Commemorating 25 Years of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security: Tracking Stock and Rejuvenation Passion

ANALYTICAL REPORT
Generated from the Regional Exchange Convening of 2025 in Kampala, Uganda

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List of
Acronyms

AU	African Union
AU ECOSOCC	African Union's Economic, Social, and Cultural Council
CRF	Continental Results Framework
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EAC	East African Community
Fem Wise-Africa	Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GESS	Girls' Education South Sudan
GIMAC	Gender is My Agenda Campaign
ICGLR	International Conference on the Great Lakes Region
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IMS	Information Management System
LAPs	Local Action Plans
MDAs	Ministries Departments and Agencies
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
NAPs	National Action Plans (NAPs)
NDP	National Development Plans
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
PSC	Peace and Security Council
RAP	Regional Action Plan
R-ARCSS	Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan
RJMEC	Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
STCs	Specialized Technical Committees
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UK	United Kingdom
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UN	United Nations
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
US	United States
WIPC	Women's International Peace Center
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WROs	Women's Rights Organizations

Executive
Summary

A diverse group of civil society actors, government representatives, regional organizations, and development partners from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), South Sudan, Uganda, and Sudan convened at a regional gathering to revitalize momentum for the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda in Africa. The meeting marked 25 years since the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), providing a timely opportunity to assess progress, challenges, and emerging priorities under the theme *"From Resolution to Reality."*

Participants acknowledged notable strides, including the development of National Action Plans (NAPs), increased civil society engagement, and broader inclusion of women in peace processes. However, implementation remains inconsistent, hindered by structural barriers, limited accountability, underfunding, and fragile political environments. Despite strong policy frameworks, the translation into practice has been uneven, particularly where civic space is shrinking, and local needs are overlooked.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) were recognized as essential drivers of WPS implementation, bridging global commitments and grassroots action through advocacy, monitoring, and direct engagement in policy spaces. The meeting highlighted how regional bodies such as the East African Community (EAC) and the African Union's Economic, Social, and Cultural Council (AU ECOSOCC) have advanced the WPS agenda by facilitating collaboration, developing regional gender strategies, and supporting WPS clusters. Improved cross-border data sharing, institutional coordination, and accountability mechanisms were identified as key areas for strengthening.

CSO advocacy within regional platforms has helped shape policy agendas and promote inclusive governance, especially through partnerships with the African Union and EAC. Initiatives like those led by The Peace Centre were lauded for connecting local women's experiences to regional and continental strategies.

A major challenge identified was the chronic underfunding of WPS. Despite broad recognition of its importance, the agenda remains one of the least funded in national and regional budgets. Participants emphasized the urgent need to mobilize domestic and international resources and strengthen CSOs' capacity to engage in gender-responsive budgeting and decision-making.

The vital role of women in frontline peace-building efforts, particularly in DRC, South Sudan, and Sudan, was prominently acknowledged. Women continue to serve as first responders, peace negotiators, and human rights defenders, often without recognition or compensation. The discussion called for dismantling institutional and cultural barriers that exclude women and ensuring they are empowered as central actors in peace and state-building processes.

The meeting concluded with a unified commitment to develop a new regional WPS roadmap for 2025–2030. This forward-looking agenda will aim to align national efforts with regional goals, prioritize youth and feminist leadership, and secure sustainable funding for tangible impact.

Ultimately, the event reaffirmed the enduring relevance of UNSCR 1325 as a blueprint for inclusive and lasting peace. Participants departed with renewed commitment to ensuring that the next 25 years of the WPS agenda fulfill the promise set forth in 2000.

> The meeting concluded with a unified commitment to develop a new regional WPS roadmap for 2025–2030

Introduction

The Women's International Peace Centre (The Peace Centre) is a feminist organization with over three decades of experience advancing women's leadership and participation in peace-building across conflict-affected and post-conflict regions in Africa. Active in 15 countries, The Peace Centre works to amplify women's voices, ignite their agency, and deepen their influence in peace and security outcomes. As a core member of the Just Future Alliance, a consortium of civil society organizations, research institutions, and global partners, The Peace Centre contributes to the collective goal of achieving inclusive, accountable, and just security and governance systems in fragile contexts.

The Just Future programme operates in six focus countries - Afghanistan, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali, Niger, and South Sudan, supporting 27 local implementing partners. Through capacity strengthening, collaborative advocacy, and policy influence, the programme aims to transform power dynamics and enhance equitable access to justice and security. A cornerstone of this work has been regional learning and networking exchanges, which have provided platforms for peer learning, cross-country collaboration, and shared strategies for reform. Between

2021 and 2024, The Peace Centre has convened four such exchanges, spotlighting critical issues such as security sector reform, women's access to justice, and civil society engagement with regional institutions like the East African Community and the African Union.

This year, the Regional Learning and Networking Exchange was anchored in the global commemoration of the 25th anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). Adopted in 2000, UNSCR 1325 recognized women's indispensable role in conflict prevention, resolution, peace-building, and post-conflict recovery. Marking both a quarter-century of this landmark resolution and five years of the Just Future programme, the regional convening presented

a critical opportunity to assess progress, celebrate achievements, and co-create a roadmap for more inclusive peace and security efforts.

The learning exchange gathered 35 participants from Burundi, DRC, South Sudan, Uganda and Sudan, including government representatives, national WPS focal points, and Regional Economic Communities to reflect on the implementation of UNSCR 1325. Through thematic panels, interactive discussions, and expert-led sessions, the exchange aimed to deepen understanding of persistent challenges, showcase impactful case studies, and generate actionable recommendations for strengthening the WPS agenda. These outcomes are captured in this synthesised report to inform future policy and programming.

Welcome and
Opening
Statement

The Regional Learning and Networking Exchange opened with powerful statements from two leading voices in the field of Women, Peace and Security, underscoring decades of commitment, progress, and ongoing challenges.

Ms. Juliet Were, Deputy Executive Director of the Women's International Peace Center (WIPC), warmly welcomed participants and reflected on WIPCs's 30-year journey as a champion of WPS. Established in 1995 in Uganda, WIPC has grown into a global voice, centering its work on research and documentation, wellness and healing, policy influence, and capacity building.

The organization marks 30 years of bold advocacy and 25 years of advancing the WPS agenda.

Ms. Were called for renewed efforts to leverage global and regional frameworks, such as the African Union Agenda 2063, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, UNSCR 1325, and the Beijing Declaration, to further WPS objectives across Africa. She outlined the learning exchange's goals: to assess progress in implementing UNSCR 1325, showcase impactful initiatives, examine persistent barriers, and generate actionable recommendations for future WPS work.

In the opening address on behalf of the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Ms. Annet Kabarungi, the Assistant Commissioner speaking on behalf of Ms. Angela Nakafeero the Commissioner, applauded Uganda's strides in implementing the WPS agenda through the Third National Action Plan (NAP III: 2021–2025). Uganda was one of the early adopters of UNSCR 1325, with its first NAP developed in 2008. Today, the country's efforts, including a nationally recognized localization strategy, have seen the development of 21 District Action Plans, ensuring grassroots alignment and sustainability. However, Ms. Kabarungi also acknowledged persistent challenges, particularly in light of emerging global conflicts. She emphasized the importance of leveraging local resources and strengthening partnerships, especially with grassroots organizations, to enhance implementation and impact.

Both speakers called for renewed commitment, collaboration, and innovative strategies to bridge implementation gaps and ensure inclusive, gender-responsive peace and security across the region. The convening was positioned as both a celebration of progress and a call to action to deepen efforts in advancing the WPS agenda.

Ms. Juliet Were, Deputy Executive Director of the Women's International Peace Center (WIPC), warmly welcomed participants

30 YEARS

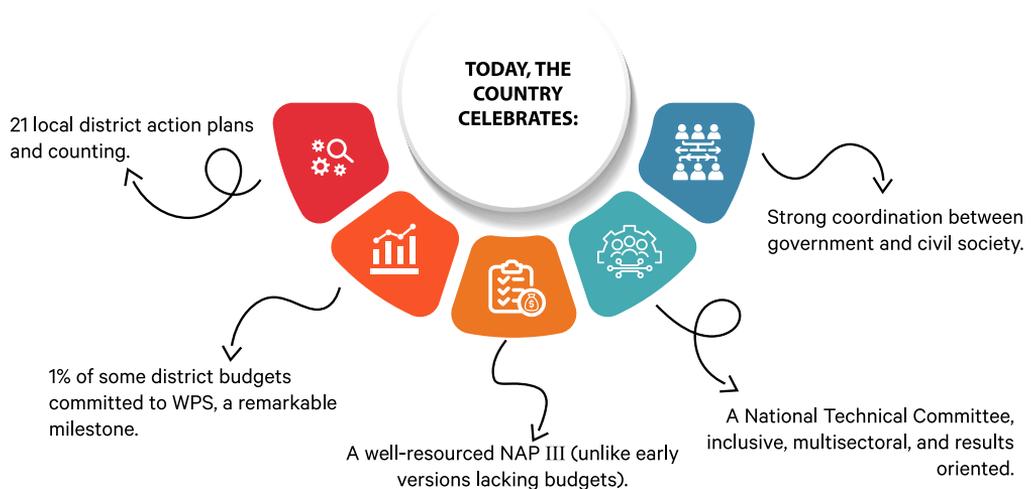*and reflected on WIPCs's journey as a champion of WPS.*

Keynote Address:

Reflecting on 25 Years of UNSCR 1325: From Resolution to Reality: Milestones, Impact, and Key Lessons since 2000

The keynote address was delivered by Dr. Hellen Nkalaba, Principal, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Makerere University. Dr. Nkalaba begun by acknowledging that conversations on women's roles in peace-building gained significant momentum from the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. But it was the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000, which scholars like Aili Mari Tripp describe as "foundational," that established a formal global framework. Importantly, this conversation began on African soil, driven by African women.

Currently, Africa and the world face escalating conflicts, from Sudan and South Sudan to Congo, from the Gaza Strip to Ukraine. Yet amidst this crisis, we affirm the truth: conflict is gendered, and UNSCR 1325 recognizes that while all suffer, women experience war differently. It demands that women be seen not just as victims, but as leaders, agents of change, and peacebuilders.

She reported that Uganda has made bold strides. It's among the first to adopt a National Action Plan and are now implementing the Third, launched by His Excellency in March 2021, a clear signal of state commitment.

TODAY, THE COUNTRY CELEBRATES:

21 local district action plans and counting.

Strong coordination between government and civil society.

1% of some district budgets committed to WPS, a remarkable milestone.

A National Technical Committee, inclusive, multisectoral, and results oriented.

A well-resourced NAP III (unlike early versions lacking budgets).

Uganda's journey has seen deepened integration across sectors, including gender-responsive budgeting enforced by the Ministry of Finance, and a growing gender seal initiative in higher education. And not only placing women at the table but preparing them to own that table.

In closing, Dr. Nkalaba called on:

- The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development to ensure WPS is mainstreamed across all MDAs;
- All particiapants commit to action, wherever they are;
- Continued localization of action plans, including translation into local languages.

Transition
From Policy to Practice[1]

In the context of UNSCR 1325 and the National Action Plans (NAPs) of Uganda, the DRC, Burundi, and South Sudan, the "transition from policy to practice" refers to the process of transforming policy commitments, particularly those related to the WPS agenda, into concrete actions on the ground. This shift involves moving beyond the existence of a WPS framework to its effective implementation, resulting in meaningful impacts for communities affected by conflict. The discussion focused on key achievements, persistent challenges, and emerging best practices, all grounded in country-specific analyses of the WPS agenda.

A.   Uganda

Uganda's strong commitment to the WPS agenda is internationally recognized as a best practice. This is demonstrated by its consistent political will reflected in the development and execution of three National Action Plans - the latest, NAP III (2021–2025). The Third National Action Plan (NAP III) was signed by His Excellency the President signifying the intentional and strategic top-level political buy-in and setting the foundation for national ownership and cross-sector implementation. The notable successes of Uganda's WPS agenda include: the development of local action plans in 21 districts - with some allocating 1% of their budgets to WPS initiatives; the meaningful inclusion of grassroots voices in planning and policy formulation; strong coordination led by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development; and institutionalization of gender-responsive budgeting, with budget proposals lacking gender considerations being systematically rejected.

B.   Democratic Republic of Congo

There have been numerous civil wars in the DRC, which have claimed millions of lives. Mass rape has also been used as a weapon of war, and women have been disproportionately affected by war atrocities. Sporadic violent acts have continued to take place randomly defining the country's social-political context. The political atmosphere in the DRC continues to be uncertain because of the unchecked flow of light weapons and small arms into the nation, and rebel groups possessing firearms in the eastern part of the country. Along with an implementation matrix that includes measurable indicators for the action plan, the DRC has embraced its Third-generation NAP (2024 - 2028) which is more encompassing and substantive. By translating UNSCR 1325 commitments into actionable national and subnational plans, the country has made phenomenal efforts at applying the WPS agenda.

C.   Burundi
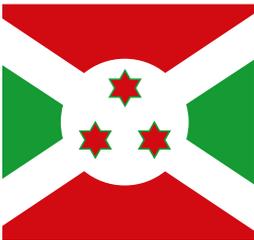
In 2022, Burundi adopted its newest National Action Plan (2022–2027). The Burundian NAP is structured around several axes: advocacy for UNSCR 1325, equality and equity in men's and women's involvement in decision-making and in peace-consolidation activities, strengthening the legal base to prevent conflicts and violence against women and girls, rights protection and assistance to victims of gender-based and sexual violence, women's participation and responsiveness to the interests of women and girls in economic recovery program design, financial mobilization and alignment for the implementation of NAP 2022–2027. During the past decade, Burundi has shown a consistent commitment to the WPS agenda through various operational and policy initiatives.

D.   South Sudan

South Sudan, having seceded from Sudan in 2011, still experiences territorial and oil conflicts. Women and children are disproportionately affected by the security conditions in the country, as criminal elements and inter-ethnic abductions compel them into domestic work, herding, or sex trafficking. Women and girls, particularly internally displaced persons, orphaned, refugee, or rural based, are susceptible to forced labor as well as sexual exploitation. They migrate on their own accord from other countries, typically coerced into sex work. The Ministry of Gender, Child, and Social Welfare supported South Sudan in the development of the First NAP in 2015. Despite political turmoil, war, and gender inequality, South Sudan has taken significant steps towards the implementation of the WPS agenda. Women have also achieved some successes in their attempts to engage in the peace process, with women making up 25% of the delegates to the 2015 peace agreement negotiations and 41% of civil society signatories to the 2018 peace agreement. Despite all these obstacles, South Sudan is currently drafting the Second NAP.

