Development Policy Management, 2017; I. Limo, "What Do Networks of Women Mediators Mean for Mediation Support in Africa?", *Conflict Trends*, no. 1 (2018), pp. 42–49; A. R. Walender, "Women and Conflict: Roles in Conflict Mitigation and Resolution in Africa", in: P. R. Aall and C. A. Crocker (eds.), *The Fabric of Peace in Africa: Looking Beyond the State*, Waterloo: Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2017, pp. 219–225.

7 H. J. Abdullah, "Women and the African Peace and Security Architecture", APN Working Papers 12, New York: Social Science Research Council, 2017; A. Porter, "Women, Gender, and Peacebuilding", in: T. Karbo and K. Virk (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Peacebuilding in Africa*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 317–337; S. Desmidt and L. Davis, "Rhetoric and Real Progress on the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda in Africa", Maastricht: European Centre for Development Policy Management, 2019; T. Haastrop, "WPS and the African Union", in: Davies and True, *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security*, pp. 375–387; N. Wilén, "Women, Gender and Peacebuilding in Africa", in: B. Charbonneau and M. Ricard (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of African Peacebuilding*, London: Routledge, 2022, pp. 128–137. See also UNOAU and DPPA, SHE Stands for Peace, Addis Ababa: UN Office to the African Union, UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, 2022, https://e.issuu.com/embed.html?d=55418_she_stands_ebook&u=ssfp.

8 H. Hudson, "The Power of Mixed Messages: Women, Peace, and Security Language in National Action Plans from Africa", *Africa Spectrum* 52, no. 3 (2017), p. 4.

9 C. Hendricks, "Progress and Challenges in Implementing the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda in the African Union's Peace and Security Architecture", *Africa Development* 42, no. 3 (2017), p. 73.

encountered, i.e., that gender inequality and insecurity are deep rooted and multi-layered, and thus negate mechanistic responses that do not deal with cultural and structural issues”.¹⁰ The overwhelming majority of contributions to this academic debate still comes from women.¹¹

Norm Emergence: Women, Peace, and Security

The issue of women has been on the Union’s agenda since 1974, when the first All-African Women’s Conference was held. The nexus between women and development has been discussed since 1979. Especially in Southern Africa, women played an important, though maybe not always prominent role, in liberation struggles against colonial oppression in West Africa as well as white settler colonialism and apartheid in Southern Africa. In preparation for the 4th UN World Conference on Women, which was held in Beijing in 1995, the UN Economic and Social Council and UN Economic Commission for Africa organized a regional conference on “Women, Peace and Development” in Kampala, Uganda. The subsequent Kampala Action Plan on Women and Peace focused on four areas: “the nature and effects of conflict and underdevelopment, women in the struggle for peace, the empowerment of women in the peace process, and peace education”.¹²

Building on this process, on 31 October 2000 the UN Security Council (UNSC) adopted the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on the role of women in the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict.¹³ This resolution focused mainly on two thematic dimensions: the prevention of sexual violence against women and children in armed conflict and post-conflict situations and the full, equal, and effective participation of women at all stages of peace processes.¹⁴ Over the past 20 years, both issues have regularly been mulled over by the UNSC. In recent years, the UNSC, first, has emphasized the sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeepers¹⁵ as well as how slow the progress has been in addressing and eliminating sexual violence in situations of armed conflict in particular against women and children.¹⁶ And, second, the UNSC has repeatedly stressed the need to push for removing persisting barriers to the full implementation of UNSCR 1325.¹⁷

10 C. Hendricks, “Women, Peace, and Security in Africa: Conceptual and Implementation Challenges and Shifts”, *African Security Review* 24, no. 4 (2015), p. 364.

11 See F. Olonisakin, K. Barnes, and E. Ikpe (eds.), *Women, Peace, and Security: Translating Policy into Practice*, London: Routledge, 2012; C. Hendricks and R. Sigsworth (eds.), *Gender, Peace and Security in Africa*, London: Routledge, 2016; and A. Chitando (ed.), *Women and Peacebuilding in Africa*, London: Routledge, 2020.

12 United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNESCO) and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), “Kampala Action Plan on Women and Peace: Adopted by the Regional Conference on Women, Peace, and Development (Jointly Organised by OAU, UNECA and the Government of Uganda, Kampala, 22–25 November 1993)”, Addis Ababa: UN Economic and Social Council and UN Economic Commission for Africa, 1994, <http://repository.uneca.org/handle/10855/14879> (accessed 3 May 2020).

