

# Women, Peace, and Security Agenda in Africa: Going Far but Not Further?

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## Abstract

*There are opportunities and challenges in the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda articulated in the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 of 2000 and other successive resolutions. However, these opportunities can be interpreted as an epitome of the proverb “a cup half-empty or half-full.” The WPS is a progressive agenda for gender programmes in Africa, but it appears unknown beyond policy and activist circles on the continent. Using secondary research and content analysis (CA) of current literature, this study seeks to investigate the progress made by the WPS agenda in Africa since the UNSCR 1325 was adopted. It was revealed that despite the challenges, the gender perspective is not deficient in peacekeeping operations (PKOs) except in peace agreements and that gender 1325 commitments are mirrored in the mandates of PKOs. However, the African Union-United Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) showed the most minor WPS agenda consideration, and so did the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). It remains unclear for the rest of Africa if the agenda is stagnating or going forward due to the structural challenges rooted in masculinity issues and patriarchal mindsets, among others.*

**Keywords:** Women; peace; security; agenda, Africa

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## Introduction

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women's involvement in the international sphere of politics was marginal (Anon, 2021). Reports commissioned by the United Nations (UN) on peacekeeping operations (PKOs), traditionally viewed as hard politics allied to masculinity and militarism, revealed a common lack of gender recognition and female participation (Simić, 2010). This highlights the need for rethinking the role of women in transnational peace and security (Simić, 2010). After a century of feminist movements, civil society lobbying, and numerous UN symposiums on women, in 2000, the UN Security Council decisively adopted Resolution 1325 concerned with Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), applauded as a milestone in international feminist endeavours (Anon, 2021). Based on lessons learnt from the

destructive wars in the 1990s, for the first time, Resolution 1325 addresses the diverse experiences and the disproportionate effects of violent conflicts on women and the need for women to engage in conflict prevention and peacekeeping processes (Tickner, 2019). Successive resolutions made in the past two decades were founded from Resolution 1325 and its mainstays: relief and recovery, protection, prevention and participation. These are further integrated into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century WPS Agenda (Puechguirbal, 2010).

Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the progress made by the WPS Agenda in the present multifaceted peacekeeping operations on the African continent. This focus is different from previous studies, which focused on the implementation impact of the WPS agenda on



peacekeeping operations (PKOs) and revealed the implementation gaps (UN, 2022; AUC, 2023; AU, 2023; Binder et al., 2008; Hendricks, 2015). A previous study by Kreft (2017) showed that while a clear development towards better gender sensitivity exists in UN mandates for PKOs, not all the UN PKOs consider the essence of 1325 to the same extent. This study is built upon these findings and considers the mandates of six different PKOs. On a practical level, this study could benefit the UN Security Council, the African Union Peace and Security Council practitioners, regional blocs, governments and other stakeholders since PKO mandates directly evolve from discussions held at a higher level of international politics. On a theoretical level, this study shows an intersection of literature on

the PKOs, feminist theory, and WPS agenda.

Thus, this article first provides a background to the study, then a theoretical background, reviews the literature on peacekeeping and the WPS agenda, focussing on developments in the 20th century, the momentous adoption of Resolution 1325, and current debates. Next, the methodology employed is outlined, followed by a discussion of the main findings, policy considerations and a conclusion.

## **Methodology**

This study employs secondary research and content analysis (CA), which was applied to various UNSC, AUPSC, RECs resolutions and other relevant commitments to the WPS agenda in Africa (Gheyle & Jacobs, 2017). CA began with a search for gender and women, including an in-depth analysis of content



chosen from international resolutions stating women and resolutions that cite gender. Based on the systemic description of explicit aspects of these identified resolutions, the initial and newest PKO resolutions were selected to reveal progress based on the coding framework (Gheyle & Jacobs, 2017). The coding framework adopts the criteria and four pillars expressed in the UN Secretary-General Report S/2010/498 on the WPS agenda implementation (Peace-Women, 2020b; Gheyle & Jacobs, 2017; UNSC, 2010). It is important to note that the coding framework and interpretation of the various resolutions were grounded in the researcher's experiences, which may differ from other researchers' understandings.