Refer to Appendices (Table 3) for details of country transitions from policy to practice on the WPS Agenda

5.1. A Deeper Analysis of the WPS Agenda – From Policy to Practice

Uganda's Funding Strategy for the NAP: Uganda has successfully secured national funding for the implementation of its National Action Plan by embedding gender equity within its legal and policy frameworks. Notably, the Public Finance Management Act mandates that all national budgets and development plans must be gender-responsive. Any proposals lacking certification for gender compliance are automatically rejected. This legislative requirement has transformed funding for WPS initiatives from optional to obligatory.

Furthermore, Uganda has integrated WPS indicators into its National Development Plans (NDP III and now NDP IV), ensuring alignment across both national and district-level plans. While the country still depends significantly on external donor support, there is increasing momentum to mobilize domestic resources, including contributions from the private sector.

Political Will vs. Women's Confidence and Capacity: A case study from Uganda also highlights that even when women attain positions at decision-making tables, many remain hesitant to speak up or take initiative, often deferring to male counterparts. This issue is less about a lack of political will or capability and more reflective of deep-rooted patriarchal norms. Societal skepticism toward women's leadership continues to hinder progress.

To confront this challenge, Uganda has established supportive structures such as the National Women Leaders Forum and the Uganda Women Parliamentary Association. These platforms work to build leadership capacity and ensure accountability to gender equality commitments. They also provide ongoing gender-responsive leadership training for elected women, equipping them to participate confidently and meaningfully in decision-making processes.
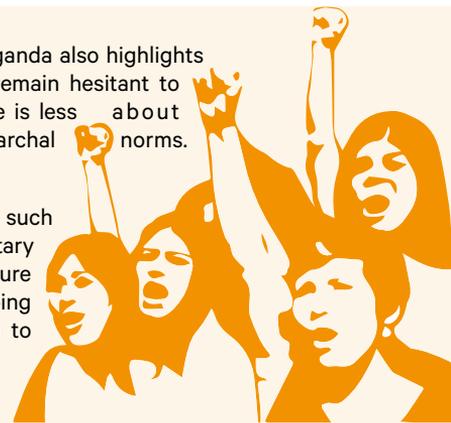
Innovation in Low-Literacy Contexts (The Case of South Sudan): South Sudan's context, marked by widespread low literacy levels, presents unique challenges for implementing the WPS agenda. Nonetheless, the country is pursuing innovative, community-centered strategies to overcome these barriers. Tribal and religious leaders, who hold significant influence, are being engaged to advocate for the localization of WPS initiatives through community dialogues and behavioral change campaigns that promote girls' education and women's rights.

Although South Sudan enacted the General Education Act (2008), which criminalizes the denial of education to girls, implementation is supported by programs such as Girls' Education South Sudan (GESS). GESS provides school capitation grants and in-kind support to reduce dropout rates and increase girls' enrollment and retention in schools.

The "Participation" Pillar in Fragile State Contexts: While many countries have made strides in advancing the protection and prevention pillars of the WPS agenda, the participation pillar continues to lag, especially in fragile contexts. The complexity of these environments demands tailored approaches, as meaningful participation becomes more difficult to achieve during emergencies.

Nevertheless, Uganda offers a promising example. The country has decentralized its NAP, enabling women at district and community levels to define their own peace and security priorities. In humanitarian settings, there have been notable efforts to include women in camp governance structures and peace committees. Additionally, gender- responsive shelters have been established, reinforcing inclusive approaches even amid crisis conditions.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Systems: The discussions highlighted the urgent need to strengthen both internal and external M&E systems to effectively measure the impact of National Action Plans and the implementation of UNSCR 1325. Many current tools fail to disaggregate data by gender, limiting insight into the specific outcomes for women and girls. For instance, Uganda is in the process of revising the WPS Policy and Emerging Strategy to ensure gender-sensitive indicators are incorporated at all levels. The country is also advocating for ministries, departments, and agencies to adopt tools that align with WPS indicators and disaggregate data by gender. Without these gender-responsive tools, M&E systems will fall short in capturing meaningful, inclusive results.

Gender Analysis and Policy Gaps: A significant number of existing policies and operational guidelines in these countries lack gender responsiveness. For example, conflict early warning systems often allocate roles based on institutional position, roles that are predominantly held by men, thereby excluding women from participation. Uganda pointed out that this "position-based" approach disadvantages women and is promoting alternatives such as quota-based or community-elected roles to ensure women's inclusion. A notable best practice is the integration of Local Action Plans into District Development Plans, which secures funding and facilitates implementation. Additionally, the country is investing in targeted capacity building for cultural

and religious leaders to challenge and shift societal norms that hinder gender equality.

Reporting Mechanisms: Despite substantial WPS-related activities at the grassroots level, much of this work goes unreported to the Ministries of Gender in these countries, undermining national visibility and reporting accuracy. Uganda is working to strengthen vertical reporting mechanisms so that data and achievements from community actors and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are accurately reflected in national reports. Efforts are underway to raise awareness and introduce standardized reporting templates to close this gap.

Sustainability in Crisis Contexts: A key question arises: how can NAP implementation be sustained during ongoing emergencies in fragile states? While immediate crises must be addressed through rapid humanitarian responses, long-term peace-building efforts should not be sidelined. Aligning NAPs with local peace-building priorities, even in conflict or displacement contexts, is essential to maintaining the foundation for sustainable peace. These priorities must remain central, even amidst crisis, to ensure resilience and long-term impact.

Conclusively, the transition from practice to policy, and back to practice, within the WPS agenda in South Sudan, Uganda, the DRC, and Burundi overarchingly reflects a narrative of resilience, progress, and persistent challenges. These countries have each demonstrated commendable efforts in localizing UNSCR 1325 through the development and implementation of National Action Plans, albeit with varying levels of effectiveness and support. Uganda has shown strong leadership through early adoption, high political will, and inclusive stakeholder engagement, resulting in notable community-level ownership. South Sudan has remained committed to women's mobilization, legal reforms, and transformative campaigns such as the GESS programme and education policy reforms, aimed at promoting girls' education and challenging harmful social norms, though adult literacy remains underdeveloped. DRC and Burundi, despite ongoing conflict and institutional fragility, show promise through civil society engagement and nascent institutional reforms that aim to mainstream gender in peacebuilding. Across all four countries, the WPS agenda continues to face barriers such as entrenched gender inequalities, limited resources, and conflict-related disruptions. Yet, the enduring efforts of women activists, civil society organizations, and gender equality advocates stand as a formidable force for change. The path forward demands continued local innovation, sustained investment, and collaborative action to bridge the gaps between policy, practice, and transformative peace.

The Role of Regional Actors in
Advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

6

The African WPS agenda is being actively shaped and advanced by key regional actors, including the East African Community (EAC) and the African Union's Economic, Social, and Cultural Council (AU ECOSOCC). These organizations provide vital platforms for dialogue, collaboration, and the development of regional strategies to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent WPS mandates. They also work jointly to prevent gender-based and sexual violence while promoting women's meaningful participation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts. This session centered on ECOSOCC and the EAC's role in advancing the WPS Agenda, highlighting how civil society actors can strategically engage with these structures.

LR: Mr. Patrick Wamukulu (Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist - AU ECOSOCC) and Mr. Morris Tayebwa (Genda Expert - EAC) sharing the roles of the regional actors in the implementation of the WPS Agenda.

AU ECOSOCC	EAC
Who is ECOSOCC: Is the organ of the African Union (AU) that gives voice to CSOs across the continent. It was established in 2004 as a response to the need for more structured, formal engagement between civil society and AU policy-making organs.	The EAC plays a critical role in the promotion and implementation of the WPS Agenda within the region. Recognizing the significance of UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions, the EAC has made considerable progress in creating regional mechanisms to support member states and civil society actors in advancing women's leadership, gender-responsive peace-building, and inclusive security.
Understanding the AU Structure and Entry Points for CSOs To engage effectively, CSOs must understand how the AU works. This is a simplified breakdown of the structure: • Assembly of the Union: 55 Heads of State and Government – the ultimate decision-makers. • Executive Council: Foreign ministers – translate Assembly decisions into policies. • Specialized Technical Committees (STCs): Including the STC on Gender and Women's Empowerment and the STC on Defense, Safety, and Security – critical for WPS. • Peace and Security Council (PSC): The AU's premier decision-making body on peace and conflict. • African Union Commission: Implements decisions – includes departments on Gender, Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Humanitarian Affairs. • ECOSOCC: Advises and engages all the above on behalf of African citizens and civil society.	**Regional Policy and Normative Frameworks** • **Adoption of the EAC Regional Action Plan (RAP) on WPS (2024):** This landmark achievement provides a harmonized, ten-year roadmap to implement UNSCR 1325 and related resolutions across EAC partner states. Developed through inclusive consultations with governments and civil society, the RAP is grounded in four key pillars: participation, prevention, protection, and relief & recovery. It addresses the gaps in national implementation and sets a regional vision for gender-responsive peace and security. • **EAC Gender Policy (2018):** The gender policy provides the foundation for mainstreaming gender in all EAC instruments, including peace and security protocols. It integrates WPS as a strategic area of intervention, further institutionalizing gender considerations in regional peace architecture. • **Revision of Peace and Security Protocols:** A gender audit conducted by the EAC identified the Peace and Security Protocol as gender blind. As a result, the EAC initiated revisions to include gender provisions and ensure the protocol reflects the realities and needs of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict settings.

AU ECOSOCC	EAC
Entry Points for WPS Advocacy: • Submission of policy briefs and shadow reports through ECOSOCC to the AU. • Engagement in continental dialogues, especially on Agenda 2063, Aspiration 4: "A Peaceful and Secure Africa." • Influencing AU WPS frameworks, such as the Continental Results Framework (CRF) and the African Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2018 –2028).	
Why ECOSOCC Matters for Women, Peace, and Security: • Serves as a vital link between African citizens, civil society organizations, and the decision-making bodies of the AU. • Plays a key consultative and advisory role by channeling grassroots perspectives, data, and policy recommendations to AU organs such as the PSC, Specialized Technical Committees, and the Assembly of Heads of State and Government. • Elevates gendered voices in peace and security dialogues, advancing the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the AU CRF on WPS.	**Institutional Mechanisms and Coordination** • **EAC Secretariat Coordination:** The implementation of the WPS Agenda is coordinated by the EAC Secretariat through close collaboration between the Gender Unit and the Peace and Security Department. The EAC has also created consultative platforms such as the Consultative Dialogue Framework to ensure sustained engagement of civil society and non-state actors in shaping and monitoring the WPS agenda. • **Ministerial Engagement and Accountability:** Recommendations from civil society and regional consultations are submitted to the Council of Ministers. The recent 47th Council prioritized WPS recommendations as a top agenda item, demonstrating political will and commitment at the highest levels of the EAC. • **Cross-border and Community-Level Interventions:** The EAC has piloted regional cross-border initiatives in hotspots such as the Karamoja Cluster (Atakara triangle) covering Kenya, Uganda, and South Sudan to address local security threats through inclusive dialogue involving women and youth. These forums contribute to community-level early warning and conflict resolution.

AU ECOSOCC	EAC

ECOSOCC's Contributions to the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda

1) Policy Advocacy and Advisory

- Promotes the integration of gender perspectives into African Union peace and security policies by offering expert input and strategic advice.

- Engages grassroots women's groups, youth networks, and CSOs to ensure their voices are reflected in AU decision-making processes.

2) Oversight and Accountability

- Through its General Assembly, comprising CSO representatives from every AU member state, ECOSOCC plays a critical role in monitoring and ensuring accountability in the implementation of the WPS agenda.

- Tracks member state progress on WPS commitments, utilizing mechanisms such as the Continental Results Framework.

3) Convening Power

- Facilitates inclusive, multi-stakeholder forums that address regional peace, security, and gender equality issues, creating a platform for dialogue between CSOs and AU institutions.

Data, Monitoring, and Peer Learning

- **Development of an Information Management System (IMS):** The EAC is working on a WPS IMS to collect, analyze, and report harmonized data across partner states. This will address the current gap in regional reporting and enable evidence-based monitoring, peer review, and policy learning among countries.

- **Research and Assessments:** A baseline study conducted across the EAC on WPS implementation revealed gaps between policy and practice highlighting that while representation of women in parliaments and leadership has increased, meaningful participation in peace processes remains limited. Structural and institutional barriers persist, including fragmentation of WPS responsibilities across different government ministries.

AU ECOSOCC	EAC

Challenges and Lessons Learned

- **Insufficient Funding:** Like many civil society institutions, ECOSOCC operates under significant financial constraints. Despite political backing, tangible financial support from AU member states remains limited.

- **Limited Awareness and Visibility:** Many CSOs are either unaware of ECOSOCC's existence or unclear about how to engage with it. Additionally, national focal points are often underutilized.

- **Barriers to Civil Society Participation in ECOSOCC:** Many CSOs, especially from francophone countries like DRC and conflict-affected contexts like Sudan and Burundi, are unable to meaningfully engage with ECOSOCC due to language barriers, lack of access to ECOSOCC's structures, limited knowledge of entry points for advocacy.

- **Navigating Political Dynamics:** Effective advocacy at the AU level requires a strategic, non-confrontational approach. While policy influence is possible, it depends on presenting well-packaged, evidence-based recommendations in a diplomatic manner.

Partnerships and Platforms for Engagement

- **Engagement with Civil Society:** The EAC recognizes civil society as a key partner in the WPS agenda. Through platforms like the Secretary General's Forum and national consultations, CSOs have space to raise issues, submit recommendations, and influence regional policy.

- **Establishment of Women Mediators Networks:** In partnership with various stakeholders, the EAC has supported the formation of national chapters of FemWise-Africa (Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation). However, operationalization remains a challenge, particularly regarding resource mobilization, deployment, and support for grassroots women mediators.

- **Collaboration with Other Regional and Continental Bodies:** The EAC WPS strategy is aligned with continental frameworks such as the African Union's Continental Results Framework on WPS and engages with IGAD and ICGLR to harmonize regional priorities.

AU ECOSOCC	EAC

Recommendations for CSO Engagement on WPS

1. **Speak the AU's Political Language:** When engaging with AU institutions, always reference relevant AU decisions and declarations on WPS, such as Assembly/AU/Dec.539 (XXIII) on gender parity.

