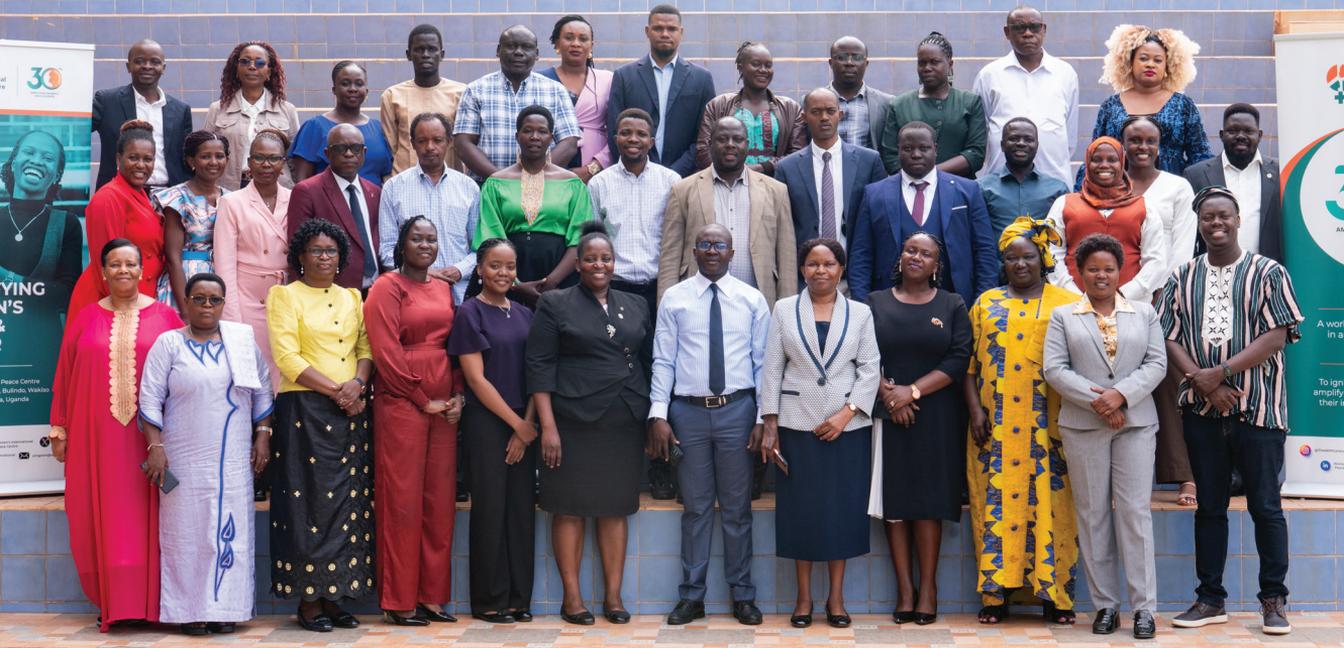# WOMEN, PEACE & SECURITY PROGRAMMING IN THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY

Policy Brief

WOMEN, PEACE & SECURITY PROGRAMMING IN THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY

Final Policy Brief

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A. Executive Summary

This policy brief examines the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in the East African Community (EAC), focusing on regional dynamics, implementation challenges, opportunities, and actionable recommendations. Drawing on extensive document review, stakeholder insights, the brief contains a comparative analysis, which provides a thorough assessment of the current state of WPS programming in the EAC region. The brief then outlines strategic pathways for strengthening regional cooperation and accelerating progress on women's meaningful participation in peace and security processes.

The analysis reveals that while significant progress has been made in developing policy frameworks for WPS implementation at both regional and national levels, substantial gaps remain in translating these commitments into concrete action. Key challenges include inadequate financing, weak coordination mechanisms, limited women's participation in formal peace processes, and insufficient attention to the regional dimensions of peace and security challenges affecting women. However, the analysis also identifies important opportunities for advancing the WPS agenda through enhanced regional cooperation, innovative financing mechanisms, and strategic partnerships.