## Background

Since African countries gained independence, they never detached fully from the residual

influence of the colonial legacy (UNSC, 2019). The continued relationship between Western powers and their former colonies has caused neo-colonialism to thrive on the continent (Zondi, 2017). In addition, the notion of Western supremacy has continued manifesting in who and what constitutes development and its measurement criterion. The same applies to defining and promoting peacebuilding and democratic governance. The same applies to defining and promoting peacebuilding and democratic governance (Zondi, 2017). Against this background, some political leaders have chosen to accept or reject certain concepts when it best suits them. As such, injustices continue in Africa, along with the marginalisation of women and ethnic minorities and governance



crises, among others (Kezie-Nwoha, 2020).

Several African countries, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Mozambique and Nigeria, are presently either in post-war tensions or conflicts and are in the reconstruction process after conflicts (Kezie-Nwoha, 2020). Conflicts that emerged after the Cold War include social, international-social, and ethnic conflicts (Pankhurst, 2004). Sub-regional and regional institutions in Africa have assumed mediating roles in these conflicts, including the African Union (AU) and the regional economic communities (RECs), such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community for West Africa (ECOWAS), and the East African Community (EAC) (Kezie-Nwoha, 2020). All these

institutions exercise mandates of peacebuilding.

Some conflicts are based on deep-seated identity, religion, ethnicity and tribe. Therefore, conflict management is needed at the political, national, social institutions and community levels (Aall, 2015). Additionally, most peacebuilding frameworks created by such institutions were developed from the perspectives of men, who are dominant in leadership positions. The nature of conflicts is changing, and war has shifted from the battleground to the public, increasing the impact on civilians, especially children and women (WUNRN, 2016). These shifting dynamics need new ways of countering conflicts and building sustainable peace. Achankeng (2013) argues that traditional approaches to conflict management have not succeeded in bringing sustainable peace to Africa owing to the patriarchal



characters and inadequate peacebuilding conceptualisation. Tensions are likely to be entrenched in patriarchal customs that concentrate on mediating power struggles amongst male political elites.

These patriarchal structures tend to be replicated by some peacebuilding institutions, such that even if women participate, their attempts to bring change are often hindered (Aroussi, 2009). In the African context, the WPS agenda seems to have made a substantial effort to minimise the patriarchal tendencies (Shekhawat, 2016). Examples include Liberia, where the women's peace crusade forced contending parties into an agreement, blocked windows and doors and stopped anyone who dared to abandon the peace talks (MacDougall, 2011). In Burundi, women insisted on having their position at the negotiating peace table, influencing the outcome

(MacDougall, 2011). Recently, women in South Sudan ensured a 35% inclusion quota in the revitalised agreement and allowed the representation of women in the transitional structures of the government (IGAD, 2018). Also, the women's role was critical in spearheading the uprising that ended a dictatorship that had lasted for three decades.

Notwithstanding this progress, women peace advocates' political and civic space continues to contract (AUC, 2023). For instance, despite the role of women in Sudan's liberation, their involvement in the continuing peace talks in the capital of Juba remains insignificant (IGAD, 2018). African peacebuilding approaches adopted the Western ideas of who can sit at the table and what content can be deliberated (Kezie-Nwoha, 2020). In many cases, men with an



affinity to the army are prioritised. Meanwhile, religious/community and women influential leaders with deep knowledge of local conflict dynamics are often excluded (Crenshaw, 1989). The supremacy of Western methods is inescapable because Western actors respond first in major humanitarian crises, funding most of the peace processes and holding most of the strategic positions in institutions of peace and security, which allows for the replication of their norms and patriarchal structures (Hooks, 2015; Crenshaw, 1989). Although most of these practices in Africa adopt the WPS agenda rhetorically, its transmutation into practice is generally militarist (Mama & Okazawa-Rey, 2012).