13 United Nations Security Council (UNSC), “UNSC Resolution 1325 (2000) on the Role of Women in the Prevention, Management, and Resolution of Conflict” (adopted at the 4213th UNSC meeting on 31 October), 2000, S/RES/1325.

14 In more detail, UNSCR 1325 highlights the following topics: protection and respect of the human rights of women and girls, equal participation of women in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, full participation of women in decision-making functions in conflict settlement and peace processes, mainstreaming a gender perspective in all areas of peace missions, particular protection and allowance for the needs of women and girls in internally displaced persons and refugee camps, allowance for the different needs of female ex-soldiers, support of local peace initiatives by women, and training peace-keeping soldiers in the human rights of women.

15 See UNSC resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2072 (2016), and 2436 (2018).

16 See UNSC resolution 2467 (2019); see also the regular reports in this regard of the UN secretary-general, United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), “Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse: Report of the Secretary-General”, 22 February 2022, A/76/720; see UNSC, “Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: Report of the Secretary-General”, 29 March 2022, S/2022/272.

17 See UNSC resolutions 1889 (2009), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), and 2493 (2019).

The AU has adopted far-reaching and detailed policies on gender equality and women rights, as expressed in the 2003 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, the 2003 Maputo Declaration on Gender Mainstreaming and the Effective Participation of Women in the African Union, the 2009 AU Gender Policy, and the 2018 AU Strategy for Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment 2018–2028,¹⁸ as well as the AU Assembly's 2004 Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa and the 2013 50th Anniversary Solemn Declaration, to name but a few.¹⁹ In 2009, the 12th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly declared 2010–2020 as African Women's Decade. Against this background, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) has persistently echoed the two strands of the UNSC debate and consolidated a continental position against sexual exploitation and harassment in violent conflict and post-conflict situations;²⁰ it also closely monitors implementation of the WPS agenda.²¹ On 31 January 2014, the UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the AU Commission published the Framework of Cooperation Concerning the Prevention and Responses to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Africa.

Institutionalizing the WPS Agenda

To put WPS on the agenda of the Union, strong norm entrepreneurs were necessary,²² activists such as the Senegalese-born Bineta Diop, who in 1996 founded the Swiss-based non-governmental organization (NGO) Femmes Africa Solidarité.²³ In the initial phase of institutionalizing the WPS agenda, the AU Panel of the Wise has had the most impact. Especially the first and second iteration of the panel made use of its prerogative to pronounce itself on any issue relating to the promotion and maintenance of peace, security, and stability in Africa. In 2009, the panel agreed to focus its thematic reflection for 2010 / 11 on the problem of women and children in armed conflicts. Subsequently, it commissioned a landmark report on "Eliminating Vulnerabilities of Women and Children in Armed Conflicts".²⁴ The report contained four powerful proposals: to establish the Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace, and Security (OSE WPS), to launch an AU five-year Gender Peace and Security Programme (GPSP),²⁵ to have open sessions of the PSC on WPS,²⁶ and to launch an African Network of Women in Conflict Prevention and Peace Mediation (FemWise-Africa).

18 African Union (AU), "Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa", Maputo: African Union, 2003; AU, "The Maputo Declaration on Gender Mainstreaming and the Effective Participation of Women in the African Union", Maputo: African Union, 2003; AU, "African Union Gender Policy", Addis Ababa: African Union, 2009; AU, "AU Strategy for Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment 2018–2028", Addis Ababa: African Union, 2018.

19 AU Assembly, "Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa" (adopted at the 33rd Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 6–8 July), Addis Ababa: African Union, 2004, Assembly/AU/Decl. 12 (III); AU Assembly, "50th Anniversary Solemn Declaration", Addis Ababa: African Union, 2013.

20 See PSC communiqués 223 (2010), 757 (2018), and 862 (2019).

21 See PSC communiqués 223 (2010), 476 (2014), 600 (2015), 728 (2017), 772 (2018), 833 (2019), 887 (2019), 951 (2020), 987 (2021), and 1063 (2022).

22 See M. Finnemore and K. Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change", *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998), pp. 887–917.

23 B. Diop, "Engendering the Peace Process in Africa: Women at the Negotiating Table", *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 21, special issue (2002), pp. 142–154.

24 AU Panel of the Wise, "Eliminating Vulnerabilities of Women and Children in Armed Conflicts", Addis Ababa: African Union, 2014.

