

Women, Peace, and Security in Africa – Equal Rights Equals Stabilization

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14. ABSTRACT Women, Peace, and Security is a groundbreaking movement and agenda that was formally ratified by the United Nations in October of 2000. It suggests that the inclusion of women by governments in every aspect of the peace process is not only of moral necessity with respect to the promotion of equal rights, but is immensely effective and empirically linked to the attainment and preservation of peace and stability. This paper explores the origins and intentions of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda as a backdrop to analyze the efficacy of United States Africa Command's WPS program efforts to date. It demonstrates that though USAFRICOM's WPS program complies with all governing directives, it fails to meet the desired and achievable results as envisioned by the WPS movement and codified by the UN.				
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INTRODUCTION

“Peace is inextricably linked with gender equality and women’s leadership.”¹ Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, former United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women, famously noted these words in his foreword to the Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (USNCR) 1325. Many world leaders have staunchly advocated and echoed this premise in various forms. Today it has become the conceptual cornerstone of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. This agenda seeks to empower and incorporate women in all roles of the peacebuilding and international security process from governance, to political appointment and decision making, to soldiering and physical peacekeeping and conflict prevention/resolution while recognizing and advocating for the evidence-based connection between gender equality and stabilization and security.²

Though a universal movement with global applicability, contemporary conflict-plagued regions are in most need of concerted WPS implementation efforts. In their extensive work on the topic, researchers Alexandra Amling and Marie O’Reilly assert that “Resolution 1325 is particularly significant in the aftermath of conflict, when there is a need to build trust between citizens and the state and to increase communication around peace and security issues.”³ There is no world region more illustrative of this notion and necessity than Africa. As international partners to many African nations, the United States, and specifically the U.S. military, has a unique ability and obligation to assist its partner nations in the crucial advancement of their WPS action plans. By exploring the intentions and achievable results of the WPS agenda while

¹ Radhika Coomaraswamy, “Preventing Conflict Transforming Justice Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325.” Report, UN Women, 2015.

² Joan Johnson-Freese, Andrea Goldstein. “Women, Peace, and Security at Twenty,” The Strategy Bridge, April 2020. <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2020/4/28/women-peace-and-security-at-twenty>.

³ Alexandra Amling and Marie O’Reilly, “From Global Promise to National Action: Advancing Women, Peace, and Security in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Philippines, Serbia, and Sierra Leone.” Research report, One Earth Future, 2016.

analyzing the efficacy of U.S. AFRICOM actions in the region, it becomes evident that course correction is needed. Though visibly present and in compliance with mandates and strategic guidance, U.S. AFRICOM WPS implementation efforts fall short of meeting the desired outcomes of the initiative and its governing directives. With prioritized refocusing and reframing, U.S. AFRICOM can realize tangible positive impacts and considerably benefit its African partners.

Contextual Background

The WPS movement formalized into UN mandate with UNSCR 1325 in October of 2000 in a unique and radicalizing fashion. Unlike typical resolutions actualized by the leveraging of states and adoption from the UN, WPS was realized and set in motion by a collection of human rights activists – namely women.⁴ It marked the first time the UN placed women’s rights at the forefront and drew attention to the critical necessity for the inclusion of women in the peace process.⁵ The resolution makes many inferences but deliberately points out the vitalness of this inclusionary role,

Reaffirming the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding, and stressing the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution.⁶

This formal recognition of women’s role in the peace process and correlation of such to the attainment of security and stability was groundbreaking. At the core of what would become the

⁴ “Just the Facts: A Selected Annotated Bibliography to Support Evidence-Based Policymaking on Women, Peace and Security,” last modified 2019,

https://oursecurefuture.org/sites/default/files/our_secure_future_annotated_bibliography.pdf.

⁵ Laura Shepherd, “Women, Peace and Security: Rethinking Policy, Advocacy and Implementation.” London School of Economics and Political Science. 2021.

⁶ United Nations, Resolution 1325, 2000,

[https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325\(2000\)](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325(2000)).

WPS movement, the adoption of resolution 1325 paved the way for the years of WPS implementation efforts that would follow.

