

WOMEN AND CONFLICT

in West Africa

DevTalks series – Reshaping Development
1 March 2021, 3 pm (CET)

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KEY MESSAGES

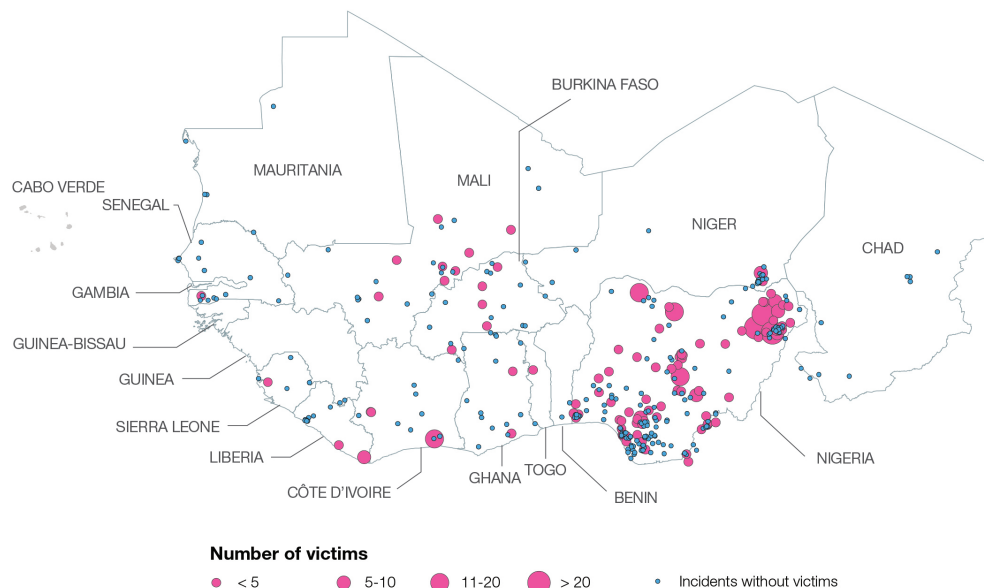
Within the framework of the OECD's March on Gender initiative, the Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat and the OECD Development Centre organised a DevTalk on the topic of Women and Conflict in West Africa on 1st March 2021. The objective was to contribute to a process of mutual learning and dialogue to inspire more gender-focused responses to conflict in West Africa and draw on lessons learned.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- ▶ The importance of dialogue and action at local and community levels to: initiate change in social norms; empower and support women who have experienced violent extremism and wish to reintegrate society; build more inclusive peace and mediation processes; and re-build trust between communities and security forces, and
- ▶ The importance of a multi-scalar approach to addressing gender inequality issues, for example, at the local, national, regional levels, but also in rural and cross-border areas, and the need to adapt policy responses to specific contexts.

WOMEN AND CONFLICT

Victims of political violence affecting women, 2009-19



Source: ACLED data, 2019b. Walther, O. (2020), « Femmes et conflits en Afrique de l'Ouest », Notes ouest-africaines, No. 28, OECD Publishing, Paris.

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March on Gender
EMPOWERING THE RECOVERY
THROUGH WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP



SAHEL AND
WEST AFRICA

Club
Secretariat



BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES

dev
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CONTEXT



- ▶ **Conflict has become more violent and widespread in West Africa.** The number of people killed has dramatically increased over the last decade, which accounts for 75% of all people killed since the late 1990s. 2020 is the deadliest year on record, both in terms of violent events (5 600) and fatalities (> 16 000).
- ▶ **Women and girls pay a high price.** They are victims of Islamist organisations, militias and government forces during counter-insurgency operations. However, the magnitude of violence against women remains largely unknown because i) many events are not recorded and ii) those that are recorded do not always provide sex-disaggregated data on the victims or perpetrators of violence.
- ▶ **Nigeria is the epicentre for all types of violence** in the region including violence against women. 65% of all fatalities recorded since 2011 occurred in Nigeria. This is largely due to the three major ongoing conflicts in Nigeria, in the Delta, Middle Belt and Lake Chad region. The Boko Haram insurgency is often underestimated: over 6 times more people have been killed in the Lake Chad region than during the entire civil war in Mali that started in 2012. The two factions of Boko Haram are by far the deadliest insurgent groups, accounting for 20% of all violent events recorded in West Africa.
- ▶ **Women are also perpetrators of violence** through the recruitment of new members, the promotion of violent organisations' objectives or through suicide bombings. This involvement may be due to a range of factors, including the desire for revenge or for redemption through individual sacrifice. Poor living conditions, a lack of education and professional opportunities and broad marginalisation of women in these areas make matters worse. In northern Nigeria, in particular, some women see Boko Haram as a way to emancipate themselves from traditional laws and gain better access to religious education or a more equal share of inheritance than through customary law.
- ▶ **External military organisations have not created the conditions necessary to protect civilians**, including women, thus far. While some interventions have led to temporary stability, they have not led to a durable means of reducing violence over the long term.