In a patriarchal context, Hendricks argues that there is no peace to talk about because patriarchy is itself violent and eventually creates behaviours that trigger a war or armed

conflict (Hendricks, 2015). The peace feminist's agenda is to have these patriarchal forms and the militarist manifestation dismantled in the practice of conflict and war. However, these perspectives are often not embedded in the peacebuilding processes, even though these perspectives were foundational to the WPS agenda (Hendricks, 2015; Crenshaw, 1989). What is needed, as asserted by Young, is a transformative agenda to ensure that all forms of exclusion and economic, political and social inequality are eradicated, especially in Africa (Young, 2010).

### **Women, Peace, and Security Agenda in Feminist Perspectives**

During the Cold War, research was predominantly from a realist perspective, concerned with the stability of power dynamics, national security and wars, but oblivious of women and gender in



the security concept (Sjoberg, 2009; Tickner, 2019). Conventional security research was distinguished by a dichotomous knowledge of binary variances between femininity (for peace) and masculinity (for war) (Aroussi, 2009). Women were generally associated with motherhood, vulnerability, subordination, and political irrelevance, and men were viewed as the providers of women and the guardians of state security (Sjoberg, 2009; Puechguirbal, 2012; Tickner, 1992).

Ever since the 1980s and 1990s, researchers of feminism like Tickner (1992) and Blanchard (2003) moved into the global scene, arguing that realism has veiled women from international relations, lacks gender sensitivity, discounts women from decision-making in foreign policy, and promotes the essentialist assumptions about women's

traditional roles (Blanchard, 2003; Jansson & Eduards, 2016; Sjoberg, 2009). Security studies through the lens of gender and feminist research defied conventional security studies and gave rise to gender-sensitive concepts of security (Higate & Henry, 2004). As an alternative to males as referent human beings for security, the new security definition was multidimensional, broad and gender-sensitive (Jansson & Eduards, 2016; Blanchard, 2003; Sjoberg, 2009).

### **The Three-Legged Stool Gender Framework**

According to Dunn (2016), the three-legged gender stool framework is epistemologically and ontologically premised on three logical areas: gender as diversity, difference, and equality (Dunn, 2016). It also relates to diverse theoretical standpoints, traditions, and classifications of feminist theory, and it was influenced strongly by feminist



debates, the equality-difference discourse, and intersectionality (Dunn, 2016). The gender stool idea, as postulated by Booth and Bennet, contends that a practical mainstreaming approach and gender-sensitive perspective to policy-making lies on all three 'legs' that simultaneously interact (Booth & Bennett, 2002; Dunn, 2016).

The gender-as-equality approach is predicated on fair treatment of people, setting women's activities that ensure they enjoy the same opportunities and rights as men through legislation (Booth & Bennett, 2002). It shows feminist liberalism and socialist theory, defining success as men and women enjoying the same treatment (Dunn, 2016). The feminist liberal theory is concerned more with the growing number of representations, whereas the socialist feminist theory is related more to Marxist

feminism, which accounts for economic structures of reproduction and production at the household level to determine the position of women (Pratt, 2013; Tickner, 1992). In the framework espoused by Squires (2005), this perspective is termed inclusion and gender neutrality (Crenshaw, 1989).

The second leg of the stool, the gender-as-difference or women's approach, encourages initiatives that identify women as an underprivileged group who merit special attention based on their differences (Booth & Bennett, 2002). It aligns with the premises put forward by Squires (2005), which refers to difference or reversal politics and was influenced by cultural and feminist radical theory. According to Pratt (2013) and Hudson (2005), radical feminism is held by essentialists focusing on the dissimilarities between women and men, women's involvement,



and violence against women. Therefore, affirmative action is needed to amplify women's voices and offset institutionalised patriarchy (Dunn, 2016; Hudson, 2005; Pratt, 2013; Squires, 2005). In the classification by Hansen (2010), this feminist standpoint implies a critical understanding of the state as a patriarchal set of practices that reinforce and muzzle structural disadvantages for women (Hansen, 2010). The cultural feminist theory is a different category espoused by Pratt (2013), which is concerned more with the role of women in peacebuilding.