25 The programme was actually launched on 2 June 2014 for the period 2015–2020. It was designed to serve as a framework for the development of effective strategies and mechanisms for women's increased participation in the promotion of peace and security as well as to enhance protection of women in conflict and post-conflict situations in Africa. The programme was financed by the government of Austria.

26 The first of these sessions was held on 9 March 2015 (491st PSC meeting).

Two institutional decisions stand out: the establishment of the OSE WPS in January 2014, with Diop appointed as the special envoy, and the launching of FemWise-Africa in 2016. The AU actually was the first intergovernmental body to appoint a special envoy on WPS (see below). The OSE WPS serves as the organizational platform for cascading the WPS norm, both within the AU Commission and across the continent.²⁷ Among the strategies employed by the OSE WPS are organizing high-level advocacy and support for women (in the form of “solidarity missions”, high-level meetings, and conferences), assisting policy implementation (for instance, with regard to the Roadmap on a Continental Results Framework – see below), establishing synergy within the AU Commission, as well as building partnerships and resource mobilization (including supporting the creation of networks of WPS, empowering women as election observers and mediators, assisting the development of a network of centres of excellence, etc.). In 2016, the OSE WPS had a staff of six, until 2021 led by chief-of-staff and special adviser Jean-Bosco Butera.²⁸

The special envoy, together with the Pan-African Network of the Wise (PanWise), invited stakeholders for an African mediation workshop on the theme of “Silencing the Guns by 2020: Women’s Inclusion in Pre-Conflict Mediation, at the Peace Table and in Social Cohesion Mechanisms” (Constantine, Algeria, 12–13 December 2016).²⁹ FemWise-Africa was subsequently endorsed by both the AU PSC (13 March 2017) and the UNSC (27 March) and officially established through an AU Assembly decision (4 July). Until 2022, it was co-chaired by Speciosa Wandira Kazibwe, a former vice-president of Uganda (1994–2003) and member of the Panel of the Wise (2014–2021), and Catherine Samba-Panza, former interim president of the Central African Republic (CAR, 2014–2016). Since April 2022, FemWise-Africa is co-chaired by led Samba-Panza and Lady Justice Effie Owuor (who was appointed a member of the Panel of the Wise for the East African region).

Institutionally, FemWise-Africa is a substructure of the Panel of the Wise (just as are PanWise, established in 2013, and WiseYouth, created in 2022). But despite the Panel of the Wise being one of the five APSA pillars, its secretariat and the related budget line fall under the Peace and Security Department (PSD) or, since 2021, Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) Department. Thus, since its establishment, FemWise-Africa has become part of the portfolio of the then commissioner for peace and security (2013–2021), Algerian career diplomat Smail Chergui. FemWise-Africa’s governance structure comprises the annual FemWise-Africa General Assembly and a steering committee, which usually meets twice a year. Organizationally, FemWise-Africa is supported by the small Panel of the Wise’s secretariat, which used to be based in the PSD Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division (CPEWD) and now has been moved closer to the commissioner’s office as a special project. Management responsibility for this unit is still located in the Mediation Support Unit (as of 2021, the Mediation and Dialogue Division).

Each FemWise-Africa General Assembly has been held under a specific theme: (1) “Silencing the Guns by 2020: Women Mediating & Promoting Cross-Border Cooperation” (Constantine, Algeria, 13–14 December 2017), (2) “Women’s Role in Preventing and Resolving: Natural Resource-Related Conflicts” (Constantine, Algeria, 29–30 November 2018), and (3) “Ensuring that no Girl or Woman will be Left Behind in our Efforts to Silence the Guns in Africa” (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 26–27 November 2019). The meeting cycle then was interrupted by Covid-19. Because the Panel of the Wise’s mandate expired in 2021, the next FemWise-Africa General Assembly has only been planned for 2022.

Internationally, FemWise-Africa is partnering with, among others, UN Women (the UN’s entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women), Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS), the Nordic Women Mediators, the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, and the Commonwealth Women Mediators Network. Logistics for FemWise-Africa have been organized and financed mainly by the African Cen-

27 In addition, since 2000 there is a Women and Gender Development Directorate, situated within the Office of the AU Commission Chairperson.

28 AU OSE WPS, “The Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security at a glance”, Addis Ababa: AU Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, 2016, p. 18.

29 The following paragraphs are reconstructed from the author’s field journal.

tre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), which is located in Durban, South Africa; the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), an independent NGO based in Helsinki, Finland; and the German Development Agency (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH, GIZ), based in Eschborn, Germany. FemWise-Africa enjoys considerable attention and financial support from the Union's international partners.