Future perspectives:

- ▶ Protecting civilians should be the number one priority for state authorities and international allies if they wish to promote long-term stability in the region.
- ▶ Addressing civilian issues is the most effective way to counter jihadism and insurgencies. Particularly in rural areas and regions far from centres of power, where local populations are often at the mercy of extremist organisations.

INSIGHTS FROM SPEAKERS

- ▶ **Holistic approach:** addressing gender inequality requires a holistic approach to empowering women socially (education, health, family planning, tackling gender-based violence); economically (land and inheritance rights) and politically (political participation in parliaments and at local levels).
- ▶ **Inter-generational approach:** for social norms to change, an inter-generational approach is required, working with young boys and girls, men and women, but also religious and traditional leaders. "Les Écoles des maris" was cited as an successful example of fostering positive behavioural change at the community level by involving men in addressing female health and well-being, reproductive health, family planning, family hygiene, respect for women and their rights.
- ▶ **Harmful traditional practices** continue to significantly threaten women's and girl's health and life chances. Education, involving religious leaders, is essential to put an end to [female genital mutilation](#) and other harmful traditional practices.
- ▶ **Mediation and conflict resolution processes:** Women play a fundamental role in these processes, illustrated by the recent example of the humanitarian peace agreement found between the [Fulani, Dafing and Gogon communities in central Mali](#), as well as the liberation of the Chibok girls, held in captivity by Boko Haram. Poor governance and institutionalised corruption, however, have rendered many conflict management processes ineffective.

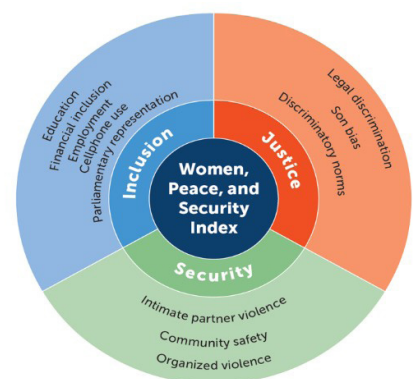
- ▶ **Creation of social networks by [civil society organisations](#) to support women in conflict-affected areas.** Social networks enable women to come together to share their stories on common challenges – irrespective of their religious affiliation. Through these [networks](#), many women survivors of violent extremist groups, forced marriage, and sex trafficking receive medical treatment, psychological support and valuable information and resources (income-generating activities, cash support) to recover and reintegrate society.
- ▶ **Co-operation across states** needs to be further developed to protect civilians, including women, seeking refuge elsewhere. Protecting populations in border areas is essential for civilian security.
- ▶ **Training and awareness-raising activities among security forces** are required to ensure the protection of women from sexual and gender-based violence as well as sexual harassment. This can contribute to building trust between communities and security forces - an essential part of peacebuilding. Ensuring dialogue between women's organisations and military forces can also facilitate these efforts.
- ▶ **Integration of women into defence and security forces** represents an effective strategy to rebuild trust between communities and security forces. The efforts of the G5 "[Collège de défense](#)" in Mauritania were highlighted in this regard. In order to strengthen the presence of women within the defence and security structures of the G5 Sahel, a first step was taken to identify and analyse the main challenges facing women with regards accessing and remaining in careers within the defence and security structures of the G5 Sahel.
- ▶ **Financing gender equality in fragile contexts is an expression of political will.** A major challenge is to allocate adequate, sustained and flexible funding to the implementation of the [Woman, Peace and Security Agenda](#). In 2017-18, USD 2.06 billion of bilateral aid (on average per year) was dedicated to gender equality as principal objective of the programme, representing 4.5% of bilateral aid to fragile contexts.

Box 1. Women, Peace and Security Index

Women's well-being is multi-dimensional as demonstrated by the [Women, Peace and Security Index](#) covering inclusion, justice and security dimensions.