Based on this assessment, the brief offers targeted recommendations for the EAC Secretariat, Partner States, civil society organizations, and development partners to strengthen WPS implementation across the region. By addressing the identified challenges and leveraging existing opportunities, the EAC can make significant progress toward a more inclusive, gender-responsive approach to peace and security that recognizes and amplifies women's roles as agents of peace.

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose and Scope

This analysis aims to provide a comprehensive assessment of Women, Peace and Security programming in the East African Community, with a focus on:

- The current status of WPS implementation at regional and national levels
- Key challenges and barriers to effective implementation
- Regional dimensions and opportunities for enhanced cooperation
- Actionable recommendations for strengthening WPS programming

The analysis covers all eight EAC Partner States: Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Somalia, while recognizing the varying contexts and stages of WPS implementation across these countries.

1.2 Methodology

The analysis employs a mixed-methods approach, drawing on:

- **Document review:** Comprehensive review of EAC treaties, protocols, policies, and action plans; national WPS action plans; and relevant AU and UN frameworks
- **Data analysis:** Examination of available quantitative data on women's participation in peace processes, security institutions, and decision-making bodies
- **Comparative analysis:** Assessment of WPS implementation across the EAC Partner States and comparison with other regional economic communities
- **Gap analysis:** Identification of key gaps between policy commitments and implementation

2. Regional Context: Peace and Security Landscape in the EAC

2.1 Overview of Peace and Security Challenges

The East African region faces a complex array of peace and security challenges that have significant gender dimensions:

- **Active conflicts:** Ongoing conflicts in eastern DRC, South Sudan, and parts of Somalia continue to have devastating impacts on women and girls, including displacement, sexual and gender-based violence, and economic insecurity.

- **Cross-border security threats:** Transnational threats such as terrorism, violent extremism, trafficking in persons, and small arms proliferation affect women in specific ways and often require regional responses.

- **Electoral violence:** Several EAC Partner States have experienced election-related violence, which often includes targeted violence against women political candidates and voters.

- **Climate-related security risks:** Climate change is increasingly recognized as a security threat in the region, with women often bearing disproportionate impacts due to their reliance on natural resources and limited adaptive capacity.

2.2 Regional Peace and Security Architecture

The EAC has established several mechanisms for addressing peace and security challenges:

- **EAC Peace and Security Protocol:** Provides the legal framework for regional cooperation on peace and security, including provisions for gender mainstreaming in conflict prevention, management, and resolution.

- **EAC Early Warning Mechanism:** Aims to detect and monitor potential conflicts, though gender-specific indicators remain limited.

- **EAC Mediation Framework:** Guides the Community's engagement in conflict prevention and resolution, with provisions for women's participation.

- **Sectoral Committees and Working Groups:** Various sectoral bodies address specific aspects of peace and security, including the Sectoral Committee on Interstate Security.

However, the analysis reveals that gender perspectives are not consistently integrated across these mechanisms, and women's participation in their governance and operations remains limited.

3. Policy and Legal Framework for WPS in the EAC

3.1 Regional Frameworks

The EAC has developed several frameworks that provide a foundation for WPS implementation:

- **EAC Treaty:** Establishes fundamental principles of gender equality, good governance, and peace and security cooperation.

- **EAC Protocol on Peace and Security:** Includes specific provisions on gender mainstreaming in conflict prevention, management, and resolution.

- **EAC Gender Policy (2018):** Includes strategic objectives related to women's participation in peace and security processes.

- **EAC Regional Action Plan on WPS:** Currently under development, aims to provide a comprehensive framework for regional WPS implementation.