Lastly, gender-as-diversity seeks to change how society is organised to prevent an unbiased distribution of roles and appreciate the multiplicity of transecting identities (Dunn, 2016). The strategy of displacement, also known as gender-as-diversity, advocates

for broadening the focus from gender inequality to appreciation of intersecting and diverse inequalities (Booth & Bennett, 2002), following Crenshaw's (1989) and Hooks' (2015) intersection of postcolonial and feminist theory (Booth & Bennett, 2002; Crenshaw, 1989; Dunn, 2016). Postcolonial feminism reviews the main racial narrative assumptions, such as white men perceived as protecting peacekeeping operations (PKOs), brown/black men seen as symbols of sexual harassment, and women are excluded from the antiracist and feminist discourse (Crenshaw, 1989; Pratt, 2013). Focusing on the experience of black women, postcolonial feminism is an intersection between race and gender discourses (Crenshaw, 1989; Hooks, 2015).

The three perspectives in the framework of the three-legged gender stool help to answer the



research question in this study. Previous studies have shown that all three perspectives are echoed in the WPS agenda, though to different degrees (Hooks, 2015; Pratt, 2013; Anon, 2021; Dunn, 2010).

Based on the liberal feminist theory and gender-as-equality viewpoint, the current African PKOs are expected to focus intensely on amplifying women's voices in all political activities to promote equality (Dunn, 2016). In light of the gender-as-difference view and the cultural and radical feminist theory, the WPS agenda in Africa considers different women's experiences in wars. Referring to differences between women and men, the pillars in Resolution 1325 of 2000 on protection, relief, and recovery in Africa are expected to include women's needs and embrace a gender-as-difference standpoint. However, the critique of the essentialist assertions on men's

and women's differences dictates that PKOs should concentrate on reconstruction in the later stages of a conflict. The gender-as-difference perspective is like an afterthought in the current African context. Meanwhile, unlike the other two established traditional perspectives, gender-as-diversity draws mainly from Africa's postcolonial epoch and black feminism in the 1990s.

## **Literature Review**

The literature was reviewed under the following themes: international WPS efforts in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the adoption of UN Security Resolution 1325, the implementation of the WPS Agenda, and the African Union's Commitment to the WPS Agenda in Africa.

### ***International WPS Attempts in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century***

Even though the initial women activists for equal participation can be traced as far back as the



late 1800s to the early 1900s, the roots of women's involvement in international politics, particularly on issues of international security, were explicitly started in 1915 at the International Congress of Women, convened in The Hague (Anon, 2021). In 1919, the Women's Peace Party, which merged into the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, brought together 1,500 women worldwide (Tickner & True, 2018) have recommend stopping the First World War and attune international women to peace and security with positive peace principles (Tickner & True, 2018; Otto, 2006). In 1948, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom assumed consultative status at the UN. This paved the way for a more official mobilisation of women's global cause through numerous women's UN world conferences, conventions and declarations (Kirby & Shepherd, 2016; Binder

et al., 2008). Examples include the Commission on the Status of Women from 1969 Report, the 1974 Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict prepared for the 1975 and 1980 conferences on the participation of women in their struggles against apartheid regimes in Mexico City, and on colonialism and racism in Copenhagen (Binder et al., 2008).

From 1975 to 1985, the UN's "Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace" focussed on increasing the prominence of UN women's events. In 1981, the UN General Assembly held the "Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women" and in 1982, the "Declaration on the Participation of Women in Promoting International Peace and Cooperation" (Otto, 2006; Binder et al., 2008). Despite the Nairobi conference in 1985



aimed at strengthening social and economic empowerment of women and censuring violence against women, it was only in 1995, at the “Beijing UN World Conference on Women,” that the experiences of women in conflicts or their lack of involvement in peacekeeping (just of 2% women) raised grave concerns (Klein, 2012; Miller et al., 2014).

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the UN PKOs mandates never issued specific women requests. However, the 189 guarantors of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action shifted to this position (Simić, 2010). The Beijing +5 conference, held in June 2000, developed the “Namibia Plan of Action,” the “Brahimi Report,” and the “Windhoek Declaration,” which referred to the 1990s destructive wars and their effect in their cause and justification (Tickner, 2019). The paradigm shifts of the

security situation in the post-Cold War and the determinations by the NGO Working Group on WPS ultimately made the UN Security Council more informed of the significance of women’s positions in conflict and peacekeeping (Puechguirbal, 2010). As such, Resolution 1325 on WPS came into being.