Key results from the region include:

- ▶ All 16 West African countries covered by the index score below the global average on **financial inclusion and the number of mean years of schooling**;
- ▶ **Formal legal discrimination against women** is highlighted in Chad and Niger where married women are required to seek permission from their husbands to open a bank account;
- ▶ **Security at family, community and societal levels:** Mali performs poorly across all three areas: 27% of women have experienced intimate partner violence in the past year, 40% of women feel unsafe in their community, and the country scores among the ten worst globally on organised violence.
- ▶ **Political representation:** Senegal leads the region and is among the top 20 globally with 42% of [parliamentarians being women](#). In Nigeria, less than 6% of parliamentarians are female, putting the country in the bottom ten globally for this indicator.
- ▶ **Sub-national disparities:** for example, marked gender equality disparities exist across Nigeria, with the best scores concentrated in the south and the worst in the north.



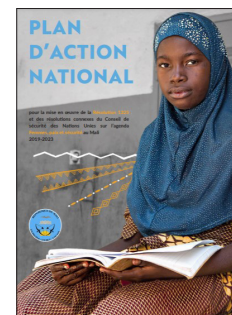
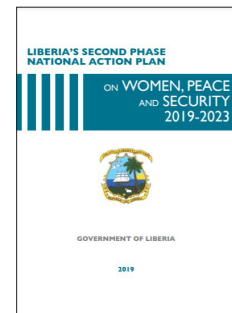
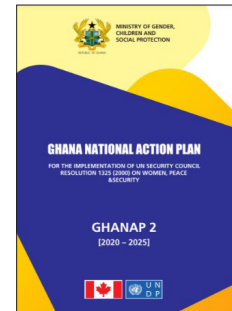
Box 2. National Action Plans in West Africa for the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

Twenty years ago, the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) was a landmark achievement. For the first time, the Security Council addressed the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women; stressed the importance of women's equal and full participation in peace and security, and called for the incorporation of a gender perspective in all areas of peacebuilding. In 2005, the Security Council called for National Action Plans (NAPs) outlining government approaches and courses of action for implementation of the WPS Agenda.

National action plans in West Africa: 13 out of 17 countries have developed [NAPs in West Africa](#). [Ghana](#), [Liberia](#), [Mali](#) and [Nigeria](#) have developed second- and third-generation NAPs, building on the work and lessons learned from previous plans. The NAPs outline the objectives and activities that countries take, both on a domestic and international level, to secure the human rights of women and girls in conflict settings; prevent armed conflict and violence, including against women and girls; and ensure the meaningful participation of women in peace and security. The objective is to drive change in funding, programmes, practices, and policy at the country-level.

Key challenges: Security Council progress reports highlight some of the key remaining challenges facing countries:

- ▶ Financial resources typically fall short of political commitments;
- ▶ Few actors have translated commitments into progress and 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 still lacking; and
- ▶ Women continue to be perceived as passive agents in conflicts, rather than drivers of change.



Ms. Hamsatu Allamin, Founder and Executive Director, Allamin Foundation for Peace and Development, Nigeria

"In Nigeria, poverty and illiteracy have the face of a woman... Society is not ready to welcome the survivors of Boko Haram abductions".



Ms. Francesca Di Mauro, Head of Unit, West Africa, DG International Partnerships, European Commission

"Building trust between communities and security forces is an essential part of peacebuilding. This involves ensuring a return of basic services to conflict-affected areas and addressing the violence experienced by women".



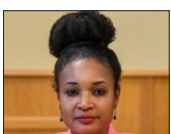
Dr. Diene Keita, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director (Programme), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

"I am not looking for gender equality, but above all for equity. Social norms must change. States must co-operate more, particularly across borders, to protect girls and women".



Dr. Jeni Klugman, Managing Director, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS)

"There is a strong relationship across different aspects of security: between current intimate partner violence, perceptions of community safety and organised violence. It is important to look behind national averages to understand regional disparities around gender inequalities".



Ms. Aminata Ndiaye, G5 Sahel

"The integration of women in uniform into the defence and security forces of G5 Sahel is not only a matter of women's rights; it is also a matter of strategic effectiveness".



Dr. Olivier Walther, Assistant Professor, University of Florida

"Violence against women is increasing in West Africa, a worrying trend that could be reversed if counterinsurgency strategies were aimed at protecting civilians rather than eliminating insurgents".