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Women's Participation in promoting Peace & Security in Africa

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ABSTRACT
Countries that are emerging from violent conflicts may be potential sites of positive change for women. The profound effects of war on gender roles including women's participation in labour previously seen as male only can sometimes produce new openings for women to influence social and political structures that, in peacetime, were closed to them.

In Africa, women play important roles as custodians of culture and nurturers of families, yet in times of conflict they are not represented at the peace negotiating table or in community reconstruction efforts. According to UN Women, a UN body that promotes women's empowerment and gender equality, women constitute fewer than 10% of peace negotiators globally and only 3% of signatories to peace agreements. Because stereotypical notions of gender, appropriate labour often re-emerges when a society strives to return to normal, women's participation in war-related work can also be overlooked or hidden away when disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes begin. Africa has a forefront of normative developments around Women, Peace & Security. A number of legislative and policy instruments subsequent to UNSCR 1325 have integrated its principles by addressing conventional security issues as part of the Women, Peace, & Security agenda.

Despite their active engagement in all aspects of social life in times of conflict, when postwar reconstruction begins along with the appointment of transitional governments women do not often gain positions of leadership.

Introduction
Women are important agents for creating stability in the lives of their families and to promote reconciliation and peace even under very difficult and traumatic situations, yet violence has had disproportionate effects on their lives. Often as targets of extreme forms of violence, women in Africa experience the full impact of violent conflicts in the region as civilians and combatants.

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However, women's peace building potential have had no significant impact on policies and decision relating to conflicts because of their absence from the decision making processes and bodies in the region. Most peace processes do not include women, civil society and youth. Priority is rarely given to developing women's individual and collective capacity to address these conflicts and to build stable, peaceful and democratic institutions in Africa. Women generally remain absent from policy dialogue with government on critical issues for peace and security that have fundamental gender dimensions and implications for sustainable stability. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) was adopted in 2000 for the empowerment of women as peace builders in conflict and post conflict settings, yet most of its commitments have not been implemented.

Women and girls are singled out as targets by terrorists and extremist groups, who abduct them and use them as suicide bombers or sex slaves.

Although women generally despise war, their bodies have become the new battlefields. Worse still, they are not consulted on issues of peace and nation-building. Many experts believe that leaving women out of peace and security processes hinders communities from finding long-lasting peace. In times of conflict, women's vulnerabilities and unique needs are often forgotten during negotiations which limit the effectiveness of both peace and security agreements, and humanitarian responses.

The United Nation Landmark Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace & Security
 The International community recognized the importance of women's participation in creating the conditions for permanent peace thus on 31 October 2000, the UN Security Council adopted the landmark resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, which acknowledged the critical role women, could play in preventing and resolving conflicts, negotiating peace, participating in peacekeeping and in humanitarian response and post-conflict peace-building. Among other things, the resolution calls for women to participate fully in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security. The resolution also requires the UN to solicit and take into account all viewpoints on gender issues in order to increase the role of women in all peace and security activities. It also requires all parties at war to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse.

Despite these requirements, UN Women says the percentage of women in peace talks has stagnated at single digits since the resolution was passed. The results have had a devastating impact on women's lives. Time is up to press for progress to increase women's active participation in peace and security matters.

To date, nineteen (19) AU Member States have developed and adopted 1325 National Action Plans (NAPs). These include Burkina Faso; Burundi; Central African Republic; Cote D'Ivoire; Democratic Republic of Congo; The Gambia; Ghana; Guinea; Guinea Bissau; Kenya; Liberia; Mali; Nigeria; Rwanda; Senegal; Sierra Leone; South Sudan; Togo; Uganda

West Africa has the largest concentration of 1325 Action Plans, with thirteen (13) ECOWAS Member States of the fifteen (15) having National Action Plans. This calls for greater interrogation as to the relationship between the existence of a Regional Action Plans and the

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adoption and implementation of National Action Plans in the same region, as well as outcomes and synergies between the two.

