

WOMEN AND CONFLICT in West Africa

DevTalks series – Reshaping Development
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BACKGROUND

OBJECTIVE

Contribute to a process of mutual learning and dialogue to inspire more gender-focused responses to conflict in the Sahel and West Africa and draw on lessons learned.



DISCUSSION POINTS

During the last decade, conflict has become more violent and widespread in West Africa with increasing numbers of civilian casualties, particularly in Central Sahel and Nigeria. Nearly 40% of violent deaths are the result of violence against unarmed populations. This trend is a result of two key factors: the deliberate strategy of extremist organisations to target civilians and the difficulty of governments to protect them.

A report by the Secretariat of the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC), [Women and Conflict in West Africa](#), analyses the evolution of violence involving women over the last 20 years. The report reveals that in conflict areas women are deliberately targeted by Islamist organisations and militias and are also victims of government forces during counter-insurgency operations. Communal violence, related to the sharing of water, land and other resources, is also at the root of violence against women. 87% of violence affecting women in the region is concentrated in Nigeria alone. In the north of the country, where Boko Haram has its roots, women are subject to systematic attacks and abductions. They are recruited as labourers, including for sexual purposes, or as informants and combatants. Some women join extremist organisations and participate in acts of violence, particularly through suicide bombings in the Lake Chad basin. This phenomenon has declined sharply, however, since the mid-2010.

Gender inequalities are exacerbated in times of crises. Societal norms that discriminate against women can fuel conflict and violence, and conflict in turn multiplies the burdens faced by women and girls. In conflict-affected areas, women and girls face heightened risks including gender-based violence (GBV), increased maternal morbidity and mortality, and forced marriage. Access to essential and life-saving services, including pregnancy care and GBV services may be extremely limited, particularly in rural areas.

Holistic approach: An OECD report on [Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Fragile and Conflict Situations: A Review of Donor Support](#), calls for a transformation in terms of working methods, from conducting gender analysis, programme elaboration and design, to monitoring and evaluation, capacity building and partnerships. It also calls for a better understanding of gender equality and conflict that is:

- ▶ deeper – focusing on the root causes of gender equality, including social norms
- ▶ wider – grasping the full range of interlinkages between gender, conflict and fragility
- ▶ more politically informed – seeking solutions to locally defined problems and supporting women and girls as agents of change rather than as passive victims.

Investment in fragile areas: Increased investment in areas prone to insecurity is necessary to protect civilian populations. Re-establishing political stability requires a return of public institutions, governance and the delivery of basic services.



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SAHEL AND
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Discriminatory norms: continue to limit the empowerment of women and girls, particularly in conflict-affected areas. Promising strategies for changing norms that engage men, boys and traditional authorities in conflict-affected areas are required.

Mediation and peace-building processes: The participation of women is essential in these processes, yet they remain largely excluded. A better understanding is required of the key challenges and enablers of women's representation in conflict resolution and mediation processes.

Civil society and community organisations: play a key role in providing support services for women in conflict-affected areas. This calls for the identification of successful community interventions that can be scaled-up.

AGENDA

Moderation: Mr. Laurent Bossard, Director, Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat (SWAC/OECD)
Short video and overview of the report "Women and Conflict in West Africa" by Dr. Olivier Walther, Assistant Professor, University of Florida.

Speakers

- ▶ Ms. Hamsatu Allamin, Founder and Executive Director, Allamin Foundation for Peace and Development, Nigeria
- ▶ Ms. Francesca Di Mauro, Head of Unit, West Africa, DG International Partnerships, European Commission
- ▶ Dr. Diene Keita, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director (Programme), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
- ▶ Dr. Jeni Klugman, Managing Director, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS)
- ▶ Ms. Aminata Ndiaye, Regional Gender Advisor, G5 Sahel

The Women, Peace and Security Agenda

Twenty years following adoption of [UNSCR 1325](#), there is important political momentum to assess progress made by the women, peace and security agenda. The year 2020 brought together a number of milestone anniversaries on gender equality and women's empowerment, including the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325; the 25th anniversary of the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#); and the 5th anniversary of [Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development](#).

The Security Council progress reports (2019 and 2020) on the women, peace and security agenda offer an overview of the main achievements and remaining challenges in this area. Overall, the Security Council finds that "few actors have fully implemented commitments. Many initiatives remain small in scale, ad hoc and project-based, without guarantees of longer-term support. Increased political leadership, resourcing and accountability for results are needed from all actors." These findings are echoed in the [UN Women Report on the 25th Anniversary of the Beijing Platform of Action](#), which points out that an increasingly militarised peace and security agenda fails to uphold women's human, economic and social rights. The report states that military expenditure has nearly doubled over the past 25 years – reaching USD 1.82 trillion in 2018 – and strongly advocates investment of this funding into efforts to enhance gender equality and women's empowerment.

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