2. **Use ECOSOCC as a Policy Channel:** Submit concise, one-page policy briefs summarizing your work and key recommendations through the ECOSOCC platform.

3. **Advocate at the National Level:** Engage your country's AU ambassador and advocate for national funding of WPS-related AU structures, including contributions to the Peace Fund.

4. **Strengthen CSO Representation in ECOSOCC:** Nominate well-qualified CSOs with strong WPS experience to join the ECOSOCC General Assembly and participate directly in decision-making processes.

5. **Utilize the AU's Early Warning System:** Integrate gender-sensitive indicators into your peace-building and conflict prevention efforts to align with the AU's early warning mechanisms.

6. Expand translation and interpretation services to all AU-recognized languages, simplify and demystify CSO membership processes, and build inclusive national and regional CSO platforms that are regularly consulted in policymaking

7. CSOs should organize, coordinate, and act strategically by utilizing these tools for robust engagement: a harmonized database, clearer frameworks for CSO participation, and platforms like the Secretary General's Forum and the Consultative Dialogue Framework.

Challenges and Areas for Strengthening

- **Policy-to-Practice Gaps:** Despite strong policy frameworks, actual implementation remains uneven. Many countries lack adequate funding, coordination, and technical capacity for WPS commitments.

- **Siloed Approaches:** Government departments and civil society actors often work in silos e.g., separating WPS from governance, elections, or women's economic empowerment which limits impact and sustainability.

- **Limited Participation in High-Level Mediation:** Women's participation in formal peace processes and command structures of regional forces (e.g., during EAC's deployment to the DRC) remains limited. There is a need to institutionalize gender parity in regional peace operations.

- **Inadequate Linkages Across WPS and Other Agendas:** Integration of WPS into broader peace and development frameworks such as climate resilience, economic recovery, and transitional justice remains nascent.

- **Advocating for Inclusive Governance in the EAC** To uphold its commitment to people-centered integration, the EAC should grant CSOs observer status in key technical forums, including the EAC Council of Ministers. This would address persistent challenges such as bureaucratic hurdles in the membership application process, the lack of structured entry points into EAC technical and ministerial meetings, and the general absence of observer status for CSOs. These shortcomings directly contradict the principles outlined in Articles 5, 6, and 7 of the EAC Treaty, as well as Aspiration 4 of the African Union's Agenda 2063, both of which emphasize inclusive and participatory governance.

AU ECOSOCC	EAC
	• **Inconsistent Engagement of Civil Society at the EAC**. While efforts to establish CSO platforms existed, poor communication and lack of coordination led to inactivity. A focal person or mechanism is needed to revitalize engagement and rebuild trust with the CSO community. • **Legal and Institutional Gaps in the EAC:** Membership processes have lacked rigorous assessment tools. While the EAC has drafted governance protocols (e.g., the Good Governance Protocol), many have not been ratified or operationalized due to state resistance. This explains why countries such as South Sudan and the DRC joined the EAC despite failing on core criteria like the rule of law, democracy, and constitutionalism. Civil society must therefore push for ratification of governance protocols and demand transparent admission criteria for new member states. • **Financial Constraints Hinder Regional Engagement:** This challenge contributes to the frequent postponement of EAC-level CSO summits. To address this, the EAC should enhance donor engagement, improve coordination with civil society organizations, and intensify political lobbying. Additionally, stronger advocacy from civil society is essential to ensure that commitments lead to tangible action.

AU ECOSOCC	EAC
	Opportunities and Way Forward

Opportunities and Way Forward

- **Full Implementation of the RAP:** Partner states and civil society must work together to domesticate the regional action plan and ensure coordinated implementation through costed workplans, joint monitoring frameworks, and accountability mechanisms.

- **Strengthen Grassroots Mediation and Track II Dialogues:** Support to community-level women mediators and traditional peace actors will be essential, especially in fragile areas preparing for elections or facing ongoing instability.

- **Operationalize the WPS Information Management System:** Timely rollout and resourcing of the IMS will enable data-driven decision-making, facilitate comparative learning, and strengthen advocacy.

- **Foster Regional Peer Review and Accountability:** The EAC should institutionalize peer review mechanisms, where partner states periodically assess and report progress on WPS commitments, like the African Peer Review Mechanism.

- **Invest in Capacity and Resources:** Both governments and donors should increase investment in the institutional and financial capacity needed to implement WPS commitments at national and regional levels.

- **Harmonize EAC and IGAD's Regional Frameworks on WPS** to create a unified regional framework that could improve efficiency, especially on financing.

6.2. Pathways to Strengthening Regional Coordination for Effective Implementation of the WPS Agenda

The Political Economy of the WPS Agenda

To effectively implement the WPS agenda, institutions must go beyond tokenistic representation of women in peace processes and political institutions. Meaningful participation requires confronting and dismantling structural barriers that inhibit women's full engagement. These barriers include limited access to land rights, financial services, livelihood opportunities, and education, all of which form the backbone of women's political economy and, by extension, their political agency.

The EAC and ECOSOCC must therefore integrate economic justice into their peace-building and governance frameworks. Doing so aligns with key continental commitments, such as Aspiration 6 of the African Union's Agenda 2063 and Article 10 of the Maputo Protocol, which affirm women's rights to participate in and benefit from development.

The question of whether the WPS agenda is more about political representation or political economy is not merely theoretical, it is a pressing, lived reality in many conflict-affected regions. In countries like Sudan, representation alone, without equitable access to economic resources, has failed to translate into meaningful empowerment or improved security for women. Therefore, addressing the political economy is not peripheral to the WPS agenda; it is central to realizing its goals.

Rebuilding Trust in Regional Mechanisms: From Rhetoric to Accountability

Trust in regional institutions is increasingly fragile, with citizens expressing frustration over the perceived ineffectiveness of these bodies in addressing serious regional crises, including electoral injustice, forced displacement, and internal conflicts. This growing skepticism highlights a crucial gap between the promises of regional governance and its tangible impact on the ground.

The Burundi third-term crisis and the 2020 ruling by the East African Court of Justice serve as a striking example as highlighted by the team from Burundi. Although the court found the president's third term unconstitutional, the lack of political or institutional follow-through has not only rendered the judgement symbolic but also exposed a deeper disconnect between judicial authority and political will. When landmark decisions are left unimplemented, it diminishes the legitimacy of regional institutions and erodes public confidence in their ability to deliver justice and uphold democratic norms.

While it is true that bodies like the EAC and ECOSOCC are not mandated to unilaterally intervene in member states' political affairs without formal requests, this procedural limitation should not be an excuse for inaction. Strengthening trust in these mechanisms requires proactive strategies that bridge the gap between legal decisions and practical enforcement.

To restore credibility and foster accountability, the following steps were shared as essential:

01 **Leverage Civil Society:** CSOs must actively cite and disseminate rulings from regional courts and decisions by the AU to hold governments accountable. These legal references can be powerful tools in advocacy and policy reform efforts.

02 **Citizen Engagement and Pressure:** Mobilizing public awareness through tools like shadow reports, citizen scorecards, and people's assemblies can increase political pressure on states to comply with regional obligations. Such initiatives democratize the implementation process and ensure that citizens remain central in governance.

03 **Institutional Follow-Up Mechanisms:** It is imperative for the EAC and ECOSOCC to institutionalize monitoring systems that track and report on member states' compliance with court rulings and resolutions. Regular reviews and compliance scorecards could serve as transparency tools and reinforce accountability.

6.3. Making Advocacy Work in Regional Institutions: Effective Civil Society Engagement with Regional Bodies

To influence regional bodies such as the African Union, the EAC and ECOSOCC, CSOs must shift from long reports to targeted, strategic advocacy. These regional bodies operate politically and respond best to concise, evidence-based interventions aligned with their policy frameworks.

i) Strategic Advocacy Tactics:

01 Develop policy briefs referencing AU and EAC frameworks such as the Continental Results Framework (CRF) and the African Strategy on Gender Equality.

02 Engage through ECOSOCC platforms, Pan-African Parliament representatives, and joint CSO-government delegations at AU and UN events.

03 Align national advocacy with continental agendas by participating in regional dialogues and summits.

04 The CRF exists but suffers from poor reporting compliance. CSOs should consider producing shadow reports where governments are inactive, drawing on successful models like the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

ii) Strengthening CSO Legitimacy and Coordination:

Many CSOs remain disconnected from regional processes due to weak coalitions and lack of participation in formal platforms. Compared to more structured professional bodies, WPS-focused CSOs often miss out on opportunities due to non-membership or fragmented efforts. The recommendations for effective engagement include:

01 Building and registering national and regional CSO coalitions in ECOSOCC databases.

02 Actively contributing to ECOSOCC's cluster work and electoral processes.

03 Using digital tools, diaspora networks, and cross-border collaboration to amplify women's voices and experiences.

iii) Engagement Infrastructure and Transparency:

While ECOSOCC is working on a centralized CSO database for peace and security, progress has been slow. A harmonization framework now enables structured national engagement, with clearer application and recognition processes. However, national chapters (e.g., Uganda) need revitalization, and there is a growing call for tracking how CSO inputs influence summit outcomes, similar to Denmark's model.

Experiences of

CSOs in Promoting Women, Peace and Security[2]

7

Civil society organizations across the region have been at the forefront of promoting the WPS agenda, despite facing complex challenges in conflict-affected and politically fragile contexts. In South Sudan, amid persistent conflict, political instability, and shrinking civic space, CSOs continue to play a central role in advancing women's rights and peace-building. Their resilience, innovation, and unwavering commitment have led to meaningful gains and remain essential for building a sustainable and inclusive peace.

In the DRC, CSOs have been instrumental in advancing the WPS agenda through robust advocacy, program implementation, and strategic collaboration with government and international stakeholders. Their work spans all four pillars of WPS, making a tangible impact on women's lives and on the peace process.

Burundian CSOs have also played a pivotal role in localizing the WPS agenda. Through grassroots peace-building initiatives, gender advocacy, and targeted partnerships, they have contributed significantly across all pillars of WPS, reinforcing the importance of community-based efforts in sustaining peace and security.

The Inamahoro movement emerged from the 2015 Burundi crisis to promote human rights, peace, and especially women's rights. Rooted in values like Ubuntu, integrity, and solidarity, it works to amplify women's voices and push for justice, security, and sustainable development. It uses UNSCR 1325 as a key advocacy tool to highlight the challenges Burundian women face, particularly in exile, and to urge regional and international bodies to support their role in peace-building and national reconstruction.

LR: Ms. Sarah Abeja from South Sudan and Ms. Mahasin Dahab from Sudan sharing CSOs experiences in promoting WPS in their respective countries.

At a broader level, The Peace Center has provided strategic leadership for over three decades, promoting WPS through coordinated regional, continental, and global advocacy. By bridging grassroots realities with high-level policy processes, The Peace Centre has strengthened accountability for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and related instruments across Africa and beyond.

Together, these experiences highlight the indispensable role of CSOs in driving the WPS agenda forward and underscore the need for continued support and collaboration to ensure inclusive and lasting peace.

Refer to Appendices (Table 4) for detailed country experiences of CSOs in promoting the WPS Agenda

7.1. Decolonizing Women, Peace and Security Agenda

As articulated by participants, decolonizing the WPS agenda requires a fundamental reimagining of global power structures. It calls for the amplification of local voices, a critical examination of the economic drivers of conflict, and a bridging of the divide between academic theory and lived experience. This is both a political and epistemic struggle, demanding a transformative shift in how peace, security, and the roles of women are understood, enacted, and valued, both across the African continent and globally.

One striking analogy revealed the colonial legacies embedded in

global mobility systems. African activists and practitioners are often excluded from international decision-making spaces due to bureaucratic and structural barriers, that are not merely logistical but deeply symbolic, reinforcing entrenched global hierarchies. For example, the difficulty of securing visas and crossing borders (such as travelling from South Sudan to Uganda) highlights the persistent systemic obstacles African women face in accessing global peace and security platforms.

The forum also interrogated the framing of conflict as a global enterprise, where the military-industrial complex and geopolitical interests often operate under the guise of peacekeeping or support. This critique exposes how external actors continue to benefit strategically and economically from instability in African regions. Thus, decolonizing the WPS agenda must include a confrontation with neocolonial systems that profit from conflict rather than seek its resolution.

Participants further critiqued the gap between feminist academic discourse and community-based realities. While feminist theory offers valuable insights, it can sometimes remain disconnected from the everyday struggles of women in conflict zones. This tension highlights the need to prioritize praxis over abstract theory, to ensure that the WPS agenda is grounded in and accountable to the lived experiences of those most affected. The conversation emphasized the importance of recognizing and supporting locally led initiatives, as well as the power of storytelling and community documentation. True progress lies not only in international recognition but in honoring and amplifying grassroots efforts to build peace and security.

