

SUMMARY REPORT OF THE WANEP GENDERTALK SERIES



DISTINGUISHED SPEAKERS (Clockwise)

- ***Ms. Guingani Antoinette***, Member of WANEP Burkina's Women's Leadership Program / President of the Women, Education and Environment Association of Ouhiyouya, Burkina Faso
- ***Ms Yadicon Njie Eribo***, Women's Affairs Coordinator TRRC, Gambia
- ***Madam Euphemia Akos Dzathor*** (Mama Awanyo I of Ghana) – Independent Consultant and Community activist
- ***Ms. Loda Coulibaly***, Network of Young Women Leaders of Political Parties and Civil Society, Mali
- ***Hajia Raheemat Momodu***, Head of Division, Human Security and Civil Society, ECOWAS Commission
- ***Emem J. Okon*** – Executive Director, Kebetkache Women Development Centre and South South Zonal Coordinator, WANEP-NIGERIA
- ***Mariam Dia, Gabou*** - Association Representative in Tanaff / Reporter for Gabou Community Radio, Senegal
- ***Haja Marie Bob-Kandeh*** – Community activist and co-founder, Sierra Leone Market Women Association.
- ***Ms. Gameti Germaine***, National Monitoring and Evaluation Expert / Focal Point of the Decentralization Support Programme, Togo

**THEME: ADVANCING THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA
FROM A COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE**

DATE: September 22 and 23, 2020

1.0. INTRODUCTION

Scholars agree that community-led peacebuilding interventions hold the key to connecting local-level initiatives to international programs and provide the opportunity to move local knowledge from the bottom up. Research has shown that recent conflicts happen at the community level where women have made significant contributions to conflict resolution, management and peacebuilding but continue to be poorly represented in both formal and informal peace processes. Such exclusion invariably leads to a failure to adequately address women's concerns, such as sexual and gender-based violence, harmful traditional practices, women's rights and post-conflict rehabilitation among others.

The landmark UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security adopted on 31 October 2000 specifically calls for greater inclusion of women in all decisions related to peace and conflict stressing the importance of women's equal participation and full involvement in leadership and peacebuilding efforts. However, several studies conducted by WANEP and its numerous partners have shown that women at the community level have little or no knowledge of 1325 and thus are not contributing their quota towards the advancement of the WPS Agenda. It has increasingly become obvious that the attainment of the full implementation of 1325 will continue to be a mirage without the meaningful participation of grassroots women.

Concerned with this anomaly, particularly with the recent calls for peacebuilding practitioners to ensure local ownership of peacebuilding design and practice, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) held the maiden edition of its Gender Talk Series under the theme: "Advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda from a Community Perspective." The Forum held remotely on September 22 and 23, 2020 for the Anglophone and Francophone audiences respectively and featured eight Panelists drawn from Burkina Faso, Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo while ECOWAS representative made a key presentation on the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF). Also, in attendance were key partners and major stakeholders from the AU, ECOWAS, UN, other civil society organizations and women groups, to discuss and share best practices for advancing the WPS agenda at the community level.

The Speakers gave an overview of situation of women in their respective countries reiterating the disproportional impact of conflict on men and women. A situation, which has been escalated by the COVID 19 pandemic. They unanimously agreed that community women are missing in decision-making and leadership, yet recent conflict takes place at that level. The two panels addressed the following key issues;

- To what extent has the resolution been implemented at the community level? (gaps/challenges)
- What progress has been made in promoting women's leadership and participation at the community level? (limitations of meaningful involvement)

BOX 1: OBJECTIVES

Specific goal of the Forum;

- **To enhance understanding of community-led peacebuilding efforts in the attainment of the WPS agenda**
- **Reflect on challenges faced in the field**
- **Facilitate exchange of knowledge and experiences between and among community peacebuilders with relevant stakeholders**
- **Examine how these efforts contribute to women's meaningful participation in peace processes.**
- **Deepen understanding of community institutions' role in ensuring inclusive participation of women in the implementation of UNSCR 1325**
- **Broaden relevant partners perspectives on how they can support and strengthen local initiatives.**

- What good practices exist in involving grassroots women in advancing UNSCR 1325? (share concrete examples)
- What role do CSOs and women organizations play in ensuring community inclusion and participation in the implementation of UNSCR 1325?
- How do we empower community women for effective implementation of the WPS Agenda?

2.0. BACKGROUND

As part of measures to ensure that women security issues and concerns continue to be in the front burner, the WPS desk of WANEP initiated a digital consultation forum aptly tagged; Gender Talk Series. The forum provides a platform to deliberate on peace and security issues and develop strategies that would place women at the centre of conflict prevention, resolution and reconstruction. Specifically, WANEP through this Series aims to create an avenue for national, international and regional partners, civil society groups and other relevant stakeholders to discuss, and share best practices for the advancement of the WPS Agenda and articulate a regional perspective on the implementation of the UNSCR 1325, progress and challenges among others.