3.2 National Action Plans on WPS

All EAC Partner States have either developed or are in the process of developing National Action Plans (NAPs) on UNSCR 1325:

Country	NAP status	Current Generation	Period	Key focus area
Burundi	Adopted	3rd	2022 – 2027	Participation, prevention, protection, recovery
DRC	Adopted	3rd	2025- 2028	Participation, prevention, protection, relief and recovery
Kenya	Adopted	3rd	2025-2029	Participation, prevention, protection, relief and recovery
Rwanda	Adopted	3rd	2018-2022	Participation, prevention, protection, relief and recovery, coordination
Somalia	Adopted	1st	2021-2024	Participation, prevention, protection, relief and recovery
South Sudan	Adopted	2nd	2021-2025	Participation, prevention, protection, relief and recovery
Tanzania	Adopted	3rd	2021- 2026	Realizing Competitiveness and Industrialization for Human Development
Uganda	Adopted	3rd	2021-2025	Participation, prevention, protection, relief and recovery

While the development of NAPs represents important progress, the analysis reveals significant variations in their quality, implementation, and monitoring mechanisms. Key challenges include:

- Inadequate costing and budgeting
- Limited civil society participation in development and implementation
- Weak monitoring and evaluation frameworks
- Insufficient attention to regional dimensions

3.3 Alignment with Continental and Global Frameworks

The EAC's approach to WPS is situated within broader continental and global frameworks:

- **African Union Frameworks:** Including the AU Protocol on Women's Rights (Maputo Protocol), the AU Continental Results Framework on WPS, and the AU FemWise-Africa initiative.

- **UN Frameworks:** Including UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions, the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, and the Sustainable Development Goals (particularly SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions).

The analysis indicates varying degrees of alignment between EAC frameworks and these continental and global standards, with opportunities for greater harmonization and coherence.

4. Implementation Status and Challenges

4.1 Women's Participation in Peace Processes

Despite policy commitments, women's participation in formal peace processes in the EAC region remains limited:

- Women constitute only a small percentage of negotiators, mediators, and signatories in peace processes.
- Women's civil society organizations often lack formal access to peace negotiations.
- Women's participation tends to be higher in informal peace processes at the community level, but these efforts are often under-recognized and under-resourced.

CASE STUDY: SOUTH SUDAN PEACE PROCESS

The Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) included a 35% quota for women's representation. However, actual implementation has fallen short, with women constituting only 25% of delegates to the National Constitutional Amendment Committee and even lower percentages in other implementation bodies. This illustrates the gap between policy commitments and actual practice.

4.2 Protection from Gender-Based Violence

Conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) remains prevalent in parts of the region, particularly in active conflict zones:

- Limited access to justice for survivors
- Inadequate protection mechanisms
- Insufficient psychosocial and economic support services
- Weak coordination between security and justice sectors

CASE STUDY: EASTERN DRC

Despite numerous initiatives to address conflict-related sexual violence in eastern DRC, including the establishment of specialized police units and mobile courts, survivors continue to face significant barriers to accessing justice and support services. Regional approaches to addressing cross-border dimensions of SGBV remain underdeveloped.

4.3 Financing and Resource Allocation

Inadequate financing is a critical barrier to effective WPS implementation across the region:

- Most NAPs lack dedicated budget lines and rely heavily on donor funding
- Limited transparency in tracking WPS-related expenditures
- Competing priorities within national security budgets
- Minimal regional pooled funding for WPS initiatives

> **KEY FINDING:**
>
> Analysis of national budgets reveals that less than 2% of security sector budgets across the region is explicitly allocated to gender-responsive programming, highlighting the significant financing gap.

4.4 Coordination and Coherence

Weak coordination mechanisms undermine effective WPS implementation:

- Limited coordination between regional and national levels
- Fragmentation of efforts across multiple ministries and agencies
- Insufficient engagement between governments and civil society
- Lack of harmonized approaches to cross-border challenges

The absence of a dedicated regional coordination mechanism for WPS has contributed to these challenges, though efforts are underway to establish such a mechanism.