Strengthening WPS Financing:
Mobilizing Resources for WPS Commitments

8
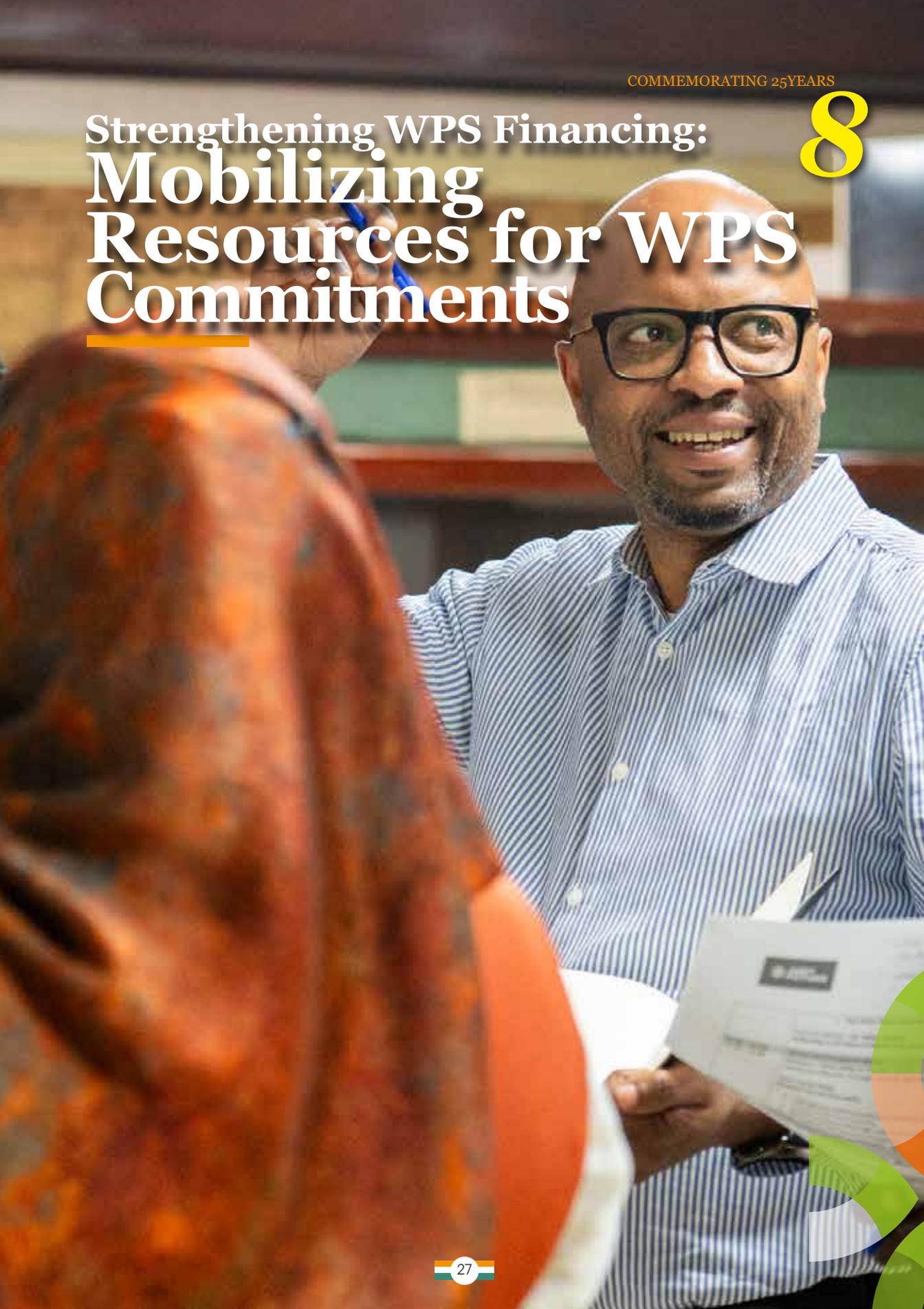
This session underscored the urgent need to transition from donor-driven, short-term, project-based funding models to financing systems that are trust-based, inclusive, and empowering, models that genuinely support women's leadership in peace and security.

Key challenges in WPS financing were discussed, including significant funding cuts by major donors such as USAID (-66.5%), Germany (-21.4%), the UK (-5.1%), France (-6%), and the Netherlands (-0.9%). These reductions have had a direct impact on peace-building efforts, with less than 15% of funding allocated to gender-sensitive initiatives and only around 1% of pooled UN funds directed toward WPS-related work.

Participants raised concerns about the heavy reliance on donor priorities, which are often shaped by the foreign feminist policies of donor governments and may not align with local needs. As a result, many local women-led organizations are relegated to implementing external agendas, with limited autonomy or influence over strategic direction. This disconnect has led to numerous NAPs on WPS being either unfunded or significantly underfunded, rendering them largely symbolic. Ministries such as Gender, Finance, and Justice frequently cite limited budgets and the absence of gender-specific allocations as key obstacles.

Systemic barriers were also highlighted, particularly the disproportionate underfunding of rural women and grassroots organizations. Funding processes are often overly bureaucratic, with direct funding opportunities being rare. Resources typically pass through multiple intermediaries, diminishing both effectiveness and accountability. Stringent requirements, such as formal registration, financial audits, and long organizational track records, pose additional hurdles, especially for newer or smaller groups.

Other persistent challenges include short project cycles, lack of core funding, and donor risk aversion. Fiduciary concerns often prevent funding from reaching smaller, politically active, or radical feminist organizations, further marginalizing voices that are critical to sustainable peace efforts.

The WPS financing opportunities shared included the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, which offers flexible funding through two windows - Rapid Response for women's participation in peace processes and agreement implementation, and the Human Rights Defenders Window providing up to $10,000 for the protection, legal aid, or relocation of women human rights defenders - as well as feminist funds such as Mama Cash, Global Fund for Women, Free the Young Feminist Fund, Urgent Action Fund - Africa, and Womankind Worldwide, which provide long-term, flexible core funding through participatory grantmaking for grassroots needs; additionally, innovative regional financing concepts were proposed, including a co-governed regional WPS fund and the establishment of a collective CSO voice to influence regional bodies like the AU, IGAD, and EAC.

As an appeal to advance the WPS agenda's finance streams, the forum called for a minimum of 15% of peace and security budgets, including national, Official Development Assistance, and regional funds to be dedicated to WPS initiatives, with multi-year, flexible, and direct funding channeled to local women-led organizations; gender-responsive budgeting mandated at all levels; accessible, inclusive funding systems established; and robust accountability mechanisms such as peer reviews and WPS scorecards implemented, responding to the urgent call from grassroots leaders to move beyond rhetoric and compliance toward meaningful investment in local leadership and transformative action.

The Role of Women in the Current Peace Processes[3]

Across the DRC, South Sudan, and Sudan, decades of violent conflict have left millions displaced, traumatized, and vulnerable, especially women and children. In each of these crises, women have borne the heaviest burdens, enduring widespread sexual and gender-based violence, displacement, malnutrition, and economic exclusion. Yet despite their central role in sustaining families and communities amidst chaos, women remain systematically excluded from formal peace processes.

In the DRC, where over 10 million lives have been lost and millions displaced, women are not just victims, they are peacebuilders, survivors, and leaders. Still, their absence from negotiation tables continues to undermine the sustainability of peace. In South Sudan, women have defied marginalization by stepping into roles as mediators, legal reformers, watchdogs, and architects of the nation's future, yet their contributions are still too often overlooked. In Sudan, one of the world's worst humanitarian crises unfolds as women and girls suffer disproportionately, even while their voices remain absent from key decision-making forums.

This is not only a humanitarian failure, it is a failure of peace-building. Any durable and just resolution to these conflicts must begin with the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women. Their leadership is not optional; it is essential to forging inclusive, gender-responsive peace that can endure. Participants shared testaments of women's roles in the current peace processes as evidenced in the table below.

8.1. Table 2: Country Case Stories

	Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)
	Progress and Gaps in Women's Participation:
	There has been some progress in increasing women's visibility in governance and peace processes, for example:
	• Women are being elected to leadership positions • The country has appointed a female Minister of Foreign Affairs, which is an important step forward. • Initially, only five women participated in the Nairobi peace process. Through concerted lobbying and external support, including from partners such as Japan and the US, the number of women increased to 12.
	However, representation in political office does not automatically translate to influence in peace and security negotiations. Most formal peace processes remain male-dominated, with very limited participation of women or civil society.
	Since the early 2000s, DRC has been involved in numerous peace negotiations from the Sun City Agreement (2002) to the Luanda and Nairobi processes, but these have largely involved military and political

elites, often referred to as "warlords", while excluding women and ignoring key civilian concerns such as:

- Land rights and land grabbing
- Sexual and gender-based violence
- Justice for survivors
- Demilitarization of local communities.

Structural Challenges to Women's Inclusion:

- Militarized peace processes prioritize combatants over civilians.
- Lack of implementation of UNSCR 1325 and the DRC's NAP on WPS.
- Cultural and institutional barriers to women's leadership and participation.
- Women are often seen as victims rather than agents of peace.
- Shifting political priorities back to Kinshasa.
- Resurgence of violence.
- Inadequate implementation of agreements.
- Budgetary constraints affecting sustained participation.

Positive Steps and Missed Opportunities:

- The DRC adopted its first NAP on UNSCR 1325 in 2010, and the second-generation NAP (2020–2023) aimed to enhance women's participation in conflict prevention, resolution, and recovery. However, implementation remains fragmented, underfunded, and poorly monitored. Despite active networks of women peacebuilders, such as local women's cooperatives, NGOs, and faith-based actors, they are rarely consulted during negotiations or ceasefire agreements.

Key Recommendations:

- Guarantee women's inclusion in all peace processes: Institutionalize a minimum 30–50% quota for women in all peace talks and transitional governance structures.
- Ensure peace talks address women's priorities: Go beyond ceasefires and military arrangements to include land reform, SGBV accountability, reintegration of female ex-combatants, and community-based reconciliation.
- Strengthen implementation of UNSCR 1325 and the DRC's NAP: Allocate adequate funding, build capacity of state institutions, and ensure monitoring and evaluation frameworks are in place.
- Protect women peacebuilders: Many face threats, intimidation, and violence. Protection mechanisms and legal safeguards must be prioritized.
- Support women-led local peace initiatives: Recognize and resource the important work done by women at the grassroots, particularly in Eastern DRC, where formal state presence is limited.

- Popularize and localize the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda: Raise awareness among local leaders, security actors, and communities about the relevance of UNSCR 1325 and gender-inclusive peacebuilding.
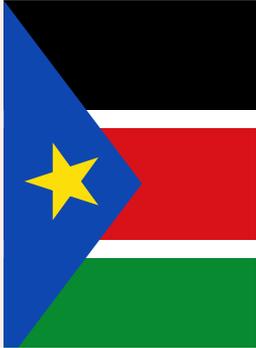
South Sudan

Women as Advocates for Peace Agreement Implementation

South Sudanese women are actively lobbying for the full implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS), in both letter and spirit. They recognize that having a peace agreement on paper is not enough since implementation has faced significant setbacks due to political deadlock and a lack of genuine commitment from some parties. South Sudanese women are working strategically to ensure the agreement does not remain a "dying document." They continue to advocate for sustained peace, urging political leaders to uphold their commitments so that they do not slide back into war.

Women as Mediators at Multiple Levels

Women are playing a key role as mediators not only at high-level political forums but also at the grassroots level. They mediate in communities torn apart by conflict, especially when violence erupts in major towns like Juba and quickly spills into rural areas. Women are instrumental in rebuilding relationships, resolving disputes, and promoting reconciliation, especially where cycles of revenge and retaliation emerge.

One notable example is response to the rising ethnic tensions in early 2025 following the circulation of videos showing violence in Sudan. In retaliation, some South Sudanese began targeting Sudanese residents in the country. Women mobilized swiftly to diffuse tensions, held dialogues with government officials, conducted media awareness campaigns, and engaged the Sudanese ambassador to restore calm.

Women in Peace Negotiations and Political Processes

Women have actively participated in the Tumaini Initiative, a peace process led by the President of Kenya aimed at bringing holdout groups into the political fold. They are among the negotiators, ensuring women's perspectives are represented in efforts to achieve inclusive democratic transition.

Women also contribute technical expertise to various stages of the peace process. For instance, women legal and gender experts review laws and

policy documents to ensure the outcomes are gender-sensitive and inclusive. Some women sit on the Tripartite Technical Committee on Security Sector Reform, working alongside the AU, IGAD, and UNMISS to ensure gender dimensions of security are fully considered.

Women in Early Warning and Conflict Prevention

Women are central to early warning and response systems, particularly through community-based networks. These systems may not always be formalized, but women's presence at the grassroots enables them to detect tensions and potential violence early. Women act swiftly to mediate, alert authorities, and organize community dialogues before conflict escalates.

Women in Dialogue and Reconciliation

We organize community and intergenerational dialogues, engaging traditional leaders, youth, and local authorities. These forums provide a platform for discussing issues affecting women and the broader community and promote peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding.

Women's Empowerment and Capacity Building

Recognizing that representation without influence is not enough, women invest in capacity building for women leaders, particularly women MPs who were appointed through political party quotas. Many of them were new to politics and unfamiliar with parliamentary procedures. These women have been trained and mentored to effectively represent women's interests, articulate policy issues, and lobby for legislative change.

Women in Media and Community Sensitization

Women in media have played a crucial role in sensitizing communities about peace processes and government policies. They understand that policies developed in Juba have limited impact if not communicated effectively to people in the rural communities. Through radio programs, campaigns, and storytelling, women ensure that peace messages reach part of the country.

Women in Constitution-Making

Women have also made significant contributions to the permanent constitution-making process. They formed a Women's Charter in partnership with the Ministry of Gender - a document that outlines minimum demands for women's rights and participation. They also conducted a gender analysis of the Transitional Constitution (2011, as amended) to ensure that women's issues are integrated in the legal framework that will guide South Sudan's future.

Barriers to the Peace Process
- The peace agreement is faltering.
- The ceasefire has broken down with active bombings in regions like Panyijar and Fangak.
- Military training sites have been attacked, and civilians displaced.
- The first vice president remains under house arrest, raising legitimacy concerns.
- Spillover effects of Sudan's conflict have increased insecurity in border areas, with reports of Rapid Support Forces presence in South Sudan.

Sudan

Why Women's Inclusion Matters:

Sudanese women make up over 50% of the population, and of the over 12 million people internally displaced, more than half are women. They are also survivors and frontline responders, organizing and sustaining care systems, running IDP camps, and leading community -based protection and advocacy. Between April 2023 and May 2024, Sudan's Unit for Combating Violence Against Women and Children documented over 1,183 cases of conflict-related sexual violence. The actual number is likely much higher due to stigma and insecurity. Despite women's leadership on the ground and the atrocities they face, Sudanese women are routinely excluded from formal peace negotiations and decision-making spaces.

Polarization, Exclusion, and Ethnicized Politics

Sudanese women face entrenched exclusion from formal peace processes, primarily due to:

- The absence of functioning civilian-led governance structures.
- Political and ethnic polarization that frames representation along tribal rather than civic lines.
- The rise of militarized political alliances, particularly in forums like the Nairobi talks.

The exclusion of women is not merely accidental it reflects a deeper marginalization of civil society and civic voices. The inability to form inclusive, non-militarized platforms means Sudanese women are either absent or tokenized in peace discussions. Without dismantling these dynamics, meaningful inclusion is unlikely.

Shared Concerns: Regional Interdependence

The conflicts in Sudan, South Sudan, and DRC are not isolated. Borders

are porous, cultures are shared, and displacement affects all. For example:

- South Sudan hosts thousands of refugees from Sudan.
- Economies are disrupted across borders.
- Civil society in one country cannot thrive when a neighbor is burning.

This interdependence necessitates cross-border approaches and stronger engagement from regional bodies like AU, EAC, and IGAD.

Youth, Girls, and the WPS Agenda

There is a growing concern that the WPS Agenda is not sufficiently inclusive of youth, particularly young women and girls. While youth played a key role in Sudan's 2018–2019 revolution, their momentum has been lost. Today, youth are more likely to be co-opted by militarized actors as instruments of violence. To reverse this:

- The WPS agenda must be deliberately expanded to engage young people.
- Schools, media, and digital platforms should promote peace education.
- Youth movements must be supported and resourced.