WANEP through its Women in Peacebuilding Network, WIPNET Programme, established in 2001 has been raising a critical mass of women and building their capacity to play more visible and active roles in promoting peace and human security in West Africa at local, national and regional levels. It uses an ideology called 'women's peace activism' to break the bonds of patriarchy and relies on UNSCR 1325, the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF), the AU Continental Results Framework (CRF) and other normative frameworks as guide and reference in promoting the tenets of the Resolution in the context of West Africa.

Gender Talk Series held over a period of two days September 22, 2020 for Anglophone audience - moderated by **Ms. Queeneth Tawo – WANEP Regional Coordinator** and September 23, 2020 for Francophone audience – moderated by **Josiane Sombo – WANEP Regional Program Officer**. The Speakers were drawn from eight countries viz; Burkina Faso, Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. In the spirit of ECOWAS/WANEP partnership, **Hajia Raheemat Momodu, Head of Division, Human Security and Civil Society, ECOWAS Commission**, gave a presentation on the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF).

BOX 2: KEY TAKE-AWAYS

- Without women there can be no peace and development. Women hold the key to sustainable peace
- Community women must be proactive and take initiatives, draft community action plans and lobby for its adoption
- Involve men and conscientize them to know that if you develop a woman, she will be useful to the family and the community
- For women to be wholly accepted, they need to make men understand the issue of gender and the need to work with women
- Traditional leaders should focus on traditional practices that favor women and this should be included in CSO advocacy strategies and integrated into community women activities
- Make women participation inclusive by involving women living with disabilities
- Harmonize, collaborate and build on women coordinating platforms to bridge the WPS gap

Speakers on the Anglophone Panel were;

- **Ms Yadicon Njie Eribo**, Women's Affairs Coordinator TRRC, Gambia
- **Madam Euphemia Akos Dzathor** (Mama Awanyo I of Ghana) – Independent Consultant and Community activist
- **Emem J. Okon** – Executive Director, Kebetkache Women Development Centre and South South Zonal Coordinator, WANEP-NIGERIA

- **Haja Marie Bob-Kandeh** – Community activist and co-founder, Sierra Leone Market Women Association.

Speakers on the Francophone Panel were;

- **Mariam Dia, Gabou** - Association Representative in Tanaff / Reporter for Gabou Community Radio, Senegal
- **Ms. Guingani Antoinette**, Member of WANEP Burkina's Women's Leadership Program / President of the Women, Education and Environment Association of Ouhigouya, Burkina Faso
- **Ms. Loda Coulibaly**, Network of Young Women Leaders of Political Parties and Civil Society, Mali
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Drawing on the perspectives of the Panelists, discussions focused on community-led peacebuilding efforts and the strategies for more inclusive and integrated involvement of women in peace processes. A key discussion at the forum was how 'traditional wisdom' can be incorporated into formal peacebuilding initiatives. This report chronicles highlights of the Gender Talk Series discussions covering the key presentations, case studies, lessons learned, challenges and proffers recommendations. The two panels have been harmonized to give a holistic view of the proceedings of the forum.

3.0. SUMMARY OF PRESENTATIONS AND PANEL DISCUSSIONS

3.1. INTRODUCTORY AND WELCOME REMARKS

The Forum commenced with a brief opening remarks by Mrs. Levinia Addae-Mensah – WANEP Deputy Executive Director/Program Director. Welcoming everyone, she noted that the caliber of participants and the Speakers was a clear indication of the seriousness WANEP attached to the forum. She added that focusing on community-led interventions was critical as WANEP recognizes community resilience as key to sustainable peace. In her presentation, Ms. Queeneth Tawo – WANEP Regional Coordinator Women, Peace and Security gave an overview of the Gender Talk Series intimating that the Series provides the platform for peace activists, practitioners and relevant stakeholders to deliberate and share experiences and best practices towards the advancement of the WPS agenda. The forum also forms part of WANEP's activities to commemorate the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325. Outcome of the discussions, she said would be widely disseminated and form the resource for the WANEP E-publication – Gender Connect.

3.1.1. OVERVIEW OF THE ECOWAS CONFLICT PREVENTION FRAMEWORK (ECPF)

Hajia Raheemat Momodu, Head of Division, Human Security and Civil Society, ECOWAS Commission gave an overview of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) adopted in 2008, describing it as 'a groundbreaking document anchored on the human security prism.' The document, she says goes beyond the traditional focus areas and establishes the connection between peace and security growth within a broader perspective. Hajia Raheemat explained that due to the high value ECOWAS places on gender, the ECPF has a secretariat with dedicated staff while a statutory Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Unit was established for the sole purpose of carrying out WPS activities. In addition, two entities were added to the ECPF secretariat namely, the ECOWAS Gender Development Centre (EGDC - Dakar, 2017) and the WPS Advisory Committee to advice on gender mainstreaming. The WPS agenda, according to her, is central with many institutional linkages within and this positions ECOWAS to carry out its gender work effectively.