4.5 Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

Significant gaps exist in monitoring and evaluating WPS implementation:

- Inconsistent data collection and reporting
- Limited gender-disaggregated data on peace and security issues
- Weak accountability mechanisms
- Insufficient learning and adaptation based on evidence

The development of the EAC Regional Action Plan on WPS presents an opportunity to establish a more robust regional monitoring and evaluation framework.

5. Regional Dimensions and Opportunities

5.1 Cross-Border Challenges and Regional Responses

Many peace and security challenges in the EAC have important regional dimensions that require coordinated responses:

- **Refugee movements:** The region hosts over 4.5 million refugees, the majority of whom are women and children. Regional approaches to refugee protection and assistance remain underdeveloped.

- **Trafficking in persons:** Women and girls are disproportionately affected by human trafficking across borders in the region, necessitating coordinated prevention and response efforts.

- **Small arms proliferation:** The flow of small arms and light weapons across borders contributes to insecurity and gender-based violence, requiring regional disarmament and control initiatives.

- **Violent extremism:** Groups like Al-Shabaab operate across borders, with gender-specific recruitment strategies and impacts that require regional prevention and response strategies.

5.2 Regional Economic Integration and WPS

The EAC's economic integration agenda intersects with WPS in important ways:

■ **Cross-border trade:** Women constitute the majority of small-scale cross-border traders in the region, making border security and management a key gender issue.

■ **Freedom of movement:** Enhanced mobility within the EAC creates both opportunities and risks for women, including in relation to trafficking and exploitation.

■ **Economic empowerment:** Regional economic initiatives can contribute to women's economic recovery in post-conflict settings if designed with gender considerations in mind.

5.3 Knowledge Exchange and Capacity Building

The regional platform offers significant opportunities for knowledge exchange and capacity building:

■ **Sharing best practices:** Partner States can learn from each other's experiences in implementing WPS commitments.

■ **Joint training initiatives:** Regional training programs can build capacity for gender-responsive approaches to peace and security.

■ **Collaborative research:** Regional research initiatives can strengthen the evidence base for effective WPS programming.

5.4 Collective Advocacy and Norm-Setting

The EAC can play an important role in advancing norms and standards related to WPS:

■ **Regional standards:** Developing regional standards for women's participation in peace processes and protection from gender-based violence.

■ **Collective voice:** Using the collective weight of the EAC to advocate for WPS priorities in continental and global forums.

■ **Peer learning and accountability:** Creating mechanisms for mutual accountability among Partner States for WPS commitments.

6. Comparative Analysis: WPS Implementation in Other Regional Economic Communities

6.1 Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

ECOWAS has made significant progress in institutionalizing the WPS agenda:

- Adopted a Regional Action Plan on WPS in 2010, currently implementing its third generation (2018-2023)
- Established a dedicated Gender Directorate with WPS responsibilities
- Developed the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework with strong gender provisions
- Created the ECOWAS Female Peacekeeping Network

KEY LESSONS:

ECOWAS's experience demonstrates the value of institutionalizing WPS within regional structures and establishing dedicated financing mechanisms.

6.2 Southern African Development Community (SADC)

SADC has integrated WPS into its broader peace and security architecture:

- Adopted a Regional Strategy on Women, Peace and Security (2018-2022)
- Established a Gender Unit within the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security
- Developed a Regional Gender-Based Violence Strategy
- Created a Women Mediators Network

KEY LESSONS: SADC's approach highlights the importance of integrating WPS across the peace and security architecture rather than treating it as a standalone issue.

6.3 Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)

IGAD, which overlaps with the EAC, has developed several WPS initiatives:

- Adopted a Regional Action Plan on WPS (2021-2025)
- Established a Women and Peace Forum
- Integrated gender into its Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN)
- Developed a Regional Strategy for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism with strong gender components

KEY LESSONS: IGAD's experience underscores the potential for collaboration between regional economic communities with overlapping membership, as well as the importance of integrating gender into early warning systems.