Timeline of Peace Efforts and Exclusion of Women:

1. Jeddah Talks (May 2023)

- Led by Saudi Arabia and the U.S., these talks focused on civilian protection and brought together the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces. No women, civil society, or political parties were present.

2. Geneva Consultations (August 2023)

- A U.S.-Swiss initiative aiming to broker humanitarian access. Again, no women's participation, no civil society representation. No ceasefire was achieved.

3. Manama Dialogue (Early 2024)

- Informal talks collapsed and lacked women's involvement.

4. LPSS Process (Late 2023 – 2024)

- A U.S.-led initiative aiming to support lifesaving and peace efforts. Only 12 Sudanese women participated out of 200 delegates – the women tried to bring attention to the ongoing atrocities, including gender-based violence. While SAF declined to attend, and RSF used the space to dominate the narrative.

Regional & International Responses: Missed Opportunities

- IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development) attempted to convene regional discussions (July and September 2023), focused on civilian protection, but again, no women were represented.
- UN Women and IGAD supported a capacity-building

workshop in late 2024, training over 60 Sudanese women on negotiation and mediation. These efforts were commendable, but they did not result in actual representation at formal negotiation tables. The outcome communiqué called for a 50% quota for women in peace and governance structures, yet no mechanisms have been established to enforce this.

Barriers to Women's Participation:

- Militarization of Peace Processes: Peace talks are dominated by armed actors; there is no civilian or gender lens applied.
- Absence of Quotas: There are no formal guarantees for women's inclusion.
- Security Risks and Mobility Constraints: Active conflict, famine, and lack of safety prevent women inside Sudan from traveling.
- Tokenism Abroad: Even women based in regional cities like Kampala, Nairobi, Addis Ababa, and Riyadh are not meaningfully included.
- No Consistent International Backing: No regional or global actor has made it a priority to consistently amplify or integrate Sudanese women's voices in peace processes.

Women's Political Organizing in Sudan:

Despite these barriers, Sudanese women are not silent. Numerous women-led platforms and feminist movements are working relentlessly, including:

- MANSAM: A broad civil society and political coalition advocating for women's inclusion in peace and governance.
- Peace for Sudan Platform: An alliance working on peace and rights.
- Feminists for Peace: A youth-led initiative focused on feminist political engagement.
- Mehanik Feminist Movement: Working to facilitate informal dialogue spaces. They launched the Sudan Strategic Analysis Group, an online platform facilitating indirect dialogue between military actors, civilians, and international observers centering on civilian protection and human rights.

Call to Action:

- Sudanese women demand space, recognition, and decision-making power.
- Demand 50% representation in all peace, transition, and governance processes.
- Support women-led civil society through funding, protection, and access.
- Make the protection of women and girls a central pillar of any peace framework.

Looking Forward:
A Renewed WPS Roadmap; The Next 25 Years: Reimagining women, peace and security

9

9.1. Co-Creation: Setting Priorities, Establishing Commitments, and Developing a Collective Action Plan for 2025–2030

As part of a collaborative effort to advance the WPS Agenda for the period 2025–2030, participants were organized into two language-based working groups - Francophone and Anglophone. Each group engaged in a co-creation process to jointly develop targeted action plans. These plans focused on two key thematic pillars: Policy and Governance Commitments and Participation and Leadership. The following outcomes represent the collective priorities and commitments identified by participants to guide future implementation and impact within the WPS framework.

9.2. THEME 1: Policy and Governance Commitments

Objective: Strengthen national and regional governance systems to support inclusive, well-funded, and accountable implementation of the WPS Agenda

Key Action Areas	Activities	Responsible Actors
Establishment and financing of WPS Funds.	• Operationalize WPS Funds under IGAD and EAC. • Advocate for dedicated budget lines for WPS in national budgets. • Map new donors to emerging powers.	IGAD, EAC, National Governments
Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms.	• Develop and roll out robust WPS monitoring tools at regional and national levels. • Operationalize WPS Barometer systems.	RECs, National Gender Machineries, CSOs
Inclusivity and Accountability in NAPs.	• Ensure women-led processes in NAP development and monitoring. • Create localized WPS awareness campaigns in local languages.	National Governments, Women-Led CSOs, Local Governments
Policy Reforms at RECs and AU Level.	• Amend EAC Court mandate to include criminal jurisdiction. • Establish enforcement mechanisms for regional court decisions. • Harmonize regional and national action plans.	AU, EAC, IGAD, Member States
Strengthen Justice and Transitional Mechanisms.	• Implement **TRC** structures in DRC (Ituri, North & South Kivu). • Ensure gender-sensitive truth, justice, and reparation processes. • Strengthen **FONAREV, CIAVAR,** and **CVR** mechanisms.	National Justice Ministries, Transitional Justice Bodies
Regional Coordination and Knowledge Sharing.	• Set up regional frameworks for sharing best practices. • Regular regional convenings for joint progress review.	IGAD, EAC, AU, CSOs

Objective: Increase women's representation and influence in peace-building and post-conflict decision-making processes

Key Action Areas	Activities	Responsible Actors
Strengthen Women's Participation in Peace Processes.	• Enforce 50% affirmative action for women in peace talks and peace implementation. • Deploy FemWise members in ongoing mediation efforts.	AU, RECs, Member States
Capacity Strengthening for Women-led CSOs.	• Conduct localized trainings in WPS and mediation using local languages. • Support CSO engagement in high-level peace forums.	FemWise, CSO Networks, UN Women
Coordination between Local and Regional Actors.	• Establish structured coordination platforms between FemWise and local women's networks. • Develop joint advocacy and peace-building programs. • Support the WPS Focal Point Advisory Council and within the ICGLR	FemWise, RECs, Local CSOs, ICGLR
Gender-Sensitive Progress Monitoring.	• Develop and implement results frameworks that measure both numbers and qualitative impact. • Mainstream feedback loops from women in conflict zones.	National Governments, RECs, CSOs
Youth and Community Engagement.	• Support women and youth peacebuilders and mediators in conflict-prone regions. • Strengthen youth networks for civic participation.	Ministries of Youth & Gender, CSOs, Peace Institutions
Digitalization and Data for Accountability	• Deploy community feedback platforms and mobile data tools. • Use digital tools for public transparency and results sharing.	Tech partners, CSOs, Local Governments

Conclusion

The convening demonstrated a shift in the right direction in terms of building coalitions, penetrating decision-making spaces, and sharpening collective advocacy strategies. It reaffirmed the need to act with clarity, consistency, and courage, and for the peace actors to position themselves both within and outside formal systems of power.

A critical observation made during the discussions was that much of civil society's advocacy has, at times, become inward-looking, speaking predominantly to themselves. To disrupt this cycle, they must shift strategy to advocate from within the systems of power such as the African Union, the EAC, and national government structures, while maintaining grassroots engagement. This approach is already bearing fruit, evidenced by growing collaboration and access to policy spaces such as engagements with AU organs and the ICGLR Regional Action Plan development.

Furthermore, the conversations strongly emphasized the need for relationship-building as a strategy. The ability to push for change depends on who one knows, how to engage, and where to place your voices. Strategic relationships, especially with ministries like Foreign Affairs, Gender, and Defense, are key to ensuring the issues are reflected in regional and national policy frameworks.

A notable milestone was the focus on UN Security Council

Resolution 1325 and its 25-year legacy. Reflections from national and local actors have made it clear that CSO voices must be documented and heard. The agreed plan to contribute papers for the *Women's World* publication symbolizes the commitment to visibility, learning, and legacy. It is vital that this documentation process be supported, coordinated, and funded effectively.

An important dimension added to the dialogue was the integration of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda with the WPS framework. These agendas must not operate in silos, but rather in synergy, to maximize collective influence and ensure inclusive peace.

Lastly, a powerful call was made to demand the right to peace, not as a favour or negotiation, but as a legally binding entitlement, enshrined in Article 10 of the Maputo Protocol. Positive peace must be pursued boldly, ensuring peace is inclusive, transformative, and lasting.

The **Peace Center's** Executive Director, Ms. Sandra Adong Oder, offered key insights reinforcing three strategic imperatives:

1. Clarity and Coordination – We need well-defined approaches for coordination among government, NGOs, academia, and private sector actors to scale up and deepen impact.

2. Funding and Sustainability – A crucial question was raised: who funds the WPS agenda? Sustainable implementation and monitoring require a well-coordinated financing strategy, one that is shared across partners.

3. Structural Inclusion and Policy Integration – Regional, national, and local action plans must interlock and reflect shared ownership. Observer status, ECOSOCC privileges, and formal recognition of NGOs' diplomatic roles are also critical structural enablers for meaningful advocacy.

Appendices

Table 3: Transition from Policy to Practice

	Uganda
	Key Achievements and Milestones

	• **Robust Policy Framework**: Since the domestication of UNSCR 1325 in 2008, Uganda has enacted and amended several gender-sensitive laws, including the Anti-FGM Act, the Domestic Violence Act, the Transitional Justice Policy, and amendments to the Succession Act.

• **Inclusive NAP Design**: NAP III is results-based, with clearly defined outcomes, resource needs, and a comprehensive Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) strategy. The inclusion of a communication strategy and resource mobilization plan enhances coordination and transparency.

• **Strong Coordination Structures**: Comprising of the National Steering Committee and Technical Committee. The committees are highly inclusive and functional, with active participation from civil society and government actors at quarterly meetings. The Ministry of Gender hosts the National Secretariat, which manages implementation, reporting, and stakeholder engagement. Informal coordination tools, like WhatsApp groups, facilitate prompt collaboration and synergy development.

• **Localization of the WPS Agenda**: Currently, 21 districts have developed Local Action Plans (LAPs), with at least 10 MDAs and CSOs creating their own operational plans aligned with NAP III. With this some districts have committed to allocating at least 1% of their budgets to WPS initiatives.

• **Capacity Building and Training**: There has been mandatory training modules on SGBV institutionalized within the Uganda Police Force as well as women peace mediators trained across multiple districts who are now recognized and respected at community levels.

• **Economic Empowerment and Leadership**: Uganda has flagship programs like the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program that have supported women's economic resilience.

    o Platforms such as the Women Leaders' Forum ensure women in decision-making roles are held accountable and supported to influence policy for gender equality.

• **Access to Services and Justice**:

    o 21 GBV shelters have been established nationwide.

    o Special court sessions for SGBV cases have been introduced to improve timely access to justice. |

Good Practices and Innovations

- **Multi-Stakeholder Platforms and Dialogue Spaces**: Uganda has institutionalized inclusive dialogue platforms that bring together government ministries, CSOs, women-led groups, development partners, and local communities. These spaces facilitate participatory planning, implementation, and joint accountability in WPS initiatives, fostering mutual trust and ownership at all levels.

- **Strong State and Non-State Collaboration**: Effective implementation of NAPs has been facilitated by strategic and meaningful partnerships between state institutions and non-state actors, particularly WROs. These partnerships have ensured community-owned solutions, contextual relevance, and gender-responsive programming.

- **Leveraging International and Regional Partnerships**: Uganda's engagement with development partners such as Norway, Japan, and the UN system has resulted in co-financing of priority WPS activities, including capacity-building, mediation efforts, and support to survivors of GBV. These partnerships have enhanced technical and financial resources while aligning national efforts with global WPS commitments.

- **Mainstreaming WPS into National Frameworks**: The integration of WPS priorities and indicators into Uganda's Vision 2040, NDPs, and sectoral plans has allowed for systematic alignment of ministry-level programming and budgeting. This institutionalization ensures that gender and peace-building are not dealt with in a vacuum but are integrated across governance and service delivery institutions.

- **Continuous Advocacy and Sensitization:** There has been continuous countrywide sensitization and advocacy efforts that have created awareness to people, traditional leaders, security agencies, and local government structures on the WPS agenda. This has heightened acceptability, political will, and reduced resistance to women's participation in peace and security processes.

- **Decentralized Implementation Structures:** The rollout of NAPs has been decentralized through the engagement of District Gender Focal Persons and local government structures. They play a role in situating the WPS agenda in contexts, mobilizing communities, and monitoring progress at grassroots.

- **Use of Community Dialogues and Traditional Leaders**: Culturally sensitive approaches, such as engaging traditional and religious leaders and facilitating grassroots community dialogues, have proven effective in breaking social barriers and promoting women's participation in peace-building and conflict resolution.

- **Strong Tri-Partite Partnerships**: The collaborative working among government institutions, CSOs, and development partners has enabled joint planning, capacity development, and mobilization of resources. The alliances have also simplified access to gender disaggregated information and evidence to inform policy and programming.

- **Innovation in M&E**: Uganda has adopted gender-responsive M&E frameworks to track the implementation of NAPs. This includes community feedback mechanisms, periodic reviews, and integration of WPS indicators into national statistical systems, which help measure both qualitative and quantitative outcomes.

Challenges and Context-Specific Barriers

- **Patriarchal Norms and Internalized Gender Biases**: Deep-rooted patriarchal systems and cultural norms continue to restrict women's participation in peace and security processes. In many communities, leadership and security are still perceived as male domains. Even among women, internalized gender norms often result in low confidence and reluctance to engage in decision-making spaces, further entrenching gender inequality.

- **Persistent Resource Constraints**: Insufficient and inconsistent funding is a critical bottleneck. Many Local Action Plans remain unfunded or underfunded, limiting implementation at district and community levels. Budget cuts, competing national priorities, and limited domestic resource allocation for WPS-specific activities undermine sustained programming and impact.

- **Weak Enforcement of Legal and Policy Frameworks**: Despite having advanced legislation and policy conforming to UNSCR 1325, enforcement is typically weak due to a lack of capacity, lack of awareness, and insufficient political will particularly at subnational levels. This gap between policy and practice impedes justice for survivors and limits accountability for WPS commitments.

- **Challenges in Tracking and Visibility of Results**: While the integration of WPS into national development plans is a positive step, it has also led to the dilution of focus. WPS-specific activities and budgets are often absorbed into broader sectoral plans, making it difficult to track targeted outcomes, measure impact, and report progress accurately.

- **Inadequate Gender-Disaggregated Data and M&E Systems**: Insufficient data and quality of gender-disaggregated data constrain effective planning, monitoring, and reporting. Most of the local governments lack the capacity and tools required to collect, analyze, and use data to inform WPS programming, and this is resulting in information gaps and reactive rather than proactive interventions.