### ***The Adoption of UN Security Resolution 1325***

Resonating with the principles of 1915, Resolution 1325 is equally traditional since it was developed in earlier works and takes a more inclusive approach (Tickner & True, 2018). Adopted unanimously on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 2000, Resolution 1325 was the creation of the UN Security Council’s first whole session dedicated to women’s experiences in post-conflict situations and related to peace, security and gender equality (Dharmapuri, 2011). Targeting women’s stigmatisation as



merely armed conflict victims, the resolution depicts the women's image as agents for and of change after conflicts (Pratt, 2013).

However, it also highlights the various experiences in post-conflict and conflict locales of women and the disproportionate effects of violent conflict (Otto, 2006). The UN resolutions provide four pillars that reflect different perspectives and equality to foster a gender perspective (Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011). It recognises the contribution of women to peacekeeping operations, exhorting all women to participate at all decision-making levels concerned with the management, resolution, and prevention of conflicts (Dunn, 2016). The second pillar is based on the concept of equality (Dunn, 2016), with stronger prevention of violence and the promotion of rights for women through

domestic law, prosecution of murder criminals and support for local peace initiatives. It calls for women's protection against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) during emergencies and acknowledges gendered issues of conflict and the vulnerability dissimilarities between women and men (Harrington, 2011; Dunn, 2016).

Working in line with these three pillars, the last and fourth pillar is recovery and relief, focusing on women's priorities in demobilisation, disarmament, reintegration, governance reform, transitional justice and security sector reform (Dunn, 2016). The three main objectives of UNSCR 1325 are women's participation in all peace-related decision-making, protection of women's rights in all cases of conflict, human rights violations, and the adoption of a gender approach in peace and security matters.



## **WPS Agenda Implementation**

The framework of the WPS is predicated on ten resolutions adopted in national action plans (NAP) by 84 countries and several regional and international organisations (Peace-Women, 2020a; Adjei, 2019). Successive Resolutions 1325 lengthened the WPS agenda in the past twenty years and concentrated on increasing awareness of PKOs and SGBV (Dharmapuri, 2012). In 2008 resolutions, Resolution 1820 introduced the policy of zero-tolerance for sexual abuse. In 2009, Resolution 1888 created the office of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General responsible for conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) (Kirby & Shepherd, 2016; Miller et al., 2014). Other resolutions focus on monitoring mechanisms of CRSV implementation (Resolutions: 1889 of 2009, 1960 of 2010, 2106 of 2013 and 2122 of 2013) and a

UN Security Council gender-perspective working areas (Resolutions: 2242 of 2015, 2467 of 2019 and 2493 of 2019) (UNSC, 2019; Kirby & Shepherd, 2016).

Departing from the original notion of 1325 to stop the stigmatisation of females as victims, the next resolutions included and legitimised essentialist suppositions on women's intrinsic peacefulness (Puechguirbal, 2012). Apart from these feminist appraisals of the WPS agenda, recent research has focussed on processes of peace-making (Shepherd, 2015). For instance, implementing the Global Study on Resolution 1325 revealed that women's recognition and participation have been improving, especially among civilians and police personnel, but also revealed implementation gaps (Hendricks, 2015; Adjei, 2019). Although literature in this area is somewhat



limited, Kreft (2017) showed that while a clear development towards better gender sensitivity exists in UN mandates for PKOs, not all the UN PKOs consider the essence of 1325 to the same extent. Krause (2015) also revealed that gender sensitivity was correlated with the prevalence of sexually violent conflicts. The 2018 report from the UN Secretary-General on WPS revealed that from 1990 to 2017, women constituted just 8% of negotiators, 1% of mediators, and 5% of witnesses and agreement signatories (UNSC, 2019).

### **African Union's Commitment to WPS Agenda in Africa**

For the past 20 years, violent and inter-state armed conflicts have diminished significantly in Africa (AUPSC, 2019). However, intra-state conflicts and a spate of violence continue, posing security threats that have disproportionately affected women in different ways (AUPSC,

2019; AUC, 2023). Conflict perspectives can change awareness of gender roles in peace, security, international relations and development (AUC, 2023). More efforts are needed to build structures and address protection issues of non-combatants in conflict and the challenges women face during and after conflict in Africa (AUPSC, 2019).