7. Innovative Approaches and Best Practices

7.1 Women's Mediation Networks

Several promising initiatives have emerged to enhance women's participation in mediation:

- **FemWise-Africa:** The AU's Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation provides a continental framework that could be adapted for the EAC region.

- **National mediation networks:** Countries like Kenya and Uganda have established national networks of women mediators that could be linked in a regional structure.

- **Community-based mediation:** Grassroots women's mediation initiatives in countries like Burundi and South Sudan demonstrate effective approaches that could be scaled up.

7.2 Gender-Responsive Early Warning

Innovative approaches to integrating gender into early warning systems include:

- **Gender-specific indicators:** Developing indicators that capture gender-specific conflict dynamics and early signs of violence against women.

- **Women's situation rooms:** Temporary mechanisms established during elections to monitor and respond to violence against women, as implemented in Kenya and Uganda.

- **Community-based monitoring:** Engaging women's organizations in collecting and analyzing early warning information at the community level.

7.3 Financing Mechanisms

Several innovative financing approaches could be adapted for WPS implementation in the EAC:

- **Gender-responsive budgeting:** Systematically integrating gender perspectives into budget processes, as Rwanda has done.

- **Peace funds with gender windows:** Establishing dedicated funding streams for WPS within broader peace and security financing mechanisms.

- **Regional pooled funding:** Creating a regional fund to support cross-border WPS initiatives, similar to the ECOWAS Peace Fund's gender component.

7.4 Men's Engagement

Promising approaches to engaging men as allies in WPS implementation include:

- **Male champions networks:** Establishing networks of male leaders who advocate for women's participation in peace processes.

- **Gender-transformative training:** Providing training for male security sector personnel on gender equality and women's rights.

- **Community dialogue:** Facilitating community-level dialogues on gender norms and women's roles in peacebuilding.

B. Policy Actions and Recommendations

8. Rationale

Advancing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda within the East African Community (EAC) is critical, supported by a comprehensive legal framework, yet requiring intensified regional action to overcome implementation deficits. The EAC Treaty (1999) provides foundational commitments to peace, security (Art. 5(3)(f)), gender equality (Art. 6(d)), and common security policy (Art. 121(1)), recognizing peace as vital for development (Art. 124(1)).

This is reinforced by the EAC Protocol on Peace and Security (2013), which mandates gender mainstreaming in conflict mechanisms (Art. 4(3)(g)), and the EAC Gender Policy (2018), aligning with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000). International instruments, including the Maputo Protocol (2003) (Arts. 10, 11) and AU Agenda 2063, further guide these efforts.

Despite this robust framework, significant challenges persist. Disparities in National Action Plan (NAP) development prompted an EAC Sectoral Council directive (EAC/SCGYCSPCD/Decision 10, 2019) for a Regional Action Plan. Women's underrepresentation in peace processes remains a concern, acknowledged by the EAC Council of Ministers (EAC/CM/Decision 39, 2020). Furthermore, conflict-related gender-based violence and inadequate WPS financing, noted by the Sectoral Council (EAC/SCGYCSPCD/Decision 11, 2020), impede progress.

A coordinated regional approach is imperative. Opportunities exist through strengthening regional mechanisms, as directed by the Council of Ministers (EAC/CM/Decision 40, 2021), and enhancing cross-border initiatives under the Peace and Security Protocol (Art. 10, 12).

Strategic Priority: Key recommendations include the EAC Secretariat finalizing the Regional WPS Action Plan by 2025, establishing a dedicated WPS Unit, and developing a regional monitoring framework aligned with AU standards. EAC Partner States must harmonize NAPs, establish dedicated WPS budget lines, and implement measures, potentially quotas (30-40%), to ensure women's meaningful participation, consistent with EAC Treaty (Art. 6(d)) and UNSCR 1325. Sustained commitment to these strategic actions is essential for achieving a gender-equal and peaceful region.