The resolution forms its basis on four distinct pillars; participation, protection, prevention, and relief/recovery. *Participation* aims to include women at every facet of decision making to include national level institutions, peace negotiations and operations, and military and law enforcement. *Protection* strives for the cessation of sexual or gender-based violence during conflict. *Prevention* centers on the intervention and prevention of violence, reinforcement of women's rights, and peace and conflict resolution processes. *Relief/recovery* seeks the advancement of reprieve and recuperation efforts following periods of conflict or war that disparately impact women.⁷ Though the above basis of the resolution provides a common framework, scholars and practitioners have expounded on this foundation in great order over the past 21 years since its inception. No two nations or set of circumstances are the same - application and implementation of action plans must be tailored appropriately.

National Action Plans and Implementation

Since October of 2000, there has been a substantial effort on a global scale to implement the objectives outlined in UNSCR 1325 and the holistic WPS agenda. Outside of the international mandates, numerous empirically evidence-based arguments exist to support and justify WPS agenda implementation. Though these arguments vary significantly by region, specified necessity, and circumstance, two primary themes have resounded; the focus on human rights and effectiveness.⁸ The human rights approach emphasizes that women comprise half of the human population and, therefore, should share equal representation across the board.

⁷ "What Is UNSCR 1325? An Explanation of the Landmark Resolution on Women, Peace, and Security." United States Institute of Peace. Accessed September 24, 2021.

https://www.usip.org/gender_peacebuilding/about_UNSCR_1325.

⁸ "Just the Facts."

Women's studies scholar Tuohy Ahern stresses this point in her research, stating that due to this quantitative fact, "their [women's] formal inclusion is, therefore, a **moral imperative**."⁹ The effectiveness premise asserts that equal participation of women in international peace and security decision-making increases the likelihood of building and sustaining peace and stability.¹⁰ Both themes highlight separate but equally important justifications to policy-makers and UN member states seeking to develop or improve WPS National Action Plans (NAPs). However, with all nations being unique and approaches to women's roles and rights varying distinctly across the globe, it is essential to consider the institutional audience and cultural dynamics. When morality doesn't translate as clearly, effectiveness sells and should be emphasized.

NAPs are among the first and most vital steps that nation-states can take toward successful WPS implementation and strides toward peace and stability. These documents codify a nation's approach and tailored objectives to implement resolution 1325 and similar WPS directives as applicable.¹¹ As Amling and O'Reilly put it, NAPs "...were conceived to address the gap between prescriptive international frameworks and domestic realities."¹² Optimistically, the number of UN member states that have implemented NAPs has exponentially grown in the last decade. Starting at 18 in 2010, the number of member states to now have a formalized NAP

⁹ Tuohy Ahern, "An Analysis of Women's Participation In Peace Negotiations; 1992 – 2010." Capstone thesis, (SIT Graduate Institute), 2011.

¹⁰ "Just the Facts."

¹¹ "1325 National Action Plans – An Initiative of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. WILPF Monitoring and Analysis of National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security," (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.) Last modified September 2021. <https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/>.

¹² Amling and O'Reilly, "From Global Promise to National Action," 2016.

resides at 98 as of August 2021. Moreover, 29 African nations currently have an active NAP, which makes up over half of the region, and is second only to Europe.¹³

While the above data constitutes clear progression, the numbers do not tell the entirety of the story. One of the foremost challenges with analyzing the efficacy of the WPS agenda is the inherent difficulty in measuring success and attributing shortfalls. One certainty is that accurate assessments must encompass both quantitative and qualitative data and evidence. Amling and O'Reilly describe the inherent challenge with standalone NAP data, noting that while research has shown their adoption to, "Increase political cohesion and stability in an otherwise fragmented public sphere, bolstering chances for sustaining peace ... few countries have been able to articulate the *specific* impacts made by their own NAPs."¹⁴ From this, we can extrapolate the need to evaluate the measure of success and make adjustments for improvement based on individual states and circumstances and the specific needs of our African partners. Still, the framework exists, and hallmarks of success can be applied to enhance our current approach and trend toward high-impact results.