The vital role of ECOWAS in pushing the WPS agenda through close collaborations with other civil society organizations and regular reflections internally and externally has yielded key results; the ECOWAS region boasts of the highest number of the National Action Plans, NAPs-1325 (14 out of 15 countries have NAPs

at different stages). It has also birthed four regional networks including NOPSWECO, MARWOPNET, NGOWG on WPS and the WA Network of Young Women Leaders (to bridge the inter-generational gap). Other initiatives include; ECOCEPA, ECOWAS Network in Prevention and mediation (FEMWISE-WA). As a parting shot, Raheemat urged greater focus on mentoring and positioning the younger women to get into the space in order to bridge the inter-generational gap and call for close collaboration with CSOs. She added; “the next 20 years of 1325 should focus more on action and less talk; we want practical action! We need to establish a vibrant young people’s platform to take over from the old brigade.”

4.0. SECOND SESSION – SUMMARY OF PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Traditional societies recognize women's role as advisor to the men and key actors in promoting solidarity and harmony in communities. Women equally play important roles in the education of children, inculcating moral values that help them live in harmony in the community. They also utilize traditional

BOX 3: BEST PRACTICES

Proceedings from the forum has revealed that women play cultural or customary roles within their communities and are already exercising powers of influence that can be enhanced and transformed to support community-led peacebuilding initiatives as shown in the excerpts below;

In Ghana, Queen Mother, Mama Awanyo 1, officially known as Euphemia Dzathor is a female traditional ruler from the Alavanyo Deme community who has used her position and resources to better the lives of women and children. She provided support to improve literacy levels in the community recording a significant increase in school in-take and reduction in the rate of school dropouts. Probably, the most obvious success is the fact that women are now allowed in the meeting of elders in a patriarchal society where gender norms are strictly adhered to.

In the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, contributions of female chiefs in community peace committees has been accepted and recognized. Civil Society Organizations like WANEP have trained these female chiefs and other community women in dialogue and mediation to strengthen their roles in mitigating in communal conflicts. The women in these communities have been empowered to become assertive and demand for their rights and are now included in community development clusters and government structures.

From Cameroun, the Women in Alternative Action is utilizing traditional values to give space to women’s voices under the Queens for Peace International project. The project focuses on empowering women in traditional institutions, such as wives of traditional rulers and female chiefs, to promote the implementation of UNSCR 1325. The Queens for Peace employ a strategy known as ‘pillow diplomacy,’ to solicit the support of their traditional ruler husbands to expand voices of community women in community peace processes. Their efforts and contributions have changed the dynamics in community peacebuilding initiatives.

wisdom in preventing and managing conflicts within families and community members. At the community level, the use of traditional media (community radio stations) by women and women’s groups for awareness creation and dissemination of messages is very common. The panelists unanimously agreed that for inclusive and sustainable peace to take root especially at the grassroots level, women’s participation in peacebuilding is imperative to creating lasting solutions to conflict.

However, they also noted that women are often not represented at the negotiation table or in formal peacebuilding efforts due to traditional gender norms. For example, women were excluded from the 40 years Casamance conflict in Senegal. In the Delta Region of Nigeria, female chiefs play more of nominal roles without the traditional authority to engage effectively in communal peacebuilding. They are also not included in community peace committees due to the patriarchal

nature of those committees and the fact that some of them actually engage in violence acts against women. In the Alavanyo Deme community of Ghana, two layers of leadership structure is operated – the male chief’s jurisdiction covers everyone while the Queen Mother’s jurisdiction only covers issues of

concern to women. These include settling minor conflicts, ensuring that women adhere to the norms and traditions of the community. The forum further identified impediments to women's participation and meaningful inclusion in leadership and decision-making as well as shared best practices and case studies on successful community-based peace initiatives that have led to transformative gender norms. Key milestones, best practices, challenges and recommendations from the discussions are presented below;

BOX 4: KEY MILESTONES

- In Côte d'Ivoire, WANEP produced the resolution 1325 into a comic strip with simple messages to facilitate the understanding and ownership of the resolution by rural women.
- Mali has passed Law 052 (2015) allowing women to be nominated and elected into leadership positions at national, regional and local level
- In Togo, women's organizations/associations are being consulted prior to implementing activities to ensure their views and needs are considered. More women are now participating in peace committees. Also, the reduction of nomination fees resulted to increased participation of women in the Togo municipal elections of June 2020.
- In the Gambia, the mothers club is a potent force in the community used to ensure the enrolment and maintenance of girls' in schools. They monitor school, advocate to end girl-child marriages, provide guidance and counselling services, fund raise and advocate for boy's involvement on gender issues to advance girls' growth.
- In Sierra Leone, towards encouraging girls to stay in school, pregnant girls are being allowed back to school to complete their education.
- In the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, the Eleme council of female chiefs played a key role in ending the spate of violence against women in their community. One of such female chiefs is Chief Miriam, who is a long-term beneficiary of WANEP capacity building initiatives and a member of the customary court.