The core activities of FemWise-Africa follow five aims: (1) professionalizing the role of women in preventive diplomacy and mediation at Track 1, 2, and 3 levels; (2) ensuring a channel for women's meaningful and effective participation in peace processes, including acting as heads of official high-level mediation missions; (3) initiating women's actions that will catalyse and mainstream the engagement of women in mediation in line with the Union's Agenda 2063 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); (4) bridging the gap between Track 1, 2, and 3 mediation and synergizing efforts towards inclusive peace processes with sustainable outcomes; and (5) strengthening mediation interventions for facilitating Quick Impact Projects (QUIPs) and establishing local and national peace infrastructures as foundations and a launchpad for medium- and long-term initiatives. Induction training for members of FemWise-Africa commenced in 2018; they were conducted by the Geneva-based UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR). In two rounds of two-days sessions on the AU environment of institutional mediation, some 100 women were trained – though not as “mediators”. By mid-2022, FemWise-Africa membership was roughly 500, including national (e.g., Uganda) and regional (e.g., Southern Africa) chapters – though most of the membership was on an individual basis.

The main challenges FemWise-Africa is confronted with relate to constraints in human resources and finances, together with its dependence on the goodwill of the commissioner in charge of the PSD/PAPS portfolio. Thus far, FemWise-Africa has not fully utilized its potential: horizontally vis-à-vis the Panel of the Wise and PanWise and vertically with regard to the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and member states. This is illustrated, among other examples, by the current difficulties in rolling out a systematic “deployment policy” and having members of the network integrated into mediation interventions by the Panel of the Wise and other structures of the AU. According to the UN, FemWise-Africa members in 2020 supported deployments to Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, Mali, and South Sudan (assisted by the UN Office to the African Union, UNAOU).³⁰

Managing the WPS Agenda

Gender has been incorporated as one out of two cross-cutting themes (the other being climate change) into the APSA Roadmap 2016–2020. The APSA Roadmap is the more operational, though hardly used indicator-based policy document for the field of peace and security – in contrast to the AU Master Roadmap.³¹ Apart from these more general commitments, two instruments are fundamental for implementing and monitoring the WPS agenda: at the level of the AU, this is the Continental Results Framework for Monitoring and Reporting on Women, Peace, and Security Agenda in Africa, and at the level of member states and of the RECs, these are National Action Plans (NAPs), or Regional Action Plans (RAPs), under UNSCR

30 UNSC, “Women and peace and security. Report of the Secretary-General”, 27 September 2021, S/2021/827, fn. 35.

31 See AU, “African Peace and Security Architecture: APSA Roadmap 2016–2020”, Addis Ababa: African Union, 2016; AU, “African Union Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns by Year 2020 (Lusaka Roadmap 2016)”, Addis Ababa: African Union, 2016.

1325. The AU itself “does not have a dedicated action plan for implementation of UNSCR 1325”.³²

The Continental Results Framework was mandated by the PSC at its 772nd meeting, held on 16 May 2018. It is a monitoring tool based on 28 indicators that follow the baskets of the original UNSCR 1325: prevention, protection, participation, as well as relief and recovery – with the incorporation of one additional theme on “WPS in the context of emerging security threats”.³³ In addition, there are 13 indicators to track the implementation of the WPS agenda within the AU Commission.³⁴

By 2021, 25 AU member states had adopted UNSCR 1325 NAPs: Angola, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, the CAR, Côte d’Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Togo, Tunisia, and Uganda (up from 19 in 2016). This is 45.45 per cent of AU member states, that is to say, just slightly above the global average. RAPs have also been developed, including by the Economic Community of West African States, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the Mano River Union, and the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region.³⁵ However, according to the International League for Peace and Freedom, worldwide only a third of the NAPs include an allocated budget for implementation. And although civil society is a major partner for the implementation of the WPS agenda, “only 63 NAPs (75%) allocate a specific role to civil society in the different stages of the NAP implementation process, with this role often limited to an ‘advisory’ position”.³⁶

Implementing the WPS Agenda

How successful has the WPS agenda been implemented by the AU thus far? This will be discussed in the following section by considering, first, women participation in conflict management and resolution and, second, debates about sexual harassment, abuse, and exploitation in AU-led peace support operations (PSOs) as well as in the AU Commission.