- **Emerging and Protracted Crises Impact:** The increasing number of climate-related disasters, the protracted effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and local security concerns have disrupted WPS implementation. These crises tend to divert attention and resources from gender priorities and increase risk for violence against women and girls, particularly in conflict and humanitarian settings.

- **Fragmentation and Coordination Gaps**: Coordination among the actors implementing the NAPs especially among govern-

ment ministries, CSOs, and development partners is at times not har-monized. Such fragmentation can lead to duplication, wastage of re-sources, and missed opportunities for complementary programming.

- **Limited Inclusion of Youth and Marginalized Groups**: While efforts have been made to integrate women, young women, individuals with disabilities, other marginalized groups are still not engaged. This un-dermines the spirit if inclusivity and waters down the effectiveness of WPS programs in addressing complex needs.

Lessons Learned

Uganda's journey in operationalizing the WPS agenda has generated criti-cal lessons that can inform future planning, implementation, and scale-up efforts. These lessons reflect the importance of intentionality, inclusivity, and collaboration in translating policy into practice:

- **Operational Plans Guide Intentionality and Actionable Measures**: Ministries, departments, and districts with WPS-aligned operational plans demonstrated higher levels of ownership, clearer priorities, and more tangible results. The plans were a guide to activity coordination with NAP objectives, enhancing accountability and guiding resource allocation.

- **Involvement of the Private Sector Is Crucial to Sustainability**: Conflict and instability directly affect business operations, labor stability, and economic growth. Involving the private sector not only opens new avenues for resource mobilization but also encourages corporate social responsibility to advance WPS goals. Private sector actors can contribute to skills development, women's economic em-powerment, and post-conflict recovery initiatives.

- **Male Engagement Is Key to Shifting Norms and Building Allianc-es**: Successful enforcement of the WPS agenda depends on inclusive action that engages men and boys as peace-building allies. Miscon-ceptions that WPS is anti-male or empowers women alone need to be discredited through awareness and education campaigns as well as capacity-building that propagates shared responsibility and gender equality.

- **Local Action Plans Are Powerful Advocacy Tools**: District-level LAPs are also instrumental in guiding localized implementation, ob-taining donor investment and influencing national and subnational resource planning. LAPs offer evidence of community priority and readiness, thus complementing the credibility of local governments to enable external partnerships.

- **Joint Planning and Implementation Foster Greater Ownership**: Comprehensive planning processes between government agencies, civil society, and community-based organizations have led to more harmonized interventions and efficient use of resources. Shared de-cision-making increases legitimacy, responsiveness, and ability of all stakeholders to produce
results.

- **Strategic and Long-Term Partnerships Enhance Sustainability**: Sustained engagement with development partners including UN agencies, bilateral donors, and civil society networks has provided the technical, financial, and policy backing necessary for continued implementation. Such partnerships also promote the institutionalization of WPS efforts, even amidst political or fiscal change.

- **Localization Enhances Relevance and Effectiveness:** Adaptation of NAP implementation to local contexts through local language materials, community dialogues, and synchronization with local government planning cycles has enhanced relevance, buy-in, and impact, especially in hard-to-reach or post-conflict settings.

DRC

Key Achievements and Milestones

- **Third-Generation NAP Adoption:** DRC launched its third-generation NAP on UNSCR 1325, a key milestone in its WPS agenda. This iteration goes beyond traditional security concerns by including reactions to emerging and cross-cutting threats such as human trafficking, cybercrime, and climate insecurity all of which especially affect women and girls.

- **Legal and Policy Reforms in Favor of Women's Rights:** The DRC Constitution, Articles 13 and 15, enshrines the principles of equality and safeguard against sexual violence. Building-on legal reforms like changing the military recruitment law and the enactment of an integrative GBV law strengthened the institutional framework for women's participation in peace and security fields.

- **Decentralization and Localization of the NAP:** There has been a good effort made towards decentralizing the NAP. Up to now, 22 provinces out of 36 have localized the plan, while 10 provinces have also gone on to develop their own LAPs. Localization has heightened ownership, contextual relevance, and implementation at the grassroots level of the WPS agenda.

- **Greater Political Participation by Women:** Appointment of the first female Prime Minister of DRC is a political breakthrough. Additionally, women occupy 32% of leadership roles across all sectors, such as 13.6% of parliamentary representation and 11% in the national police representing slow but steady gains in terms of women's political and security sector involvement.

- **Institutionalization of Gender-Responsive Budgeting and Support Services:** The integration of gender budgeting across key ministries has improved resource allocation for gender-specific needs and priorities. Furthermore, the establishment of multi-service centers for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence provides critical psychosocial, legal, and medical support, contributing to survivor-centered justice.

- **Strengthening of Coordination and Monitoring Frameworks:** The establishment of robust coordination structures, such as the National Security Committee, has improved the vertical (national-to-local) and horizontal (inter-agency) coordination. These structures are central to tracking the implementation and impact of the NAP, ensuring accountability, and adaptive programming.

Good Practices and Innovations

Despite persistent challenges, the DRC has demonstrated a range of good practices and innovations that are narrowing the gap between policy and practice in UNSCR 1325 implementation.

- **Localization and Translation of UNSCR 1325:** As part of promoting wider ownership and understanding of the WPS agenda, the DRC has translated UNSCR 1325 into four local languages. This has significantly enhanced grassroots engagement, enabling women from remote and linguistically diverse communities to understand their rights and mobilize towards their inclusion in peace and security processes.

- **Active Civil Society and Women Mediator Networks:** Civil society organizations, particularly women-led organizations, have been in the driver's seat in pushing implementation. The formation of women mediator networks has facilitated conflict resolution at the community level, early warning systems, and peace negotiations, particularly in regions where there is minimal formal governance presence. These networks are critical bridges between state actors and communities.

- **Strategic Investments in Women's Leadership and Capacity Building:** Women have gained the skills, confidence, and knowledge to take up leadership roles in governance, security, and peace-building institutions through targeted capacity-building initiatives. These interventions have had tangible results in the representation of women at local and national levels, including participation in peace dialogues and development planning.

- **Women's Solidarity Movements and Community Resilience:** Women's organizations have shown tremendous resilience in the face of conflict and insecurity. Their solidarity action by way of establishing local peace committees, savings groups, and advocacy campaigns has facilitated social cohesion, challenged negative norms, and advanced the rights of women. Such community-based initiatives are de facto early recovery and stabilization mechanisms in fragile contexts.

- **Use of Arts and Media for Peace Messages:** Women organizations in several provinces have employed traditional storytelling, community theater, and radio programs to promote peace, reconciliation, and gender equality. These culturally sensitive approaches have proven effective in reaching marginalized communities and influencing public opinion regarding women's roles in peace-building.

- **Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration:** Effective collaboration between

government institutions, civil society, UN agencies, and international partners has improved coordination and facilitated sharing of resources. The collaboration has also made joint programming possible in protection, empowerment, and prevention of gender-based violence.

Challenges and Context-Specific Barriers

While the DRC has recorded significant achievements in institutionalizing WPS agenda, serious challenges have undermined the complete realization of UNSCR 1325 at both national and local levels.

- **Conflict on a Long-Term Basis and Mass Displacement:** The conflict, particularly in the Eastern DRC, keeps destabilizing populations and undermining peace-building. Over 7 million people are displaced within the country with the majority being women and children placing a massive burden on local systems and preventing the safe inclusion of women in governance and decision-making processes.

- **Insecurity by Armed Groups:** There are over 100 active armed groups in the country that present a threat to peace, human security, and the realization of the NAP. Not only do they continue to engage in violence, but they also support widespread human rights violations such as SGBV, making it challenging to realize programs safely and effectively.

- **Insufficient Mobilization of Resources and Institutional Capacities:** The policy commitments are not supplemented with an effective mobilization of financial and technical capacities to the WPS agenda. There are many CSOs and local governments lacking the capability, infrastructure, and recurring funding needs to translate NAP priorities into practical activities on the ground.

- **Low Literacy and Limited Empowerment of Women:** High illiteracy levels among women, particularly in rural and conflict areas, are a challenge to their effective contribution to peace negotiations, leadership, and post-conflict reconstruction endeavors. This undermines the "participation" pillar of UNSCR 1325 and limits the extent to which women can shape peace and development efforts.

- **Rising Digital Threats and Cyber Exploitation:** The increasing misuse of digital technology, including AI, for cyberstalking, harassment, disinformation, and exploitation of women is on the rise. The regulatory framework is underdeveloped, and there is limited awareness among women and institutions regarding the issue, which results in an emerging digital protection and safety gap under the WPS agenda.
- **Weak Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms:** Weak systems of data and poor sex-disaggregated data hinder effective monitoring of progress and the effects of NAP implementation. Moreover, weak accountability mechanisms at provincial and national levels weaken the responsiveness of institutions to women and girls residing in situations of conflict.
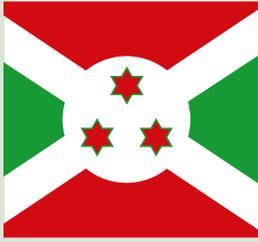
Burundi

Key Achievements and Milestones

- **Adoption and Usage of Three Generations of NAPs (Since 2012):** Burundi started with its initial NAP in 2012 and is implementing its third-generation NAP now, showing a steady institutional dedication to the localization and operationalization of UNSCR 1325. Each subsequent one has further strengthened national coordinating and monitoring mechanisms, as well as included emerging issues such as economic recovery and youth integration.

- **Constitutional Provisions for Gender Equality:** The 2018 Constitution entailed gender-sensitive reforms, specifically Articles 13 and 22, which protect the principle of non-discrimination and guarantee minimum quotas for women's representation in national institutions - 30% of the seats in Parliament and the Senate to ensure inclusive decision-making and governance.

- **Improvements in Response to GBV:** The NAP has a zero-tolerance response towards GBV through action measures such as the establishment of Centers of Excellence. These centers offer platforms for capacity development of women and front-line responders through protection, psychosocial response, legal services, and survivor-focused response mechanisms, especially among those affected by conflict.

- **Women's Political Empowerment Progress:** There has been considerable progress in elevating women's representation in leadership in Burundi. For example, during the 2022 elections, 25% of parliamentary seats were taken by women, demonstrating both constitutional protection and ongoing pressure through the NAP agenda.

- **Economic Empowerment of Women and Youth:** The new NAP also places priority on economic reintegration and resilience of women and youth, particularly from displaced and conflict-affected individuals. The key interventions are the agricultural credit schemes, vocational training, and women-led cooperatives -empowerment initiatives that enhance livelihoods but also enable sustainable peace and recovery.

Good Practices and Innovations

Burundi has also demonstrated several good practices and innovative strategies that enable effective localization and operationalization of the WPS agenda. These practices demonstrate a growing commitment to gender equality, inclusive governance, and transformative peace-building.

- **Annual National Commemoration of UNSCR 1325:** The annual national commemoration of UNSCR 1325 is a powerful advocacy and awareness-raising platform, stimulating national debate and multi-stakeholder engagement. These events foster public ownership, sharing of progress and challenges, and aligning local priorities with global WPS commitments.

- **Effective Multi-Stakeholder Coordination Mechanisms:** Effective coordination among government agencies, civil society organizations, and development partners forms the foundation of NAP implementation. Coordinated action enhances policy coherence, avoids duplication of effort, and ensures that programming is gender-responsive and contextually relevant.

- **Ambitious Gender Parity Target by 2030:** Burundi has made a progressive political commitment to achieve 50% fill of women in decision-making roles by 2030. This target, aligned with international gender equality norms, signals high-level political will and offers a measurable framework to monitor progress on women's leadership across all sectors.

- **Engagement of Men and Boys as Partners for Gender Equality:** Aligned with the necessity to transform harmful social norms, Burundi has initiated programs that engage men and boys in promoting gender equality, GBV prevention, and women's participation in peace-building. These programs foster community-led behavior change and break down patriarchal barriers.

- **Data-Driven Decision-Making and Evidence-Based Programming:** Recent investments in data collection, gender analysis, and impact evaluations are starting to guide policy development and track NAP implementation outcomes. This focus on evidence generation is critical to resourcing, accountability, and continuous learning within WPS architectures.

- **Strengthening Legal and Institutional Frameworks:** Efforts at legal capacity-building, including training judicial actors on gender-sensitive laws and women's rights, have facilitated increased access to justice for women and GBV survivors. Legal reforms and enforcement mechanisms are still vital to fostering participation and protection of women.

- Decentralized implementation of the NAP in some provinces enables grassroots participation and suggests an adapted response to community needs.

- Burundi's integration of the WPS agenda into broader national development plans and peace-building strategies enhances its sustainability and alignment with long-term recovery goals.

Challenges and Context-Specific Barriers

While Burundi has made commendable strides in translating the WPS agenda from policy into practice, several structural and operational challenges continue to hinder full and effective implementation.

- **Embedded Gender Stereotypes and Norms:** Deep-seated patriarchal gender norms and stereotypes continue to confine women primarily to family and caregiving labor, socially constructed stereotypes and norms limiting women's access to decision-making spaces, community leadership, and peace-building processes despite progressive policy and legal environments.

- **Underrepresentation of Women in Peace and Security Institutions:** As opposed to political representation gender quotas, women remain underrepresented within key peace and security institutions such as the military, police, mediation units, and local councils resolving conflicts. Underrepresentation here reflects both institutional biases as well as a lack of deliberate efforts at recruitment, retention, and promotion of women within these institutions.

- **Weak Economic Empowerment of Displaced and Rural Women:** Displaced and rural women continue to remain economically marginalized, augmented by bad access to land, credit, and skill improvement. Existing empowerment initiatives are urban-based and not suitable in relevance to the condition of rural or conflict-affected regions women.

- **Limited Comprehensive Gender-Disaggregated Data and Monitoring Mechanisms:** There is a scarcity of good, sex-disaggregated data, and poor monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for the effect of gender-specific interventions in the NAP. This hinders evidence-based planning, resource allocation, and measuring progress or adapting strategies accordingly.

- **Heavy and Unpaid Care Burden on Women:** Girls and women in Burundi bear the disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic and care work, limiting their time, mobility, education, economic opportunity, and civic engagement. The issue is mainly overlooked in national planning and policymaking.

- Scalability and sustainability of grassroots initiatives are limited by sparse funding and donor coordination for WPS work.

- Increased civil society engagement in NAP implementation and monitoring, especially institutions of women, internally displaced people, and women with disabilities.

