

**PRESENTATION AT THE UNITED NATIONS PEACEBUILDING COMMINISION MEETING ON
16TH MARCH 2020 ON THE WORK OF WOMEN IN PEACEBUILDING NETWORK (WIPNET) OF
WEST AFRICA NETWORK FOR PEACEBUILDING (WANEP)**

INTRODUCTION

The Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) is one of the programmes of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) aimed at integrating a gender perspective in its peacebuilding work. It was launched in November 2001 with the primary objective to build the capacity of women to enhance their roles in peacebuilding and post conflict reconstruction in West Africa. WIPNET seeks to increase the number of women practitioners in peacebuilding as trainers, researchers, mediators and advocates. Through community mobilization and other innovative platforms, grassroots women are provided opportunity to amplify their voices on issues of peace and human security.

WIPNET is committed to ensuring that women's needs, concerns and issues are mainstreamed into all formal and informal peace building processes in West Africa. Since 2002, through a program called Women's Peace Activism, WIPNET has been mobilizing women's groups to promote social justice in West Africa where patriarchy has kept women marginalized and excluded from the decision-making table.

INITIATIVES

Over the years WIPNET has taken a variety of initiatives to realise its goal and key among them include the following.

1. Developing a manual for building the capacities of grassroots women in the sub-region. The manual was translated into local languages in Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal and the Gambia. A French version was also produced. Across the sub region the trainings has been used to mobilise grassroots women for their participation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes. The process has also raised awareness on human rights and gender-based violence.
2. In addition, community radio programs called "Voices of Women" has become a valuable tool in reaching out to greater numbers of women engaging in community issues that are an impediment to peace and human development in West Africa. The

Voices of Women program is aired in Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Senegal.

3. In collaboration with ECOWAS and KAIPTC, developed a guideline for the development and implementation of NAPs which was published in English and translated into French and Portuguese and distributed in all the 15 countries.
4. As a result, WIPNET members across West Africa have been very instrumental and have played critical roles in the development of the National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325 on Women Peace and Security. Of the fifteen countries Carpe Verde is the only country that has not yet launched their NAP. Four countries including Ghana Mali, Nigeria and Togo have already launched their second NAP while Mali and Nigeria are in the process of developing their third NAP. Nigeria has localised the implementation of their NAP by developing Local Action Plans (LAPs) that resonate well with grassroots women.

	COUNTRY	Launch of First NAP	Launch of Second NAP
1.	Benin	2019	
2.	Burkina Faso	2012	
3.	Cape Verde	N/A	
4.	Cote d Ivoire	2008	
5.	Gambia	2012	
6.	Ghana	2012	2020
7.	Guinea Republic	2009	
8.	Guinea Bissau	2010	
9.	Liberia	2009	
10.	Mali	2012	2015
11.	Niger	2016	
12.	Nigeria	2013	2017
13.	Senegal	2011	
14.	Sierra Leone	2010	
15.	Togo	2011	2018

5. WANEP also developed contextualised indicators on how to monitor the progress of the NAPs. Gender Desk Officers at the Ministry of Gender in all the 15 countries were trained on how to monitor the NAPs in their respective countries.

6. WANEP's Early Warning System has also been engendered by developing a checklist of indicators to capture specific abuses of women to be able to determine the trends and address them appropriately
7. In addition, a simple conflict analyses tool known as the **SCALE** and **BRICK** have been developed to enable grassroots women do gender analyses of conflicts at their level. Grassroots women are able to use the tool to determine the impact and level of vulnerability of conflict on women and men.
8. Perhaps the most innovative initiative is the establishment of "**Peace Hut**" in Liberia which is also being replicated in Cote d' Ivoire and Sierra Leone and is gradually spreading to Senegal and other countries. The Peace Hut provides a safe space for the empowerment of grassroots women while getting some of their issues resolved. The hut is operated by professionals like lawyers, doctors and clinical psychologists who provide pro bono services for women and girls survivors of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV). Some of the services provided include legal representation and following up on cases of rape and defilement in court and making sure that perpetrators are duly convicted. The Hut also serves as psychotherapy and healing centre for traumatized women and girls who are victims and survivors of GBV.

The hut also serves as grounds for creating awareness on the rights of women and grassroots women who come there to acquire skills such as bead making, sewing and other handicrafts to get them economically empowered in order to enhance their living standards and reduce their vulnerability. In 2019, out of the 163 rape cases recorded, 75 were effectively prosecuted. Members of the Peace Huts are regularly trained on Adult Literacy and Numeracy activities including strategies for tackling GBV with emphasis on psychosocial support services. In 2017 a total of 105 women were trained in Liberia on psycho-social support and are currently providing trauma counselling and psycho-social support to survivors and victims of SGBV in their respective counties. Through the Peace Huts facilitated by WANEP in Liberia, the women have been monitoring SGBV cases to ensure that victims get speedy justice. As a result, there has been a significant increase in the understanding of SGBV among community members.

CHALLENGES

Despite all these efforts there are still some hurdles in the way of women's full, equal and meaningful participation in peacebuilding processes which continue to militate against progress of the work of WANEP in its WIPNET programme.

- i. The region continues to battle with **patriarchy** which affects the general wellbeing of women as it prevents women from being in positions that make decisions that affect their own lives.
- ii. Generally, low education levels of women compared to their male counterparts continue to have cascading effects on the lives of women
- iii. High illiteracy levels and lack of exposure among grassroots women makes it difficult to identify issues that affect them negatively to even seek solutions.
- iv. Majority of women in West Africa continue to be less empowered economically thus increasing their vulnerability to GBVs and other abuses.
- v. The gap between legislations and their implementation in most West African countries continue to be wide. Ghana for instance has the DV law which is froth with implementation challenges.
- vi. In most West African countries, the inability of the countries to pass affirmative action laws continue to limit women's full and equal participation in decision making. Cote de Ivoire is the only country that has recently passed a bill on equal political participation in (2019)
- vii. Almost all the countries have little or no dedicated budget and other resources for the implementation of the NAPs.
- viii. Lack of coordination among women groups to present a common front. The groups tend to work in silos without much progress due to duplication of efforts

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Support for women organizations**

It is important to channel more support to women's organizations advancing women's rights, women's political and economic empowerment, and transformative justice. This is because traditionally, women's rights organizations are noted for their flexibility, willingness to reach out to the grassroots. Their approach distinguishes

them from government's structures, that are usually overloaded with authoritarian relationships and bureaucratic structures and procedures which usually delay and disrupt the implementation of projects.

- **Shadow Report on Implementation of UNSCR 1325:**

CSOs in all countries should be encouraged to produce shadow reports annually to assess the level of Women's involvement in peace processes at all levels. The best practices and challenges faced should be enumerated and action-oriented recommendations put forward to enhance government's implementation of National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325.

- **Documentation**

Documentation and dissemination of women experiences on community peacebuilding showcasing women peace interventions across West Africa to encourage women's involvement and participation.