Women Participation in Peacebuilding

At the time of writing this working paper, no detailed results coming from the Continental Results Framework had been published; however, there is a report on the implementation of the WPS agenda published by the OSE WPS in 2016.³⁷ So, one is mainly left with general indicators and some sketchy empirical highlights.³⁸ Based on the Women, Peace, and Security Index (WPS Index), published by

32 AU OSE WPS, “Report on the Implementation ...”, p. 15.

33 AU, “Continental Results Framework for Monitoring and Reporting on the Implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda in Africa (2018–2028)”, Addis Ababa: Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace, and Security in Africa, 2019, p. 4.

34 A. Okech, “Women and Youth”, in: U. Engel (ed.), *Yearbook on the African Union*, vol. 1, Leiden: Brill, 2021, pp. 214–231; A. Okech, “Women and Youth”, in: U. Engel (ed.), *Yearbook on the African Union*, vol. 2, Leiden: Brill, 2022 (pp. 219–232).

35 AU, “Continental Results Framework for Monitoring and Reporting”, p. 1.

36 Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF): PeaceWomen, www.peacewomen.org/.

37 AU OSE WPS, “Report on the Implementation ...”.

38 For a comparative analysis of Malawi, Mozambique, Somalia, and South Sudan in this respect, see R. Sigsworth and L. Kumalo, “Women, Peace, and Security: Implementing the Maputo Protocol in Africa”, ISS Paper, no. 295 (2016), Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies.

the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security and the Peace Research Institute Oslo,³⁹ implementation of the WPS agenda on the African continent and at the level of AU member states lags behind the rest of the world, with significant differences between regions (e.g., Southern Africa does better than areas where Islam is the dominant religion) and within member states (e.g., northern Nigeria, with below-average scores, versus the western and southern parts of the country, with above-average scores). Generally, peaceful countries do better than societies in conflict (the lowest scores on the WPS Index are recorded, in descending order, for the CAR, Mauretania, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Chad, DRC, and South Sudan). Yet on a positive note, compared to 2017 when the first WPS Index was published, of the top ten score improvers, six are in sub-Saharan Africa: the CAR, Mali, Cameroon, Benin, Kenya, and Rwanda, in descending order of improvement.⁴⁰

Women representation in the AU's politics of peace-building has made some progress.⁴¹ The positions of commissioners are allocated on a gender parity basis: 9 out of 20 directors of divisions are currently female, but only 3 out of the 22 high representatives, special representatives, and special envoys are women – apart from Diop these are Zimbabwean Chido Cleopatra Mpemba, who was appointed special envoy on youth in November 2021 (she followed the first special envoy in this field, Tunisian Aya Chebbi from Tunisia, 2018–2021), and Nigerian Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, who serves the West African region in a group of five envoys on the Covid-19 pandemic.⁴² On the involvement of women in peace processes, outdated figures indicate that at least in the past they were strongly underrepresented.⁴³ In the 13 African peace accords concluded between 1999 and 2011, women were not among the signatories of the peace accords.⁴⁴ There was only one woman among the lead negotiators (in 2008, Mozambican elder and stateswoman Graça Machel was one of the three key negotiators in Kenya). Only in a limited number of cases were women part of the negotiation teams (notably in the case of mediation on Kenya in 2008, they made up 25% of the teams, on the DRC in 2003 12%, on Uganda in 2008 9%, and on Darfur in 2006 8%). Finally, women are rarely called upon to act as witnesses regarding previous human rights violations in peace negotiations (only in 6 of the 13 cases and always below 20% of the total number of witnesses).

More recent global figures published by the UN secretary-general would indicate that in 2020, “women represented only 23 per cent of delegates in peace processes led or co-led by the United Nations”.⁴⁵ And after a downward trend, “the percentage of peace agreements with gender provisions has started to rise, but at 28.6 per cent the share remains well below the high of 37.1 per cent recorded in 2015. None of the ceasefire agreements reached between 2018 and 2020 included gender provisions”.⁴⁶

When it comes to the participation of women in AU-led PSOs, there is a lack of representative data. In a 2015 breakdown of troop- and police-contributing countries for the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), Burundi had a share of 1.4 per cent of women in the mission (77 out of 5,337), Djibouti 0.7 per cent (7 out of 987), Ethiopia 2.9 per cent (131 out of 4,304), Kenya 0.08 per cent (3 out of 3,863), and Uganda 2.57 per cent (160 out of 6,220).⁴⁷ This seems to indicate that despite strong commit-

39 GIWPS and PRIO, *Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022. Tracking sustainable peace through inclusion, justice, and security for women*, Washington DC: Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security and Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2021.