- Insecurity and political instability persist in constraining civic space and participation, especially of women human rights defenders.
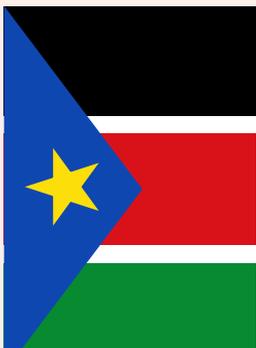
South Sudan

Key Achievements and Milestones

- **Implementation of the First-Generation NAP (2015–2020):** South Sudan completed its first National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 successfully, a critical step towards gender mainstreaming in peace and security processes. Work on developing and finalizing the second-generation NAP is ongoing, a sign of ongoing national commitment towards the WPS agenda.

- **Enhanced Women's Inclusion in Peace and Political Processes:** Women inclusion in peace and political processes has been strengthened, particularly through institutions established under the R-ARCSS. Women have been involved in peace negotiations, constitutional review, and transitional governance structures.

- **Affirmative Action Amplified:** Constitutional and legal support for the 35% affirmative action quota (from 25%) has facilitated the integration of women into leadership, including appointments in transitional institutions, parliament, and peace implementation bodies. This is a significant move toward gender equality in decision-making.

- **Adoption of Gender-Responsive Transitional Justice Laws (2024):** Two historical transitional justice legislations were passed - one establishing the Commission for Truth, Healing and Reconciliation and another on Compensation and Reparation. Both passings have gender-responsive measures, ensuring that women's experiences of conflict and healing are adequately addressed and integrated into justice and reconciliation processes.

- **Introduction of Progressive Legal Reforms:** The GBV Bill and the Family Law have been presented with a view to end harmful traditional practices, promote women's rights, and provide legal protection to the survivors of violence. These laws are also an effort towards harmonizing statutory and customary laws in favor of women's rights.

- **Formation of GBV Specialized Police Units:** To increase access to justice, specialized units of the South Sudan National Police Service have been formed to address GBV cases in a professional and sensitive manner. These units help facilitate survivor-centered responses and accountability for GBV perpetrators.

- **Greater Coordination and Multi-Sectoral Response:** Strong coordination via mechanisms such as the GBV Sub-Cluster, Protection Cluster, and WPS Technical Working Groups has raised the quality and scope of prevention, response, and advocacy interventions. The platforms also enable synergy among government, UN, civil society, and international partners.

- **Civil Society and Grassroots Women Engagement:** The role of civil society and grassroots women is still crucial in sensitizing the community, lobbying, peace-building, and service provision. Their work lies at the center of localization and sustainability of the WPS agenda.

Good Practices and Innovations

Despite the ongoing challenges, South Sudan has been experiencing some creative and best practices that are accelerating the process of policy to practice transition in the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and the National Action Plan.

- **Strong Civil Society Leadership and Coalitions:** Active and well-organized civil society coalitions like the Women's Coalition, Justice and Human Rights Civil Society Alliance, and Transitional Justice Working Group have been leading the way for advocacy, public education, and policy influence. These coalitions have functioned as watchdogs, policy advocates, and service providers, ensuring that the voices of women are represented in peace and justice processes and that governments and international players are held accountable to gender promises.

- **Institutionalized Inclusion through Peace Agreement Mechanisms:** The R-ARCSS put in place institutionalized inclusive governance and accountability structures such as the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission and the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism. These frameworks have enabled women's involvement in institutionalized formal peace and security debate, monitoring, and oversight positions representing a shift from informal to formal participation in structured, decision-making forums.

- **Invincible Resilience and Mobilization of Women:** Despite long-term conflict, displacement, and humanitarian crises, South Sudanese women and women-led organizations have demonstrated incredible resilience. Despite ongoing conflict, they continue to mobilize, build local peace networks, train women leaders, conduct trauma healing, and campaign at the grassroots level. This is a testament to the resilience of women's dedication to peace-building and their ability to lead change.

- **Localization and Community Engagement Models:** Some grassroots women's organizations have come up with community-owned peace dialogues, women's forums, and on-the-wheel legal aid clinics that bring the WPS agenda to the grassroots levels. They increase reach and relevance, especially in rural and conflict-affected contexts.

- **Intergenerational Partnership between Youth-Women:** In some cases, programs actively encouraged partnership among young women leaders and mature women peacebuilders to generate mentorship and continuity in WPS leadership and advocacy. The inclusive strategy of this approach helps in crossing generational divides and sustaining momentum.

- **Gender Mainstreaming Transitional Justice:** Civil society actors successfully lobbied to have gender-sensitive provisions included in the Transitional Justice law enacted in 2024. This resulted in incorporating women's experiences of conflict into the work mandates of the Commission for Truth, Healing and Reconciliation and the Compensation and Reparation Authority to ensure inclusiveness in

the process.

Challenges and Context-Specific Barriers

Although South Sudan has demonstrated political commitment to further the WPS agenda, there have been many systemic and underlying barriers that have made it difficult to turn intentions into action.

- **Long-Term Conflict and Displacement:** Overarching insecurity, localized conflict, and instability continue to erode implementation activities. A significant percentage of the population predominantly women and children are trapped in Protection of Civilian sites and IDP camps, where meaningful participation and services access are severely constrained.

- **Institutional Capacity Shortage and Commitment Budget:** The initial NAP first-generation was launched without a clear budgetary allocation, and it had to rely mainly on donor funds. Lack of institutional arrangements limited technical capacity, while ineffective inter-agency coordination at the national and sub-national levels still weakens effective implementation, monitoring, and sustainability.

- **Embedded Patriarchal Norms and Tokenism:** Internalized gender differences and sociocultural norms limit the space for women's effective engagement in leadership and decision-making. Women are often hired to fill quotas but lack the empowerment, authority, or training necessary to inform decisions. This increases tokenistic representation rather than transformative engagement.

- **Limited Capacity and Low Literacy Among Women:** With the country's national female literacy rate at a paltry 28.86%, the majority of women are hampered from joining political, peace-building, and leadership capacity-building schemes. This limits them from participating in policy processes, particularly in rural and marginalized communities.

- **Poor Infrastructure and Inaccessibility:** Unacceptable Road networks, communication, and transport infrastructure make most territories inaccessible, thereby preventing awareness-raising, civic education, and outreach related to the WPS agenda. This is disproportionately affecting women in conflict or hard-to-reach zones.

- **Weak Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Systems:** Absence of an effective results-based monitoring and evaluation system in the initial NAP saw poor evidence of its actual results and impacts. This becomes counterproductive for accountability, lesson learning, and the ability to inform changes in the second-generation NAP.

- **Impact of Climate-Related Crises:** Climate change-related crises such as prolonged droughts and intense floods have increased displacement, famine, and gender-based vulnerabilities. Compound crises drain already limited resources and decrease the prioritization of gender and peace-building measures.

- **Weak and Under-Resourced Women's Institutions:** Institutions mandated to promote women's participation and rights in peace and governance processes are not allocated to the authority, staff, and operational budgets required to be effective. This prevents them from assuming leading or coordinating positions in WPS implementation and advocacy on a scale.

Table 4: Experiences of CSOs in Promoting Women, Peace and Security

South Sudan

Participation

- **Affirmative Action Advocacy**: CSOs successfully pushed for the increase in women's representation quota from 25% to 35%, a commendable milestone demonstrating the collective power and persistence of women-led organizations.

- **Policy Influence and Legislative Engagement**: CSOs have actively engaged in reviewing government policies and proposed bills, particularly those related to electoral reforms, peace implementation frameworks, and constitutional processes.

- **Capacity Building for Women**: Despite the uncertainty around South Sudan's electoral calendar, CSOs have been proactive in training and empowering women to participate meaningfully in governance, peace-building, and decision-making processes.

- **Dialogue Facilitation**: CSOs have created platforms for inclusive political dialogue, including facilitating interaction among fragmented political groups. These efforts have provided safe spaces for discussion and promoted consensus-building, especially between factions of the ruling party.

- **Engagement in Regional and National Mechanisms**: South Sudanese CSO representatives have observer status in regional mechanisms such as IGAD and RJMEC, strengthening accountability and information sharing between grassroots actors and regional bodies.

- **Support NAP on WPS**: CSOs have been at the forefront in drafting, re-viewing, and advocating for the finalization and implementation of South Sudan's NAP II on UNSCR 1325, which is still pending formal adoption.

Prevention

- **Establishment of FemWise–Africa South Sudan Chapter**: With sup-port from CSOs, the South Sudan Chapter of the African Union's Fem-Wise network was launched in late 2023. It aims to empower women mediators and strengthen early warning systems.

- **Formation of Peace Committees**: CSOs, often in partnership with local and international actors, have formed peace-building and conflict reso-lution committees at community levels, addressing local grievances and promoting reconciliation.

- **Security Sector Reform Advocacy**: CSOs have advocated for and moni-tored security sector reforms, especially to ensure that such processes are inclusive and respect human rights.

- **Legislative Oversight**: CSOs have contributed to the development and review of transitional justice frameworks, including the Transitional Justice Act, the establishment of a Gender-Based Violence Court, and review of controversial bills such as the Civil Registry and Citizenship Bill.

- **Gender-Sensitive Trainings and Materials**: Gender focal persons within CSOs have conducted extensive training, distributed materials, and advocated for gender-responsive planning and budgeting in prevention

frameworks.

Protection

- **One-Stop Centers for GBV Survivors:** Several CSOs, in collaboration with UN Women, have established comprehensive GBV service centers offering medical, psychosocial, legal, and shelter services.

- **Pro Bono Legal Support:** Organizations such as the South Sudan Law Society offer free legal aid for survivors of violence and vulnerable women and children.

- **Juvenile Justice:** CSOs have been instrumental in establishing juvenile courts to ensure the protection and rehabilitation of children in conflict with the law.

- **Special Protection Units:** CSOs have successfully lobbied for the creation of Special Protection Desks within the police force to address gender-based crimes more efficiently.

Relief & Recovery

- **Humanitarian Advocacy**: CSOs have pushed for gender-responsive humanitarian responses and the inclusion of women's enterprises in national economic recovery plans.

- **Livelihood and Economic Empowerment:** Programs aimed at increasing women's economic independence and resilience have been implemented by various CSOs, including vocational training and small enterprise support.

- **Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET):** In response to years of disrupted formal education, CSOs have supported the rollout of TVET programs under a national policy, helping especially youth and women regain productive skills.

- **Emergency Response Planning:** CSOs contributed to the design and implementation of the National Emergency Response Plan, ensuring it considers gender dynamics and needs during crises.

Best Practices

- **Strong CSO Networks and Alliances**: In a politically volatile environment, South Sudanese CSOs have built broad-based coalitions, which offer protection, amplify voices, and allow for more impactful advocacy.

- **Effective Coordination and Communication**: There is a clear structure among CSOs that enhances information flow and strategy alignment, ensuring cohesive engagement with stakeholders including government actors and development partners.

- **Community-Driven Approaches**: A bottom-up approach ensures that initiatives are informed by grassroots realities, enhancing relevance and community ownership.

- **Evidence-Based Advocacy**: Continuous research and data collection have allowed CSOs to engage in evidence-informed programming and policy dialogue.

Challenges & Lessons Learned

- **Collective Action**: Given the shrinking civic space, CSOs have found that working in large coalitions makes them less vulnerable to political targeting and more influential in advocacy.

- **Strategic Partnerships**: Forming alliances with like-minded actors, including development partners, has bolstered CSO capacity and legitimacy.

- **Persistence Pays Off**: Long-term lobbying on laws and policies some pursued for over four years demonstrate that persistence and consistency are crucial to success.

- **Adaptive Management**: Frequent changes in government leadership and restructuring demand continuous adaptation and flexibility in how CSOs operate and engage with the state.

Recommendations for Future Research and Action

Understanding Peace Agreement Collapse:

- A comprehensive study on the drivers behind the collapse of the 2015 peace agreement, and the fragility of the 2018 agreement, is necessary to inform future peace efforts.

Gender-Responsive Budgeting:

- A national study on gender-sensitive public finance is needed, as gender-focused initiatives in South Sudan are significantly underfunded.

Women's Leadership in Security Sector:

- Investigate the barriers to women's participation in security institutions and leadership, to inform reforms that can unlock opportunities for gender inclusion in defense and law enforcement agencies.

DRC

Participation

- **Increased Women's Political Participation**: CSOs have actively promoted women's engagement in political leadership through campaigns, leadership training, and mentorship programs. Women's movements in Kinshasa and other provinces have led strong advocacy efforts for the inclusion of more women in national and local governance structures.

- **Support for NAP II**: CSOs collaborated with the government in the development and data collection for the second National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325, ensuring women's voices were reflected and regional dynamics considered.

- **Training of Women Mediators**: CSOs trained women as peace mediators and community leaders, equipping them with skills to engage in dialogue and conflict resolution at local and provincial levels.

- **Inclusion of Marginalized Groups**: Civil society has been deliberate in promoting the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), ensuring their participation in peace-building processes and community leadership.

Prevention

- **Early Warning Mechanisms**: CSOs have established community-based early warning systems to detect and report potential conflict, including those with gendered dimensions such as sexual violence and displacement.

- **Advocacy for Gender-Sensitive Laws and Policies**: CSOs actively participated in the development and advocacy for national laws and local policies that integrate gender considerations in peace and security planning.

- **Community Sensitization**: Through public campaigns and grassroots mobilization, CSOs have raised awareness about gender equality, women's rights, and the importance of inclusive peace-building.

Protection

- **Support to GBV Survivors**: CSOs have partnered with the police and judicial institutions to improve the handling of GBV cases, including referral pathways and psychosocial support for survivors.

- **Strengthening Legal Frameworks**: CSOs were instrumental in advocating for laws against GBV and the Law on Transitional Justice, contributing to improved protection mechanisms for women and girls in conflict-affected areas.

- **Capacity Building Across Sectors**: CSOs have provided training and capacity building for women in sectors such as security, health, education, and local governance to enhance their leadership and protection roles.

Relief & Recovery

- **Support for Economic Empowerment**: CSOs have initiated livelihood projects for women, especially in conflict-affected and displacement-prone areas, to support recovery and resilience building.

- **Advocacy for Inclusive Humanitarian Responses**: CSOs have lobbied for humanitarian responses that address the needs of women, girls, and persons with disabilities, ensuring access to services and participation in decision-making during recovery efforts.