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) report of 2018 emphasised that instability and conflicts in Africa exacerbate the pre-existent discrimination patterns against girls and women, subjecting them to increased risks of human rights infringements (CEDAW, 2018). Between 2018 and 2019, most of the victims were women (AU, 2023). According to the UNSC (2019), a record of political violence level was aimed at women in the past 12 months in



Africa, involving sexual violence, killings, offline and online harassment, forced disappearances, mob violence and physical assault. Starting in 2018, in the context of the Security Council's agenda, more than 50 parties to the conflict were suspected of having instigated or committed rapes and other patterns of sexual violence (Kishi et al., 2019).

A critical analysis of more recent mediation processes showed that most representatives and special envoys tasked to participate in conflicts at very high levels were men (AUPSC, 2019). Additionally, evidence gathered from 2012 up to 2016 suggested that in Africa, peace agreements and processes continued to occur in a context strongly dominated by men (AUPSC, 2019). However, females are understood to influence disputing parties in their societies and can informally

intervene and have an impact (AU, 2023). Nonetheless, the recognition of women's contribution and involvement at all levels of preventing conflict is lacking in Africa (AUPSC, 2019). This is due to the stereotypes about women's roles in mediation, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding. The slow implementation of global, continental, regional, and national commitments, protocols and resolutions on women's participation and gender equality remains a challenge in Africa.

In 2017, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) sessions showed that the AU's priority was the implementation of the WPS agenda (AUPSC, 2019). The council emphasises in all its communiqués that women's meaningful involvement is a *sine qua non* condition for building durable peace and security in Africa (AUPSC, 2019). The council further highlights the



importance of women's inclusion as equal actors in conflict management, prevention and resolution, development, and post-conflict peacebuilding. Regardless of these commitments, the progress concerning the implementation of the WPS agenda in Africa is lagging. For example, the AUPSC (2018) conveyed a concern despite the availability of well-enunciated strategies, action plans and policies on WPS. Nonetheless, women continued to endure the effects of conflicts in the continent and fall victim to abuses, including sexual violence. As women remain underrepresented in peace activities, member states call for the involvement of women in all peace processes (AU, 2023; AUPSC, 2018). The AUPSC (2019) developed the Continental Results Framework (CRF) on WPS (2018-2028) in Africa to advance the implementation of

the WPS agenda. Launched officially in February 2019, the framework seeks to monitor AU member states in implementing the WPS agenda and other stakeholders' implementation of different international and African commitments and instruments on WPS across Africa (AUPSC, 2019).

Parallel to this framework, the AU also launched the "Strategy on Gender and Women's Empowerment" at the organisational level (AUPSC, 2019). This strategy could expedite the AU-wide execution if complemented by a gender strategy of peace and security (AUC, 2023). The principle of gender equality and the normative WPS agenda framework have significant national and regional visibility, especially when regional institutions adopt policies that support the WPS agenda (AUC, 2023). Most of the sub-regional



and regional African organisations adopted a broad framework of gender equality policy (AUC, 2023). For example, the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) developed a gender policy, while most SADC member states adopted national gender policies (Anon, 2021). In addition, IGAD in East Africa employs a Regional Action Plan to implement the 2000 UNSC 1325 and the subsequent resolutions. The East African Community (EAC) agreed to adopt the UNSCR 1325 regional strategy. In 2018, the SADC embraced the WPS regional strategy (2018-2022), which exhorts member states to take on the National Action Plans (NAPs) (AUPSC, 2019).

Beyond strong political will and all these normative instruments, significant progress has been observed in the development mechanisms (AUPSC, 2019; AUC, 2023).