40 Ibid., pp. ii and 4.

41 See Hendricks, “Progress and Challenges”, pp. 73–98.

42 Missing from the AU's website is Michelle Ndiaye Ntab, the special representative and head of AU Liaison Office to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

43 In the following UN Women, “Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations: Connections between Presence and Influence”, 2nd edn., New York: UN Women, 2012 [2010], pp. 4–5.

44 With the exception of the Sun City Accords on the DRC in 2003, when women made up 5 per cent of the signatories. In 2017, the OSE WPS published a booklet presenting the biographies of 34 women mediators; see AU OSE WPS, “African Women Mediators and Election Observers. Building Peace, Securing Women”, Addis Ababa: AU Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace, and Security, 2017.

45 UNSC, “Conflict-Related Sexual Violence”, para. 5[a].

46 Ibid., para. 5[b], para. 20, and figure 1.

47 AU OSE WPS, “Report on the Implementation ...”, p. 20.

ments by the AU, women still do not play a noticeable role in peace-keeping. In comparison, as of May 2018 in UN missions South Africa (18.5%), Ghana (13.4%), Cameroon (10.5%), Zambia (10.3%), Tanzania (7.9%), and Ethiopia (7.3%) have yielded the highest percentages of women to military and police components.⁴⁸ The overall low numbers reflect many factors, including a lack of information on deployment opportunities; corruption in deployment selection; women seen as needing protection rather than as potential protectors by senior leaders; years of requested experience for deployment; physical fitness tests; UN minimum criteria for deployment; ostracism within training cohorts; inadequate accommodation, facilities, and equipment; lack of specific medical care; lack of adequate family-friendly policies; SGBV; unequal opportunities on deployment and missed opportunities at home; unreasonable expectations; and lack of support networks.⁴⁹ Recent UN figures show that at the end of 2020 only 5.2 per cent of all military troops in UN peace-keeping operations were women.⁵⁰

Sexual Harassment, Abuse, and Exploitation

In 2019, the AU placed a set of strongly disapproved practices under the label “misconduct”.⁵¹ Among other instruments, this set was based on the Union’s Code of Ethics and Conduct (2016), the AUC Harassment Policy (2016), and the Policy on Conduct and Discipline for PSOs (2018). Accordingly, *sexual exploitation* is defined “as the inducement, incitement, coercion and compelling of another person to undertake a sexual activity through abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, dependency or trust”; *sexual violence* “includes acts of sexual nature against one or more persons or that cause such person or persons to engage in an act of a sexual nature by force, or by threat of force or coercion, such as that caused by fear of violence, duress, detention, psychological oppression or abuse of power, or by taking of advantage of coercion environment or such person’s or persons’ incapacity to give genuine consent”;⁵² and *transactional sex* means “sexual relationships where the giving of gifts or services, such as rent, phones, clothes, drinks, drugs, grades, or education, support to the family and employment is an important factor”.

The latter is distinct from prostitution. The Union’s set of disapproved practices is quite similar to what the Office of the UN Secretary-General has called “prohibited conduct”.⁵³ The UN list also includes *discrimination* (which is “any unfair treatment or arbitrary distinction based on a person’s race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, religion, nationality, ethnic origin, disability, age, language, social origin or other similar shared characteristic or trait”); *harassment* (“any unwelcome conduct that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation to another person, when such conduct interferes with work or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment”); *sexual harassment* (“any unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation, when such conduct interferes with work, is made a condition of employment or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment”); and the *abuse of authority* (“the improper use of a position of influence, power or authority against another person”).

48 M. Ghittoni, L. Lehouck, and C. Watson, “Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations. Baseline Study”, Geneva: Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2018, p. 7.

49 Ibid., pp. 23–44.

50 UNSC, “Conflict-Related Sexual Violence”, para. 5[c].

51 AU, “African Union Policy on the Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse for Peace Support Operations”, Addis Ababa: African Union, 2019.

52 The UN is working with the following definition of “conflict-related sexual violence”. It refers to “rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage, and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls, or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict”. See UNSC, “Conflict-Related Sexual Violence”, para. 4.

53 UN Secretary-General (UNSG) Office, “Secretary-General’s Bulletin: Addressing Discrimination, HHHHarassment, Including Sexual Harassment, and Abuse of Authority”, 19 September 2019, ST/SGB/2019/8.