Women's participation in peace processes in Africa (1992-2011)
Table 1

Countries	Women signatories	Women lead mediators	Women lead mediators	Women in negotiating teams
Sierra Leone (1999)	0%	0%	20%	0%
Burundi(2000) – Arusha	0%	0%	–	2%
Somalia (2002) – Eldoret	0%	0%	–	0%
Cote D'Ivoire (2003)	0%	0%	0%	–
DRC (2003)	5%	0%	0%	12%
Liberia (2003) – Accra	0%	0%	17%	–
Sudan (2005) – Naivasha	0%	0%	9%	–
Darfur (2006) – Abuja	0%	0%	7%	8%
DRC(2008) Goma-North	5%	20%	0%	–
DRC(2008) – Goma – South	0%	20%	0%	–
Uganda (2008)	0%	0%	20%	9%
Kenya (2008) – Nairobi	0%	33%	0%	25%

Central Africa Republic (2008)	0%	0%	0%	–
Zimbabwe (2008)	0%	0%	0%	–
Somalia (2008)	0%	0%	0%	–
Central Africa Republic (2011)	0%	0%	0%	–

The above table illustrates that, with very few exceptions, the number of women participating in peace negotiations in a variety of official roles is significantly low or non-existent. While there has been advocacy to increase the numbers of women at the table, research indicates that influence and sequencing or timing of participation, and not just presence is critical in affecting the outcomes of the peace agreements and its provisions. How women mobilize outside the formal space, and the opportunities and avenues for transfer have also been noted as key as a strategy for influence. Mediators have a large role to play in this regard, and guidelines for women's inclusion in peace processes have been developed at the UN level. Participation of women even in peacekeeping, whether in UN or AU peace operations, indicates very low members overall with regard to the military and higher participation amongst the, which has in turn improved the reporting of sexual assaults. They have also set up units that provide protection to civilian victims of abuse.

Proportion of Women in Ministerial Level Positions 2005-2015 (%)
Country 2005 2010 2015
Table 2:

Countries	2005	2010	2015
Burkina Faso	14.8	17.9	12.5
Burundi	10.7	28.6	34.8
Central African Republic	10	12	24.1
Democratic Republic of Congo	12.5	12.5	8.1
Gambia	20	31.1	21.1

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Ghana	11.8	21.6	23.1
Guinea	15.4	16.1	14.7
Guinea-Bissau	37.5	23.5	31.3
Kenya	10.3	15	30
Liberia	13.6	30.4	20
Mali	18.5	21.4	16.1
Namibia	19	24	21.7
Nigeria	10	9.7	24.1
Rwanda	35.7	33.3	35.5
Senegal	20.6	12.9	20
Sierra Leone	13.5	8	6.9
Togo	20	14.3	20.7
Uganda	23.4	32	29.6

Some countries have seen improvements, others have remained relatively stable, and others have seen rollbacks. By and large, ministerial appointments rest on political will, however transitional constitutions can set quotas for the executive, and in the context of political settlements, ministerial allocations as part of the power-sharing equation, can be determined along-side quotas for women. This is illustrated in the August 2015 South Sudan peace agreement, which maintains the minimum 25% for women's nominations to the Executive provided for in the Transitional Constitution of South Sudan.

Women as Peace Activists
In Africa, women played both an active and a passive role in the restoration of peace. Though women have not been fully engaged in the peace making initiatives in their societies, due to cultural stereo types, and political favoritism and hegemony, in some aspects of conflicts, women have played vital and selfless roles. It is not easy to translate women's activism into a presence at the peace table. Certainly, not all women groups want to be at the table if it involves negotiating

with the warlords or tyrants who helped create the conflict, but most peace activists feel that women's presence is essential. From Liberia, Leymah Roberta Gbowee a women's Rights Peace activist and a Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, 2011 has spoken publically numerous times on the issue of women in conflict situations and the Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, a peace activist and a Nobel peace prize winner too has contributed a lot in advocacy for example through the book she wrote entitled "Women War and Peace" to highlight the important roles women can play in promoting peace and security in Africa.