Challenges & Lessons Learned

- **Limited Resources**:
Financial constraints and donor dependency hinder the ability of CSOs to scale up or sustain their activities across the vast and conflict-affected regions of the DRC.

- **Persistent Insecurity and Conflict**: The continued armed conflict, especially in eastern DRC, poses significant risks to CSO staff and beneficiaries, and impedes access to communities in need.

- **Weak Implementation of Policies**: Despite the existence of strong frameworks, implementation remains inconsistent due to lack of political will, coordination gaps, and bureaucratic hurdles.

Lessons Learned

- **The Power of Collaboration**: Joint advocacy and coordination among women's rights organizations have proven effective in influencing policy and amplifying impact at both the national and provincial levels.

- **Investing in Capacity Strengthens Impact**: Ongoing capacity building has enhanced the effectiveness and sustainability of women's leadership in peace-building and governance.

- **Evidence-Based Programming**: Research and gender analysis conducted by CSOs have provided valuable data to shape programming and influence donor priorities and government interventions.

Recommendations for Future Research and Action

- Increase support for CSOs, especially women-led organizations, through direct funding and capacity building to scale and sustain their WPS interventions.

- Strengthen multi-stakeholder coordination between CSOs, government, and international partners to ensure coherent implementation of the WPS Agenda.

- Promote localized and inclusive peace-building approaches that center the experiences of women, girls, persons with disabilities, and displaced populations.

- Advocate for a gender-sensitive budgeting process within government institutions to ensure the allocation of adequate resources to gender and peace programs.
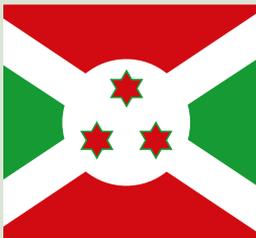
Burundi/Mouvement Inamahoro

Participation

Burundi

- **Promotion of Women's Political and Civic Participation**: CSOs have been at the forefront of advocating for increased representation of women in governance and decision-making platforms, including through voter education, leadership training, and public dialogues.

- **Engagement in NAP II**: Civil society actively participated in the data collection and consultations leading to the development of Burundi's second National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325, ensuring diverse women's voices were heard and incorporated.

- **Capacity Building for Marginalized Groups**: Special attention has been given to empowering rural women, IDPs, young women, and persons with disabilities through training and leadership development initiatives, enabling them to engage in peace-building and political processes.

Inamahoro Movement

The Movement's commitment to participation was evident from the onset, when women and girls in exile across the region were brought together and reorganized to mobilize for peace and security in Burundi. This initiative not

only connected displaced women but also shifted their self-perception, from victims of conflict to essential peace actors. Through advocacy at the regional and international levels, including engagements with the EAC, AU, and UN, Burundian women ensured their inclusion in the inter-Burundian dialogue. This access allowed them to present their concerns and solutions to the Secretary-General of the EAC, the Chairperson of the AU Commission, and the UN Security Council. Although the dialogue process did not conclude due to political challenges, the Movement's presence at the table and their active contributions represented a breakthrough in women's political engagement.

In addition, the Movement focused on empowering women through capacity-building activities in leadership, mediation, peaceful conflict resolution, and communication. These efforts created deeper understanding of the WPS Agenda and stimulated greater engagement among women and girls. Dialogue was also facilitated between Burundian women in exile and those who remained in the country including those aligned with the ruling party fostering mutual understanding and the formation of a unified women's peace agenda. Furthermore, the Movement actively engaged Burundian refugee youth through debates, training sessions, and intergenerational dialogue. These activities helped promote civic responsibility, peace-building, and positive masculinity, reinforcing the importance of young people in sustaining the WPS and Youth, Peace and Security agendas.

Prevention

Burundi

- **Conflict Prevention and Peace-building Initiatives**: CSOs conduct regular community sensitization on peace, gender equality, and coexistence, helping to reduce intercommunal tensions and promote non-violence, particularly during electoral periods.

- **Early Warning Systems**: In partnership with grassroots women leaders, CSOs have developed local early warning and response mechanisms that identify and help mitigate conflict risks, especially those with gendered implications.

- **Advocacy at the African Union**: Burundian CSOs have taken advocacy beyond national borders by engaging the AU and other regional bodies to push for greater accountability and support for the WPS agenda in Burundi.

Inamahoro Movement

Prevention was central to the Movement's strategy from the beginning. The act of reorganizing displaced women to engage in peace-building was itself a preventative measure, designed to stop further marginalization and reduce their vulnerability to exploitation. Through education and training in nonviolent communication, leadership, and conflict resolution, the Movement worked to instill a culture of peace and civic responsibility. They also convened cross-political dialogues among women in Burundi and the diaspora, aiming to reduce political polarization and forge a shared vision for peace. The involvement of young people and promotion of positive masculinity further helped to challenge and transform harmful gender norms, thereby addressing root causes of violence and instability.

Protection

- **Advocacy for Legal Reforms**: CSOs contributed significantly to the adoption and implementation of laws on Gender-Based Violence and transitional justice. They continue to advocate for the enforcement of these laws, access to justice for survivors, and survivor-centered services.

- **Support Services for Survivors**: Many CSOs provide psychosocial support, legal aid, and referral services for GBV survivors, especially in post-conflict communities.

Inamahoro Movement

The Movement demonstrated a strong commitment to protecting women and girls from violence and human rights violations. Through a network of monitors in Burundi, they collected and shared information on violations, particularly those affecting women. Their persistent advocacy, including direct correspondence to national leaders, contributed to the release of several arbitrarily detained individuals, including women human rights defenders and journalists. A notable example was the advocacy that led to the release of Christa Kaneza in 2021, and later the release of additional women activists and a journalist who had returned to Burundi under the impression that peace had been restored.

Support was also extended to survivors of rape and gender-based violence. The Movement provided these women and girls with medical care, psychological support, and small economic grants to help them rebuild their lives. This support empowered many survivors to break their silence and publicly share their stories. In situations where women in Burundi were under direct threat, the Movement worked with humanitarian institutions to evacuate and protect them, actions that saved lives. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they successfully mobilized humanitarian assistance for Burundian refugee families, especially in Rwanda and Uganda, at a time when most aid agencies were unable to respond due to limited resources.

Relief & Recovery

- **Peace and Reintegration Support**: CSOs support the reintegration of women ex-combatants and returnees and engage in livelihood and economic empowerment projects that support community resilience and recovery.

- **Psycho-social and Economic Healing**: Through trauma healing programs and skills training, CSOs support women and girls affected by past and ongoing violence to rebuild their lives and contribute to community development.

Inamahoro Movement

Understanding that sustainable peace requires economic empowerment, the Movement prioritized women's recovery and reintegration through financial inclusion. They offered entrepreneurship training and financial literacy education to help women become economically independent. The establishment of savings cooperatives gave women access to small loans at low interest rates, enabling them to start or expand businesses. These economic empowerment initiatives not only provided immediate relief but also laid the foundation for women's greater political participation and long-term contributions to Burundi's reconstruction.

The Movement continues to seek partnerships to scale up this initiative and ensure that women return home fully equipped to play meaningful roles in their communities.

Challenges & Lessons Learned

- **Solidarity and Network Building**: Strong collaboration among women's rights organizations and peace actors has amplified their voice and strengthened advocacy for WPS in national and regional spaces.

- **Commitment to Change**: Despite a challenging environment, the persistent commitment of CSOs has resulted in gradual changes in policy and public perception around women's roles in peace and governance.

- **Sustained Advocacy Is Key**: Continuous lobbying, even amidst shrinking civic space and political sensitivity, has helped maintain momentum around WPS issues, especially gender justice and transitional justice.

Recommendations for Future Research and Action

- **Addressing Patriarchy in Peace-building**: There is a need for deeper research and innovative strategies to challenge and transform entrenched patriarchal norms and institutions that limit women's participation and rights.

- **Combating Persistent Discrimination Against Women**: Studies could explore effective legal, educational, and social strategies for addressing systemic discrimination and harmful cultural practices that hinder women's full inclusion in peace and political life.

- **Impact of Civic Space Restrictions on WPS Work**: Given the limitations imposed on civil society in recent years, there is a need to study how these restrictions affect the implementation and sustainability of WPS programming.

- **Invest in Community-Based Peace-building**: Support grassroots women's organizations working on peace, security, and conflict resolution, especially in rural and border areas.

- **Enhance Legal Implementation**: Advocate for full implementation of GBV and transitional justice laws, with resources allocated to enforcement, awareness, and survivor support.

- **Support Research and Innovation**: Fund research on patriarchal systems and discriminatory practices, and support the development of innovative, culturally sensitive approaches to address them.

- **Strengthen Regional and International Advocacy**: Continue engaging with the African Union and international bodies to raise visibility and attract political and financial support for Burundi's WPS efforts.

Sudan

Participation

- Sudan's first-ever National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 was adopted during the transitional government period, with active involvement of CSOs.

- Women actively participated in the Juba Peace Agreement, with gains reflected in the transitional constitutional charter.

- Women and young women engaged in consultative forums on peace, gender, and political participation, and were mobilized through neighborhood resistance committees.

- Advocacy campaigns such as "All Our Rights" and "No, Join the Committee" promoted grassroots women's participation and political agency.

- Women's rights groups established a minimum standard agenda for political participation and legal reforms.

Prevention

- Awareness raising on 1325 at national level through radio, TV, and community outreach.

- Integration of 1325 principles into broader conflict prevention and peace policy discourses.

- CSOs and youth groups led education efforts on combating violence against women.

Protection

- Sudan launched its first NAP on WPS and the first GBV policy framework in 2020.

- Established governmental and community-level referral pathways for GBV survivors.

- Conducted national-level capacity building for security forces on WPS and GBV.

- Strengthened collaboration between CSOs and local protection networks.

Relief & Recovery

- In conflict-affected areas such as Darfur, women mobilized to promote 1325 and lead local relief efforts.

- Established local relief distribution networks with 50% female representation.

- In the current war, Women's Emergency Response Teams were formed to address conflict-related sexual violence, provide essential aid, and support women's economic recovery.

Best Practices

- Broad mobilization of young women in non-traditional spaces (neighborhood committees, feminist grassroots movements).

- Collaborative drafting of the NAP involving the Ministry of Social Wel-

fare, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Defense, and Ministry of Security with technical support from the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces and funding from the Danish Embassy.

- Enhanced relationships between federal security actors and local protection networks.
- Localized GBV response systems emphasizing survivor dignity.
- Youth-led awareness campaigns and capacity-building.
- Launch of the first national GBV hotline for women and girls in Sudan.
- Women-led local relief and protection networks tailored to displaced and war-affected populations.
- Integration of economic empowerment with humanitarian response.

Challenges & Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned:

- Political rhetoric around women's leadership did not translate into actual inclusion in decision-making, policy reform, or budget allocations.
- Need for an aligned, unified women's agenda to counter tokenistic inclusion.
- Importance of supporting women's leadership in non-traditional and grassroots organizing spaces.
- Lack of political will to ratify and implement regional and international women's rights protocols.
- Fragmented and underfunded survivor-centered services, especially psychosocial and medical support.
- Prevention efforts lack sustainability and institutional support.
- Gender blindness in national policies undermines effective prevention.
- Aid and rehabilitation programs often overlook the specific needs of women, especially in polarized and militarized contexts.

Recommendations for Future Research and Action

- Political economic analysis of women's participation in peace and governance in fragile and conflict-affected settings.
- Development of localized, survivor-centered frameworks for GBV response and referral in conflict settings.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of community-based prevention networks in conflict zones.
- Militarization and its impact on women's reintegration, disarmament, and post conflict recovery.

WIPC

Participation

Regional Convenings and Outcome Documents

- WIPC has co-organized and participated in at least nine regional convenings under platforms like Gender is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC) Network, engaging women leaders and activists from countries such as South Sudan, Uganda, Sudan, Mali, and others.

These forums resulted in outcome documents and policy recommendations which were presented to the African Union Heads of State Summits, influencing regional declarations on WPS.

High-Level Engagements and Envoy Visits

- WIPC played a pivotal role in convening AU Special Envoys on Women, Peace and Security, facilitating visits to countries like DRC and South Sudan, and hosting consultations with refugee women in Uganda.

These engagements provided first-hand accounts from conflict-affected women, which shaped the AU's advocacy and accountability efforts.

Early Warning Mechanisms

- The Centre supported the strengthening and operationalization of women-led early warning mechanisms in conflict-prone areas within the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa, contributing to localized conflict prevention and response systems.

AU ECOSOCC Engagement: Through its engagement with the AU ECOSOCC, WIPC has:

- Enhanced linkages between CSOs and AU organs.
- Contributed to the development of policy briefs and position papers on women's participation, protection, and peace-building.

EAC Institutional Strengthening: Within the EAC, WIPC has organized and facilitated:

- Technical meetings with EAC structures to integrate WPS principles.
- Advocacy dialogues to influence EAC regional policy on youth and women's inclusion in peace processes.
-

ICGLR Engagements

- WIPC has supported WPS-focused dialogues within the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), advocating for mechanisms and national focal points to monitor and report on women's peace and security commitments.

UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

- At the global level, WIPC annually facilitates grassroots women leaders' participation at the CSW in New York. It supports community-based women to engage in policy dialogues, raise issues from local contexts, and influence global debates on WPS and gender equality.

Regional Networks for WPS Collaboration

- WIPC has initiated and sustained five regional WPS networks, fostering cross-country collaboration and shared learning across South Sudan, Burundi, DRC, Sudan, and Uganda.

- These networks promote joint advocacy, information exchange, and coordinated action for the implementation of WPS frameworks.

Best Practices

- **Collective Advocacy:** WIPC's platforms foster unified voices and collective influence at regional and international levels, amplifying the concerns of women from conflict-affected areas.

- **Multi-Level Collaboration:** The Peace Centre demonstrates effective partnership models between national actors, regional bodies, and civil society.

- **Localization of WPS:** By bringing grassroots women to policy spaces, WIPC has bridged the gap between local lived experiences and global commitments.

- **Evidence-Based Advocacy:** Periodic policy reviews, position papers, and shadow reports enhance accountability for WPS implementation.

Recommendations for Future Research and Action

- Institutionalization of regional WPS frameworks within REC structures such as EAC and ICGLR.

- Tracking and accountability for national commitments through civil society shadow reporting.

- Youth engagement strategies to ensure meaningful participation of young women in WPS processes.

- Resource mobilization for regional networks to ensure sustainability and impact.

**Women's
International
Peace Centre**

Amplifying Women's Voice and Power

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