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Women and Peacebuilding in Africa: Some Policy Recommendations

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Support practitioner/policy institutions and universities

to design and run effective mentorship programs for women's effective participation in decision-making and peace negotiations;

Fund and popularize policies

that mainstream gender into all aspects of education and research on peace, security, and development;

Promote legislation and peacebuilding policies

and programmes that encourage young women's participation in peacebuilding at all levels;

Provide equal training opportunities

for both young women and men in civic and peace education, conflict resolution, conflict transformation, peace mediation, and critical thinking;

Facilitate programs

for the emergence of a critical mass of woman peacebuilders across the continent; and

Work with regional organizations

to reinforce policy frameworks and mechanisms that empower women's rights activists and non-governmental organizations to involve more women in providing leadership to peacebuilding initiatives and institutions.

There is an increasing acknowledgment of the important role played by women in peacebuilding worldwide. The UN Security Council Resolution (UNSC) 1325 calls for the full involvement of women in all efforts towards the maintenance of and support for peace and security.¹ Other successive UNSC resolutions linked to the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) framework such as 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, and 2242 have underscored the role of women in peacebuilding. However, Machakanja observes that "women's participation in peace and security in Africa remains more symbolic than substantive, and their capacity to influence and engage in peace negotiations is often resisted by local cultural norms and patriarchal hierarchies."² Although women contribute significantly to peacebuilding in Africa, their efforts are often diminished, or "invisible." This is predominantly a result of the patriarchal bias which tends to exclude women from political activities and official peace negotiations.³ This policy briefing note is based on the research findings of a recently published edited book on [Women and Peacebuilding in Africa](#).

WOMEN AND PEACEBUILDING IN AFRICA

Women and Peacebuilding in Africa provides new perspectives to the challenges women confront in situations of armed conflict.⁴ While recognizing the unbearable trauma that women suffer during violent conflict, African women scholars observe that women are not just victims and survivors of violent conflict; they are active agents in conflict transformation. The case studies in the book showcase women's contributions from different parts of Africa to peacebuilding. These include

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initiatives that involve women living with disabilities, woman healthcare workers, woman artisanal miners, and woman fighters. The book also explores the multi-faceted roles of women in peacebuilding, drawing on cases from Eswatini, Kenya, Madagascar, Nigeria, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Woman peacebuilders in Africa face a lot of bias and structural obstacles. Although they are engaged in multiple peacebuilding roles at the community level, when it comes to dialogues and national conversations, the focus shifts to men. Research shows that significant peacebuilding work undertaken by women is mostly overlooked or invisible. For example, by contributing to the integration of women with disabilities into post-conflict reconciliation, reconstruction, and resettlement initiatives in several conflict-affected countries, woman activists are playing a leading role in promoting social cohesion. The same applies to woman healthcare workers and woman artisanal miners. Woman advocates who are engaging in activities that support the entry of women into these spheres of work from the periphery to the center must be recognized and supported.

Some of the research findings also bring to the fore another neglected issue, namely the role of women in terrorism. Most of the literature concentrates on projecting the image of women as victims. A few researchers have examined the role of women operating in terrorist organizations. Shifting focus to the role of woman fighters or actors in terrorist networks is critical to having a fuller picture of the complex connection between women and terrorism. This is important in challenging stereotypes relating to the role of women in terrorism and peacebuilding in Africa. Other significant challenges facing women engaged in peacebuilding on the continent include the following:

- i) Women still account for a small percentage of peacekeepers in spite of their demonstrable skills;
- ii) Absence of gendered approaches to peace and security in a context where women's understanding of peace and security is often quite different to that of men;
- iii) Marginalization of gendered approaches at the grassroots level as women have remained marginalized in the struggle for peace and security in militarized contexts;
- iv) Limited political will to implement the gender-sensitive conflict resolution and peacebuilding;
- v) The persistence of patriarchy as a hegemonic ideology that privileges the interests of men in peace

negotiations, decision-making, and implementation;

- vi) The low-level representation of women in leadership positions;
- vii) The persistence of the instrumentalist approach to peacebuilding where women are being brought to extinguish fires that are started by men; and
- viii) Limited financial support for training of woman peacebuilders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made to African governments:

- Support practitioner/policy institutions and universities to design and run effective mentorship programs for women's effective participation in decision-making and peace negotiations;
- Fund and popularize policies that mainstream gender into all aspects of education and research on peace, security, and development;
- Promote legislation and peacebuilding policies and programmes that encourage young women's participation in peacebuilding at all levels;
- Provide equal training opportunities for both young women and men in civic and peace education, conflict resolution, conflict transformation, peace mediation, and critical thinking;
- Facilitate programs for the emergence of a critical mass of woman peacebuilders across the continent; and
- Work with regional organizations to reinforce policy frameworks and mechanisms that empower women's rights activists and non-governmental organizations to involve more women in providing leadership to peacebuilding initiatives and institutions.

¹ B. Miller et al. 2014. "Women in Peace and Security through United Nations Security Resolution 1325: Literature Review, Content Analysis of National Action Plans, and Implementation," [IGIS WP 13/GGP WP 09](#). Institute for Global and International Studies, Georgetown University.

² P. Machakanja, 2016. "Is UNSCR 1325 Empowering African Women to Negotiate Peace? Insights and Policy Options." [APN Briefing Note No. 6](#).

³ O. Ilesanmi, 2018. "Women's Visibility in Decision Making Processes in Africa—Progress, Challenges, and Way Forward," [Frontiers in Sociology 3:38](#). doi: 10.3389/fsoc.2018.00038

⁴ Anna Chitando, Ed. 2021. [Women and Peacebuilding in Africa](#). New York: Routledge.