In the Africa, Women taught their daughters and sons, proper behavior and the ethics of society, and impressed on them the importance of such values as honesty, uprightness and the necessity to compromise. As such, women have always been active promoters of harmony in the community, which can be referred to as a "culture of peace". This natural role of women is not unique to any particular ethnic group, but rather is generalized throughout the African continent. A similar trend of emphasis on the role of 'mother as peace builder' is also noted among women who have displayed the zeal to prepare and train the young boys who are one day going to be adult men of the society. They teach the boys the rules of leadership, particularly norms relating to the human relations and conflict resolution thus women remain a rich reservoir of knowledge to tap while engaging in peace agreements in times of conflict.

Women activists also promote a vision of peace that goes beyond the negotiating table. Women have contributed to stopping violence and alleviating its consequences in a range of ways: providing humanitarian relief, creating and facilitating the space for negotiations through advocacy, and exerting influence through cultural or social means. They have also spearheaded civil society and reconciliation activities. Even though some women activists faced numerous injustices for trying to protect women's rights, they have played a vital role in promoting women's rights and their place in the society. Women activists have unequivocally rejected the patriarchal language which denotes women as daughters, wives or sisters entitled to protection in that capacity rather than as human beings who will assert themselves as change agents of peace & change in their communities.

Women's grass-root leadership role is most visible in their communities; it is here that they organize to end conflict and build the skills necessary for peace building and reconstruction. These organizations enhance possibly different but shared interests and aspirations and thus an opportunity to get different views and ideas. Women grass root organizations build networks of solidarity combining feminism and anti-militarism.

Status of the Implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda in Africa
Several African countries have embraced resolution 1325, and 16 states now have relevant national action plans in place. The African Union (AU) has also made significant efforts to integrate commitments to the idea of women, peace and security into its own security, crisis-response, human rights and peace-building efforts. The organization trains women as peace mediators, election observers and gender advisers.

Also, a number of centers of excellence, training centers, and research institutes have been established, or added WPS initiatives to their programming. These entities, and both national and regional level, have been involved in WPS research, capacity building, and documentation. The Pan Africa Centre for Gender and Development in Senegal, the Kofi Annan International

Peacekeeping Training Centre's Women, Peace, and Security Institute in Ghana are examples of institutions which may or may not have a formalized or systematic partnership with government and RECs, but nevertheless have a critical contribution to make in the promotion of the agenda. National and Regional Networks and Peace Platforms established by Civil society and women's groups in Africa have demonstrated that they can convene, mobilize, and organize to ensure their active participation in a wide range of conflict prevention, resolution, and peace-building activities. This recognition of the importance of strategic and collective agency has resulted in the formation of more permanent and formal platforms for promoting women's participation in the process of preventing and managing conflicts, at various levels. For example, in 2000, the Mano River Women's Peace Network was launched to complement nationally-driven activities to consolidate peace in the sub-region. COCAFEM, also established in 2000, is a regional coalition of women's groups and associations in the Great Lakes that was borne out of the acknowledgement of the regional cause and consequences of conflict in the region, and the desire of women in the sub-region to play a visible role in conflict management and advocate with national and sub-regional policy makers to address the impact of insecurity on women. These regional networks and platforms are then uniquely positioned to engage with regional institutions who are leading conflict resolution and management processes in the region, as well as engage in cross-border solidarity and action. At a national level, platforms such as Planete Femme in Central African Republic, the South Sudan National Platform for Peace, and the Platform for Women Leaders in Mali, are examples of how women have organized to build consensus on key issues, priorities, and asks and push for their greater participation during the process of peace negotiations, as well as strategize and engage in monitoring and implementation post-agreement.

Women's Situation Rooms (WSR) is women's groups initiated and led process that mobilizes women and youth to address the particularly gendered nature of electoral violence for women as both candidates and voters. Electoral violence constitutes a major obstacle to women's participation in electoral processes specifically and political participation in general, as well as a broader risk to peace and security within a country and locality. WSRs-with slight variations and contextual adaptations-have been established in a number of countries during elections, including in Liberia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Mali, Guinea Bissau, Ghana, and Nigeria. This process, which has been noted as best practice, involves a wide range of activities that result in women's direct and full participation in ensuring peace and stability in advance of, during, and following elections. It may involve a range of peace-building activities, including consultations, trainings, monitoring and advocacy; bringing together women, youth, media, electoral stakeholders, professionals, religious and traditional leaders and institutions to ensure a transparent and peaceful electoral process. These actions lead to the Women's Situation Room where women are involved in peace advocacy, intervention, coordination, political analysis, observation and documentation.