Remarkably, this incorporates the nomination in 2014 of the AU Special Envoy on WPS, the introduction of the programme on Gender, Peace and Security in 2015, and the unveiling of the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (Fem-Wise) that took place in 2017. In November 2015, informed by the mandate of the Special Envoys, the Peace and Security Department introduced a work plan of five years (2015–2020) based on gender, peace, and security whose main goal was to speed up the WPS agenda implementation in Africa, mainly within the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) (Kezie-Nwoha, 2020; AUC, 2023; AU, 2023). The Fem-Wise was a creation of the African Union Assembly of Heads of State in the purview of APSA as a supplementary structure for the Panel of the Wise (Kezie-Nwoha, 2020). However, regardless of the

noteworthy progress, the AU admits that more effort is needed to support the execution of the WPS agenda (AUPSC, 2019). This explains why the AU Chairperson made a clarion call to the RECs, the member states, and international partners to deploy unswerving political will, expertise, resources, attitudinal change and accountability to guarantee the full execution of the WPS agenda (AUC, 2023; AUPSC, 2019).

### **Discussion of Main Findings**

The findings reveal that although the current PKOs are implemented on the African continent based on multifaceted mandates, they reflect different levels of the obligations entrenched in the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 of 2000. Most peacekeeping missions in Africa are hinged on particular resolutions, including the obligations to implement the WPS agenda and 1325. Although

a thrust on advancing female participation could also be ascertained for all, including local women and female peacekeepers, concern for the prevention pillar remains at the middle level in certain resolutions like the UNAMID operation. This leads to only some PKOs fully reflecting the spirit of equality in the WPS agenda. For some, there is still an opportunity for greater reflection on the implementation of the WPS agenda.

UNAMID, whose mandate was already somewhat absent from the prevention pillar, accounts for only about half of the cases dealing with protection and perhaps refers to and restates the WPS agenda in general. A further analysis shows that it is the UNAMID's first resolution, which underscores women's protection and calls for the UN Secretary-General to apply the policy of zero-tolerance against sexual violence perpetrated by



peacekeepers in the UNAMID's exercise. Meanwhile, MINUSCA involves mechanisms to ensure some degree of protection from SGBV perpetrated by peacekeepers through the implementation of the UN zero-tolerance policy and women's protection from SGBV in violent conflict. This study leads to the belief that the WPS agenda has affected the first PKO in terms of women's consideration in Africa, but not necessarily of gender. Blending this finding with the evolution of the feminist theory, which for a long time did not have the perspective of gender-as-diversity and was somewhat engaged in the equality-difference discourse, implies that the PKOs lack a diversity perspective.

This discussion and analysis illustrate that gender perspective is indeed implemented through the WPS agenda as reflected in the current PKOs in Africa. While

the UN's Resolution 1325 has laid the foundational mechanisms, the WPS agenda in Africa leads the PKOs process in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The four pillars in Resolution 1325, namely, relief and recovery, participation, protection and prevention, and the consequent resolutions, continue to affect peacekeeping for women in the continent significantly. As opposed to most research, this study focuses on the implementation of the WPS agenda in peacekeeping in Africa. This study reveals that gender was employed in different contexts, mainly in the form of SGBV protection, then training and gender analysis, and more theoretically in gender as a converging issue across the implementation of WPS. This showed that a perspective of gender exists in some peace agreements. However, the WPS agenda in Africa could show more diversity, and there is a



need to analyse other resolutions. It was striking that UNAMID, one of Africa's most extended missions, revealed the most minor WPS agenda consideration, although MINUSCA significantly reflected it.

The AU and its member states have been able to develop policies and frameworks to ensure that the WPS agenda is realised in Africa. The main challenge is that most adopted a vision of WPS from a state-centric perspective focused more on militaries 'silencing the guns' and deploying peacekeepers to battlefields. Even if the AU is encouraging a new paradigm that narrates African solutions to African problems, this appears not to have effectively transformed into the implementation of the WPS agenda in Africa.

The commonality of all these frameworks is the motivation to

gauge women's participation by determining how many women occupy decision-making positions. Notably, most countries with more prominent figures of women in positions of decision-making, especially in parliament, are those convalescing from conflict, for example, South Africa, Uganda, and Rwanda. However, this improved participation has failed to decrease gender-based violence (GBV), nor has it bettered women's socioeconomic status. This focus on figures only restricts the transformative implementation of the WPS agenda in Africa. The concept of increasing the participation of women in decision-making is meant to ensure that the perspectives and needs of women are addressed adequately in the decision-making processes.