Two dimensions of continued sexual harassment, abuse, and exploitation are key: AU-led PSOs and the day-to-day practices within the institution itself, the AU Commission. Again, for contextualization a look at the UN is useful:

A series of coups d'état, including in several countries that appear in the present report, were another worrying development. Terrorist groups and transnational criminal networks continued to destabilize some of the most fragile contexts, including through the use of sexual violence as a tactic. In some situations, gender-based hate speech and incitement to violence were evident in public discourse, including on digital platforms. Women peacebuilders and human rights defenders were often specifically targeted, including through sexual violence and harassment as a form of reprisal, in order to exclude them from public life. Activists and advocates working to highlight the plight and defend the rights of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, and to support their access to justice and services, were also subjected to reprisals and intimidation.⁵⁴

But it is not just that women and girls become victims of sexual violence in conflict; they are also threatened by the very people that are meant to protect them, peacekeepers. The UN General Assembly is regularly recording allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation. For a variety of reasons, underreporting grossly distorts these numbers. On average, only 69 cases are reported annually.⁵⁵ The majority of allegations (i.e., 90%) relates to two peace-keeping missions in Africa: the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the CAR (MINUSCA) and the UN Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO).⁵⁶

The first case of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) in AU-led PSOs was reported in 2014 by Human Rights Watch with reference to AMISOM.⁵⁷ The advocacy group claimed that “some AMISOM soldiers [...] in the war-torn capital, Mogadishu, have abused their positions of power to prey on the city’s most vulnerable women and girls. Soldiers have committed acts of rape and other forms of sexual abuse, as well as sexual exploitation – the abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes”.⁵⁸ The report predominantly implicated soldiers from Uganda and Burundi. The AU was quick to deny the substance and generalizations of the report; it reiterated its “zero tolerance policy on misconduct and abuses in peace support operations”.⁵⁹ It then ordered an independent investigation into the matter. In many of the 21 cases under review, the investigation stalled because alleged perpetrators no longer could be identified, no formal complaints had been lodged, or personnel had been repatriated. Importantly, the investigation established “that there was evidence on the existence of SEA against AMISOM personnel especially in one of the Contingents”.⁶⁰ In response to these and other debates in 2018, the Union issued a draft Policy on Conduct and Discipline for PSOs. A year later, the various statements on this topic were integrated into the “prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse for peace support operations”.⁶¹

A closely related debate on disapproved practices of sexual harassment and abuse within the AU Commission emerged in 2018, somewhat trailing the global #MeToo discussion.⁶² On 25 January 2018, 37 women working in the AU Commission signed a petition in which they claimed that “pro-

54 UNSC, “Conflict-Related Sexual Violence”, para. 2.

55 United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), “Special Measures for Protection”, para. 59.

56 Ibid., para. 62.

57 Human Rights Watch (HRW), “‘The Power These Men Have Over Us’: Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by African Union Forces in Somalia”, New York: Human Rights Watch, 2014.

58 Ibid., p. 1.

59 AU Commission, “Press Release”, Addis Ababa, 8 September 2014.

60 AU Commission, “Press Release”, Addis Ababa, 21 April 2015. The investigation confirmed that an AMISOM policy on prevention and response to SEA was in place.

61 AU, “African Union Policy on the Prevention and Response”.

62 #MeToo is a decentralized social media campaign to raise awareness about the issue of sexual harassment and abuse of women. It initially was started in 2006, on Myspace, by sexual harassment survivor and activist Tarana Burke (USA). Already in 2016, there was a #EndRapeCulture campaign organized by female students in South Africa. Other prominent campaigns on the African continent were located in Kenya, Nigeria, or Tunisia.

fessional apartheid” was practised against women.⁶³ In response, the AU Commission chairperson, Moussa Faki Mahamat, appointed a commission of enquiry to look at cases of gender discrimination and sexual harassment. The enquiry was led by Diop (although explicitly not in her capacity as special envoy on WPS). In November 2018, a final report based on 88 interviews with AU staffers was tabled. The report went much further than its original brief, outlining 40 cases of malpractice in human resources functions; cases of harassment, bullying, and intimidation; governance challenges; gender discrimination; fraud and corruption; and impunity and sexual harassment. It concluded:

It is the finding of the committee that incidents of sexual harassment exist in the commission. This is established by the almost unanimous confirmation of the prevalence of this occurrence by interviewees appearing before the committee. Evidence presented [suggests] that this form of harassment is perpetuated by supervisors over female employees in their charge, especially, but not exclusively, during official missions outside work stations [...] senior departmental staff, who position themselves as “gatekeepers” and “kingmakers”, are well-positioned to make believable promises to young women that they will be offered contracts [...] according to interviewees, the young women are exploited for sex in exchange for jobs.⁶⁴