Africa has a forefront of normative developments around Women, Peace & Security. A number of legislative and policy instruments subsequent to UNSCR 1325 have integrated its principles, but moved beyond it by addressing socioeconomic development as well as conventional security

issues as part of the WPS agenda. There are regional particularities nonetheless, with the focus being different across regions.

At the same time, both the AU and the UN have increased the number of women military and police officers in peacekeeping missions, which has in turn improved the reporting of sexual assaults. They have also set up units that provide protection to civilian victims of abuse. Similar units that shelter victims of gender-based violence also exist in Somalia and the Darfur region of Sudan. In Rwanda, Liberia and the DRC, the UN provides support to survivors of gender-based violence.

The way forward in Africa

Going forward, it would be necessary the UN, AU, regional organizations and Member States increase the complexity of pushing for inclusion of more women in peace processes. Beyond the individual initiative of a mediator, a clear term of reference for mediators around women's participation and inclusion is then critical. Beyond the lead up to the signing of the agreement, women's participation and inclusion in implementation and monitoring of the agreement post-agreement should also be encouraged.

Increase in Rosters of Qualified Women to complement a number of capacity building measures for women in leadership, mediation, negotiation, and election observation will also promote women contribution to peace and security. Rosters should be developed at national, regional, and continental level to ensure that Member States, RECs, and the AU have access to qualified women that they can deploy as part of their conflict prevention, management, and resolution efforts.

The African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (*ACDHRS)* is also urging countries to create national action plans on implementing 1325. This call comes as a result of the slow adoption and implementation of the 1325 by countries. So far only 16 countries have action plans. There is the need to regularly remind countries of their commitments and accountability in the monitoring of and reporting on the implementation of the resolution. African countries can also look into information sharing and documenting good practices, regional training, as well as monitoring and reporting on progress in the implementation of the resolution.

Governments can also support national statistical bodies in incorporating WPS agenda into existing national surveys or data collection mechanisms, providing wider national-level data for monitoring and reporting purposes. This would allow countries to streamline and harmonize data for various national reporting requirements as well as assessing impact of interventions. Increase documentation of good practice on WPS nationally will also promote women participation in promoting peace & security in other parts of Africa.

Supporting the development of regional plans which not only mainstream gender internally within the regional organization's peace and security architecture but also emphasize coherence and synergy with National Action Plans, and implement regional level programming through identification of high impact flagship projects to increase women involvement in peace-building.

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There is the need to provide funding and capacity building to women on peace and security issues at the national, regional and continental levels, in order to acquaint them with peace and security knowledge, which will enable them to fully participate in conflict prevention, management, mediation, reconciliation, and peace-building, as well as in post-conflict reconstruction and development.

Conclusion

It is high time society started to treat women as change agents in the peace process and not merely as victims who are vulnerable. Women are not merely passive victims, but also are important agents and actors in the peace building processes in Africa. As agents or actors, women have played significant roles in terms of being mothers, educators, mediators, peace activists and community leaders, coping and surviving actors, breadwinners and decision makers.

As peace activists and community leaders, women have played a variety of roles and have been engaged in various activities, yet their role and participation tends to be 'invisible' in the context of the formal peace building processes. Most peace building activities conducted and initiated by women peace activists and community leaders have been carried out outside of the official and formal peace building processes. It is against this backdrop that I believe that there should be a change in attitudes and behaviour and individuals should learn that women are effective and they should be incorporated fully. Africa has made progressive and significant normative strides with regards to the WPS agenda, at continental and regional levels. UNSCR 1325 has not only been domesticated on the continent, but elaborated and further developed. This being the case, currently only a third plus one of AU Member States have put in place NAPs to drive implementation nationally of these commitments. Implementation has been slow, ad-hoc/uneven, and largely limited to process outcomes. There have also been other regional efforts through various country consortia within a sub-region or efforts through regional civil society and centers of excellence.

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