9. Recommendations for Strengthening WPS Programming in the EAC

9.1 For the EAC Secretariat

1. Finalize and adopt the EAC Regional Action Plan on WPS with clear implementation mechanisms, monitoring frameworks, and financing strategies.

2. Establish a dedicated WPS Unit within the EAC Secretariat with adequate staffing, resources, and political support to coordinate regional WPS efforts.

3. Develop a regional WPS monitoring and evaluation framework aligned with the AU Continental Results Framework and adapted to the EAC context.

4. Establish a regional WPS fund to support cross-border initiatives and provide supplementary funding for national WPS activities.

5. Create a regional network of women mediators linked to the AU FemWise-Africa initiative and national mediation networks.

6. Integrate gender perspectives into all peace and security mechanisms, including the EAC Early Warning Mechanism and Mediation Framework.

7. Facilitate regular knowledge exchange and learning among Partner States on WPS implementation.

9.2 For EAC Partner States

1. Harmonize National Action Plans on WPS to ensure coherence and complementarity across the region.

2. Establish dedicated budget lines for WPS implementation in national budgets and track expenditures.

3. Strengthen national coordination mechanisms for WPS implementation, ensuring meaningful civil society participation.

4. Adopt minimum quotas (30-40%) for women's participation in peace delegations, mediation teams, and post-conflict governance bodies.

5. Enhance protection mechanisms for women in conflict-affected areas, including through specialized police units and access to justice initiatives.

6. Strengthen data collection and reporting on WPS indicators, contributing to regional monitoring efforts.

7. Develop cross-border cooperation agreements on specific WPS issues, such as refugee protection and trafficking prevention.

9.3 For Civil Society Organizations

1. Strengthen regional networks of women's organizations working on peace and security issues.

2. Enhance monitoring and advocacy on WPS implementation at both national and regional levels.

3. Document and share best practices and lessons learned from community-based peacebuilding initiatives.

4. Build capacity of women leaders to engage effectively in formal peace processes.

5. Develop strategic partnerships with government institutions, security sector agencies, and regional bodies.

9.4 For Development Partners

1. Align support with regional and national priorities for WPS implementation.

2. Provide flexible, long-term funding for WPS initiatives, moving beyond short-term project cycles.

3. Support regional approaches to addressing cross-border dimensions of peace and security challenges affecting women.

4. Invest in strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems for WPS implementation.

5. Facilitate South-South learning exchanges on effective WPS programming.

10. Conclusion

The Women, Peace and Security agenda in the East African Community stands at a critical juncture. While significant progress has been made in developing policy frameworks, substantial challenges remain in translating these commitments into concrete action. The regional dimensions of peace and security challenges affecting women necessitate coordinated approaches that go beyond national boundaries.

This analysis has identified key gaps and opportunities for strengthening WPS programming in the EAC, drawing on comparative experiences from other regional economic communities and highlighting innovative approaches and best practices. The recommendations provided offer a roadmap for enhancing regional cooperation, strengthening institutional mechanisms, and accelerating progress toward the full implementation of the WPS agenda.

By addressing the identified challenges and leveraging existing opportunities, the EAC can make significant progress toward a more inclusive, gender-responsive approach to peace and security that recognizes and amplifies women's roles as agents of peace. This will not only advance gender equality but also contribute to more sustainable peace and security outcomes across the region.

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Annexes

Note: Annexes to be developed in subsequent phases

Annex 1: Status of National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325 in EAC Partner States

[Detailed table with information on each country's NAP, including development process, key priorities, implementation mechanisms, and financing arrangements]

Annex 2: Women's Representation in Peace Processes in the EAC Region (2015-2023)

[Data on women's participation as negotiators, mediators, and signatories in major peace processes in the region]

Annex 3: Gender-Responsive Early Warning Indicators for the EAC Region

[Proposed set of gender-specific indicators for conflict early warning in the EAC context]

Annex 4: Mapping of WPS Initiatives in the EAC Region

[Comprehensive mapping of major WPS initiatives by governments, civil society, and development partners across the region]