4.1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Women should take advantage of the existing platforms at the local level to build their leadership skills rather than seek national recognition where they may not have the chance
- We need to harness and adapt the value of traditional wisdom spectrum where uneducated women have contributed meaningfully to peace efforts, but this should be done with care because these platforms can sometimes be used to deepen discriminatory practices against women.
- Very important to build capacity of male dominated chiefdoms, council members etc., and inform men of the essence of involving women and allowing them to bring their value into peacebuilding processes
- We have developed enough frameworks; they are existing institutions at the community level to leverage on; work within those structures
- Document, map and recognize women peacebuilding efforts at the community level to increase possibility of financial

support to local actions by women

- Donors should be made to support local women peacebuilding efforts directly and not through intermediaries: Organizations like WANEP and ECOWAS should get donor partners to support women local actions
- Connect WPS with other issues such as microcredit schemes, land ownership, child rights etc., The general wellbeing of women should be an anchor for WPS
- There is much talk at the strategic level, we need to cascade the discussion to where it truly resides - at the grassroots level
- Establish collaborative community-based approaches with women's organizations as partners in implementing development programs
- Localization of 1325 document into local language to ensure its popularization and ownership by local communities.

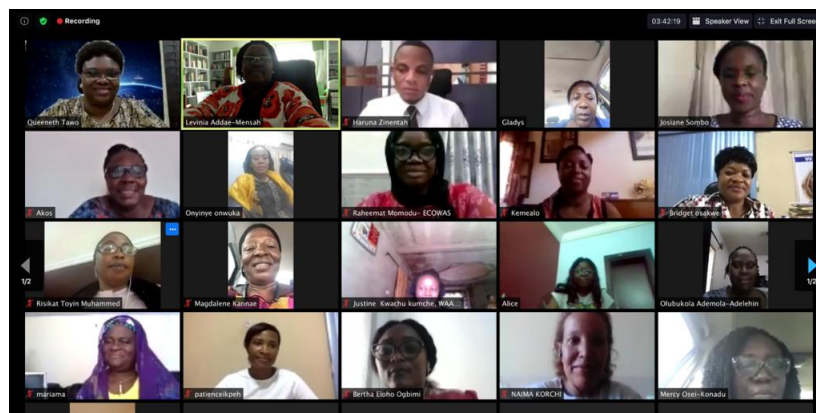
- Develop strategies to harness the experiences of older women for meaningful involvement of young people in ensuring smooth intergenerational bridge

5.0. CHALLENGES TO MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

- Resolution 1325 sensitization and advocacy initiatives are often centralized in urban areas with limited outreach to rural women.
- Women's leadership roles and contributions to peacebuilding at the local level are not documented or taken into consideration in national statistics on women's leadership positions.
- The persistent low women's low economic power orchestrated by endemic poverty, hinder women's equitable/effective participation in community peace processes
- Community leaders lack knowledge and awareness on gender policies and on UNSCR 1325
- Lack of government's political will to honour WPS commitments
- Absence of dedicated resources for the effective implementation of UNSCR 1325
- Absence of baseline data, authenticity of indicators and absence of effective monitoring mechanisms hinder the full implementation of 1325 NAPs
- Constraints of dealing with entrenched male traditional authority
- Lack of community action plans to help to ascertain the extent of the implementation of 1325

6.0. WRAP UP/CLOSE

In her closing remarks, WANEP Program/Executive Director, Ms. Levinia Addae-Mensah expressed appreciation to all participants particularly WANEP partners including ECOWAS, UNOWAS, AU, KAIPTC for their support and partnership. She described the forum as a platform for multiple stakeholders to share their perspectives and presented specific instances where we can see clearly the invaluable role of women at the different levels; strategic, operational and tactical. Mrs. Addae-Mensah, said she was impressed



Digital image of some participants and Speakers on day one of the Gender Talk Series

with the quality of conversation adding, 'the panelists spurred us into good reflections and good discourses. This was an opportunity to walk the talk!' She further recognized WANEP Regional and national office colleagues as well as network members for the support in making the forum a success and called for stronger partnerships and collaboration in the actualization of the WPS agenda.