What Works (and Doesn't) in Africa

In their studies of conflicted South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Hannah Dönges and Janosch Kullenberg provide insight and specific success anecdotes. Regarding the protection of women, a core pillar of UNSCR 1325, they observe that women in security roles were the most innovative and impactful,

[women] suggested that the times of patrolling would be announced in the different tribal languages on the site. This is done so that local women could coordinate to meet in groups and go out in time to join the peacekeepers who were on their way or returning from a point approximately five kilometers away from the site... This consultation as part of a weekly scheduled women's security meeting has been a way to tailor peacekeeping protection for a group of women most vulnerable to physical threats of sexual violence

¹³ "1325 National Action Plans."

¹⁴ Amling and O'Reilly, "From Global Promise to National Action," 2016.

and abuse such as those leaving the sites. It also came without substantive additional costs for the mission.¹⁵

Though a success story on the critical component of protection, this powerful example showcases how women engaged in *participatory* roles during conflict can affect highly impactful and the most desired of WPS outcomes – the protection of women and prevention of gender-based violence.

Similarly, in their studies of the DRC, Amling and O'Reilly note several significant takeaways. Congolese women were immensely successful in the creation of their nation's first NAP.¹⁶ Yet, significant amounts of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence continue to be pervasive. This is attributed to the fact that women's participation in security processes has failed to increase despite the existence of an inclusive NAP.¹⁷ Amling and O'Reilly explain this through several critical factors, but predominantly the continual lack of political will to operationalize the true ideology inherent in the nation's NAP. They note that "If international and national actors could rally around the idea of women's **leadership** for peace and security in Congo, a more holistic approach could succeed in better addressing these challenges."¹⁸

Nigeria has experienced similar successes and shortfalls attributable to the lack of women's participation in impactful roles. Nigerian policy officials recently reported implementing its latest WPS NAP. They addressed new coverage in previous doctrinal gaps to include the "Inclusion of women in councils of traditional rulers and periodic gender training for security sector agencies."¹⁹ However, Nigeria has suffered a substantial uptick in violence

¹⁵ Janosch Kullenberg, and Hannah Elena Dönges. "What Works (and Fails) in Protection." In *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security*, ed. Sara E. Davies and Jacqui True, (New York: Oxford University Press), 2018.

¹⁶ Amling and O'Reilly, "From Global Promise to National Action," 2016.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "1325 National Action Plans - Nigeria." Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Accessed September 24. <https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/index.php/nigeria/>.

targeting women, specifically in the form of abductions, stemming from the Boko Haram conflict. Of note, during the 2014 conferences in London and Paris held to address counter-Boko Haram strategies, no Nigerian women's civil society organizations or representatives were present.²⁰

From the above three examples, we can quickly isolate and assess a critical theme. The effectiveness of the highlighted African nation WPS NAP implementation efforts hinged on the degree of women's participation in impactful roles. As the initial core pillar of resolution 1325 envisioned, successful women's participation is unrealized by surface level or sporadic involvement on the periphery. Instead, participation in critical roles, leadership roles, at all levels, from Congress in the capital to conflict on the ground, will yield impactful results and promote stability.

USAFRICOM WPS Efforts

AFRICOM is among the leaders of the United States Combatant Commands regarding actions and efforts toward furthering the WPS agenda. It is in complete "letter of the law" compliance with UN and U.S. strategic policy and governing directives. It maintains an active program that is accessible, contributable, and well documented. These strides on behalf of the command should not be discounted. However, Geographic Combatant Commands (GCCs) are regionally separated due to their diverse missions and area-specific challenges. As evidenced above, the WPS agenda should be heavily prioritized for AFRICOM. Upon deeper review, it is unmistakable that the command has the potential and obligation to make a more substantial impact.