This, it stands to be reason, may only be the proverbial tip of the iceberg. An enquiry into similar allegations against the UN was carried out by the Deloitte accounting company in 2019. Based on 30,364 respondents (or a 17.1% response rate), the enquiry highlighted that junior and temporary staff were particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment (junior professional officers 49.3%, UN volunteers 39%, and consultants 38.7%). The most vulnerable targets were women and transgender personnel between the ages of 25 and 44. And the potential harassers were mainly men between the ages of 45 and 54. The consequences of reporting incidents of sexual harassment overwhelmingly were described as losing one’s job, while perpetrators of sexual harassment usually enjoyed impunity.⁶⁵ Clearly these figures show that sexual harassment of an organization’s own staff is not a problem of the AU or the UN per se. Rather systematic abuses and harassments seem to reflect a universal pattern in organizations governed along patriarchal lines. To date, the lack of accountability throughout the system (in terms of training, monitoring, reporting, enquiries, and criminal accountability), prioritizing victims’ rights and dignity, as well as proactive risk management constitute major challenges to fully implement the WPS agenda.

Conclusion

The WPS agenda was successfully developed and disseminated through the AU system. In this respect, one could talk about a complete process of norm emergence and norm cascade.⁶⁶ Strongly guided by UNSCR 1325 on the role of women in the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict, the AU has concentrated on two policy fields: (1) the prevention of sexual violence against women and children in armed conflict and post-conflict situations and (2) the full, equal, and effective participation of women at all stages of peace processes. During the initial institutionalization of the WPS agenda, the AU Panel of the Wise was the key source of inspiration. Since the establishment of the OSE WPS in 2014 and the launching of FemWise-Africa in 2017, the AU has developed relevant

63 See reports in the *Mail & Guardian* [Johannesburg], 4 May 2018 and *The East African* [Nairobi], 12 May 2018.

64 Quoting from an inter-office memorandum dated 22 November 2018; see *Mail & Guardian*, 17 May 2019.

65 T. Welsh, “UN surveys sexual harassment, union says problem is broader”, *Devex*, 18 January 2019, www.devex.com/news/un-surveys-sexual-harassment-union-says-problem-is-broader-94163 [accessed 22 August 2020].

66 Finnemore and Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change”.

WPS policies and related monitoring tools. Yet as the continued significant underrepresentation of women in conflict management and resolution as well as continued sexual violence and abuse against women and girls in situations of conflict and post-conflict (also with regard to AU-led PSOs) as well as sexual harassment within the AU Commission demonstrate, full implementation of the WPS agenda still remains unfinished business.

At the discursive level, Heidi Hudson describes how much NAPs on the African continent often still conflate constructs such as “gender” and “women” as well as “womenandgirls”.⁶⁷ With regard to the participation of women in peace and security, she also shows how security discourses display a civilizing intent through the participation of women in the security sector (“making war civil for and through women”). And on the case of protection, she stresses how violence is seen through a sexualized lens that privileges women’s protection and yet, at the same time, still makes women responsible for preventing SGBV.

The conclusions drawn by Olonisakin are even more disturbing. She finds that gender equality in “mainstream” peace and security “is treated as a side issue”. Relevant mediators “lack conviction about the need to transform gender relations in their areas of operation”: “There is no real interest in a deep examination of gender issues except as a technical problem requiring a technical approach and solution”. Even worse, Olonisakin is convinced that women leaders and activists “have, even inadvertently, reinforced the status quo” of male-dominated organizational cultures in the AU and the RECs.⁶⁸ Seen from this perspective of critical feminism, the WPS agenda may have made great strides in recent years in terms of norm cascade, but it has only just started to change dominant social practices within the AU.⁶⁹

What still needs to be included into this debate is a complementary focus on men and masculine cultures of violence as well as their overwhelming presence in places of power. In addition, there is need to go beyond simple gender binaries and address issues of intersectionality, LGBTBI*, and others. And, finally, it remains a desideratum to enquire the basis of knowledge production on WPS more systematically. Who is speaking on whose behalf? And who really gets heard?

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UN Women, PeaceFem App (mobile phone app that illustrates women’s inclusion in peace processes around the world)

67 Hudson, “The Power of Mixed Messages”, p. 5.

68 F. Olonisakin, “Bringing Gender Dimensions Back from Obscurity: Governance, Peace and Security in Africa”, Accra: African Women’s Development Fund, 2016, p. v.

69 For a perspective in this respect, see A. M. Tripp, *Women and Power in Postconflict Africa*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

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