However, in most African countries, an appointment in any



decision-making position should be affiliated with a political party. Political parties in Africa may not be an integral part of the communities except during campaigns. Therefore, their candidate only reflects the views of the party and not the views of women or the community they purport to represent. The feminist movements have been pressing for clearer parameters of what constitutes participation, but this advocacy effort appears not to have been fully addressed by scientists.

Meanwhile, instead of focusing on the implementation of the WPS agenda, some women in politics see women activists for WPS as potential competitors and wish them away. Although many African countries with NAPs execute UNSCR 1325, emerging and protracted conflicts remain obstacles to effectively implementing the WPS agenda in Africa. As a result,

the participation of women in peacebuilding and the protection of women from sexual and gender-based violence remains lagging. All the initiatives signify the AU's commitment to wholly implement the ongoing commitments and normative instruments in Africa on the WPS agenda. What is required is persistent and consistent activism for political will and transformation of mindsets.

Challenges to implementation remain prevalent. Aside from regional and country-specific challenges, RECs and member states share some cross-cutting challenges and issues. The major issue is adequate and sustainable financing for both WPS implementation and monitoring. Other challenges noted in this study include the lack of statistical capacity and knowledge management for improved accountability and reporting, leadership, and



coordination at the national level. This includes the obligation to bring the Ministries of Defence and gender-relevant bodies close together and address developing issues like violent extremism, irregular displacement and migration, and climate change as a broader agenda for WPS.

There are also deep-seated stereotypes and attitudes around gender roles in Africa. Even with the institutional and normative measures developed by member states, persistent cultural beliefs, attitudes and structural settings (such as social norms and values) hinder the execution of the WPS agenda, hence perpetuating the vulnerability of women. While the need to engage men is increasingly recognised, there is not much in terms of broadening the WPS agenda to discuss and tackle masculinity issues, deeply entrenched patriarchal mindsets, and institutional cultures. Some of

these have been deeply embedded during the colonial and continue to date.

The UN (2022) revealed that the impact of the WPS agenda on women's lives is ambiguous because there is a lack of monitoring of the progress, weaknesses, achievements, and NAP implementation of UNSCR 1325. African member states have limited efforts to include gender perspectives in any attempt to monitor and evaluate different peace and security sectors. They also have limited capacity to collect and report gender issues in areas affected by conflict. Women's participation in politics and peace processes is usually figurative and is frequently withstood by cultural norms. There is a lack of cooperation or coordination by various actors engaged in the WPS agenda at the national and regional levels. Civil society organisations



representing women working on gender equality, conflict prevention and peacebuilding remain underfinanced and not integrated into the prevailing WPS policy discourse on the continent.

### **Conclusion**

Over the years, the AU and its member states have shown a dedication to the WPS agenda and have made reasonable progress, including creating diverse and robust continental mediators and women leadership networks. The use of gender-sensitive language increased in peace agreements. The number of women's groups, gender experts, and women appointed as official mediators, negotiators, witnesses, advisory bodies, and signatories has also increased in recent years. However, the participation of women in peace processes has been low, and the implementation of action plans and policies has been slow.

Financing, implementation and monitoring of policies, NAPs and laws remain feeble. The implementation of most national and regional NAPs on WPS is not budgeted; hence, this depends heavily on donor funding. Women continue to be targets of SGBV. In recent years, online violence against activists for women and women in politics has become pervasive in Africa. This has weakened the implementation of the WPS agenda due to disinformation communicated as an insult and hate speech, violating women's rights and their involvement in public affairs.

All in all, Africa has made significant and progressive normative advances to implement the WPS agenda at regional and continental levels. However, going further than the current progress remains an uphill task, given the myriad of structural challenges rooted in patriarchal mindsets, funding,

cultural beliefs, a lack of political will, and masculinity issues. However, the continent has been able to domesticate the UNSCR 1325 and further elaborate and develop it. As of 25 January 2022, thirty AU member states had designed NAPs to implement WPS.



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