A hasty search for AFRICOM sponsored WPS events in the region will indeed yield multiple results, all of which while admirable, fall short of hitting the effectiveness target. One

²⁰ Ibid.

such event is the execution of Obangame Express 2021 (OE21), a major annual exercise between AFRICOM commands and participating partner nations designed to improve cooperation and increase maritime security. Following the exercise, an AFRICOM published article highlighted women's participation and lauded the event for the steps it took to advance its WPS initiative.²¹ At the time of the exercise there were a total of only 6 women in the Ghanaian Navy, one of the primary partner nations participating. A U.S. Navy female assigned to the exercise later commented, "I never know what to expect going in, if there would be very many other females involved, there's not a whole lot..."²² While training these disparately low numbers of female participants is positive, it does little to directly remedy the causal problem – the woefully imbalanced numbers of females within partner force organizations. Joanne Johnson-Freeze offers that "Raising awareness and knowledge about WPS goes a long way in advancing the framework... You can't implement what you don't know about."²³ As opposed to solely providing basic security training during exercises where few partner females are present, what if AFRICOM were to pair these practices with targeted WPS educational efforts? Emphasizing the importance of expanded female participation / leadership roles and the vital correlation to stabilization to not only the female participants, but the leadership circles of partner forces present at these events has potential to accomplish enhanced results.

Another such event details recent training of women at Solidarte Feminine, a local women's organization in Djibouti, in both first aid and the English language by U.S. Army civil affairs Soldiers assigned to Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa. The U.S. Soldiers held

²¹ Fred Gray, "Obangame Express 2021: Women in Arms Lead the Way." United States Africa Command. March 2021. <https://www.africom.mil/article/33655/obangame-express-2021-women-in-arms-lead-the-way>.

²² Jacob Stanley, "Obangame Express 2021 Women of Obangame." Filmed March 2021 at United States Africa Command, 02:09. <https://www.dvidshub.net/video/788380/obangame-express-2021-women-obangame>.

²³ Joan Johnson-Freeze, "Women, Peace, and Security: Moving Implementation Forward." War on the Rocks, July 2021. <https://warontherocks.com/2021/07/women-peace-and-security-moving-implementation-forward/>.

basic first aid training and discussion groups to develop English speaking skills.²⁴ Each of these highly showcased events, though positive, share common questions – Do they move the needle, do they affect actual change toward stability and security in the region as envisioned in the spirit of the WPS agenda?

The above two examples are only recent AFRICOM sponsored activities, but many preceding them share common threads and are advertised under the banner of WPS advancement. They are predominantly security cooperation events, exercises, and the like, characterized by the training of partner force women (when available) in basic soldiering and sailing far from conflict. There is rarely mention of crucial components such as gender role advisors, interface between outside agencies and governments with potential to expand influence, or **participation** in real-world contemporary engagements, to name a few.

Not solely negative criticism, a WPS reception was recently held amidst exercise Flintlock 2019, AFRICOM’s largest combined Special Operations Forces and Law Enforcement exercise. This event featured attendees from the exercise, prominent community members, local women’s organizations, WPS scholars, and activists.²⁵ During the proceedings, Dr. Justine Couliadiati-Kielem, regional coordinator of the Women of the G5 Sahel Platform, commented, “As this special operations exercise is taking place, it raises the importance of women in both diffusing this conflict as well as creating the environment in which an enduring peace can survive.”²⁶ She went on to emphasize, “Women’s participation in security is not peripheral; it is a key part of ensuring lasting, meaningful security.”²⁷ The co-existence of such a conference and

²⁴ Taylor Davis, “U.S. Army Civil Affairs Empowers Women in Djibouti.” United States Africa Command. July 2021. <https://www.africom.mil/article/33864/us-army-civil-affairs-empowers-women-in-djibouti>.

²⁵ Nathan Herring, “Event Brings Awareness to Critical Role of Women During Conflict.” United States Africa Command. February 2019. <https://www.africom.mil/article/31553/event-brings-awareness-to-critical-role-of-women-during-conflict>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

an AFRICOM exercise may have been a product of good fortune and timing and limited to exercise participant invitation. Still, this is just the type of event that AFRICOM should seek to seize and replicate continually. By doing so, they will bring forth the necessary ingredients to improve their impact and cultivate change.

Counter Arguments and Rebuttal

As a GCC, AFRICOM is among the highest echelon of military commands, and the DOD apparatus writ large. Its scope of charge and responsibility is almost immeasurably vast and complex in nature. One challenge and primary counterpoint to taking additional steps toward advancing their WPS agenda is inherent in the question of priority. Why should critical time and resources be refocused on WPS at the potential expense of other prioritized lines of effort when they comply with the requirement? In his 2021 posture statement to Congress, General Townsend highlighted AFRICOM's prioritized initiatives as strategic competition and countering Chinese and Russian influence in the region, continued support to counter Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs), and crisis response efforts to best minimize and mitigate the impact from HIV/AIDS, Ebola, and the COVID-19 pandemic. He summarizes that "Africa is key terrain for strategic competition with the People's Republic of China and Russia and our support to C-VEO operations is necessary to protect the Homeland."²⁸ Of note, nowhere in the posture statement is WPS mentioned; in fact, even the word "Women" is referenced only once.²⁹

While these lines of effort cannot be discounted in terms of precedence and priority, AFRICOM is overlooking a critical linkage. Though not a standalone U.S. national interest or objective independently identifiable in the National Defense Strategy (NDS) or similar high-

²⁸ Stephen Townsend, "Statement of General Stephen J. Townsend, United States Army United States Africa Command Before the United States House of Representatives on Armed Services. *Africa: Securing U.S. Interests, Preserving Strategic Options*. United States Africa Command, 2021.

²⁹ Ibid.

level strategic guidance, effective WPS agenda implementation correlates to security and stability and enables peace. As Joan Johnson-Freese and Andrea Goldstein put it in their 2019 analysis/recommendations to the pentagon, “Research has shown that gender equality and **inclusive** security correlate positively with stability and inversely with radicalization. In short: gender equality **is** global security.”³⁰ Therefore, continued investment of their WPS program should not be viewed as detracting from AFRICOM’s prioritized strategic objectives, but rather as an essential and effective means to achieve them.

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

While AFRICOM has upheld WPS programmatic mandates and has not violated any of the governing directives regarding WPS, there is much more that they could and should be doing given the stakes involved. The immense importance of WPS agenda efforts to the African region and the vital link between WPS investment and the achievement of the overarching AFRICOM objectives founded on the attainment and preservation of stability and security make it imperative to go beyond what has been accomplished so far.

Where to Start: Recommendations

1. Expand women’s participation in actual peacekeeping and security operations on the ground wherever able, in addition to the emphasis currently placed on training and theater security cooperation engagements. Model with enhanced U.S. women participation and encourage the same from partner forces.
2. Work with governmental and civil organizations of partner nations to break down structural barriers and insufficient political desire that impedes impactful women’s inclusion and participation in influential roles.

³⁰ Andrea Goldstein and Joan Johnson-Freese, “How the Pentagon Can Build on NATO’s Success with Women, Peace & Security.” The Strategy Bridge, May 2019. <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2019/5/13/how-the-pentagon-can-build-on-natos-success-with-women-peace-amp-security>.

3. Further the agenda by creating increased opportunities for partner nations to collaborate and enhance respective awareness of improved WPS NAP implementation benefits and potential effectiveness. Sponsor events that bring together members of government, political apparatus, civil organizations, military, and experts in the WPS field.
4. Set the example. Seek out and implement increased opportunities and key leadership roles for women within the U.S. AFRICOM organization. Provide them, as well as men charged with WPS agenda expansion, increased exposure opportunities to partner nation militaries to promote constructive dialogue.

Johnson-Freese and Goldstein astutely note that “No nation treats its women as well as it treats its men.”³¹ Yet, hope for equitable change is not lost. In the 21 years since the birth of the WPS movement, tremendous strides have been made, particularly in the last decade. It has never been more widely evident that efforts toward gender equality are both overdue and of imperative necessity in today's environment. United States Africa Command has unmatched access, capability, and inherent obligation to advance this groundbreaking agenda. Their increased dedication in this arena would not be in vain or come detrimental of any other. Women, Peace, and Security efforts are not only morally paramount, but proven largely effective at promoting peace, security, and stability. We must recognize and embrace that *equal rights equals stabilization* - the time for doing better is now.

³¹ Ibid.

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