

FROM THE GRASSROOTS TO THE TOP TABLE: INSPIRING WOMEN LEADERS



‘African women are resilient. If we are not there, nothing happens. What we do may be a drop in the ocean, but that drop can multiply and change the future of Africa.’ Bineta Diop, Special Envoy for Women, Peace and Security to the African Union.

On Tuesday, 12 December, the GCSP hosted a public event titled, [‘From the Grassroots to the Top Table: Inspiring Women Leaders in Peace and Security.’](#) The event featured [Madame Bineta Diop](#), Special Envoy for Women, Peace and Security to the African Union, and [Julienne Lusenge](#) GCSP Executive-in-Residence Fellow and co-founder of [SOFEPADI](#), an NGO for Women’s Solidarity for Peace and Integrated Development. [Fleur Heyworth](#), Gender and Inclusive Security Cluster Leader at the GCSP, facilitated the conversation.

Madame Diop, who contributed to the drafting of [United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325](#) as well as the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ rights, and the Maputo Protocol highlighted that, ‘1325 is not just a paper but a framework that tells us how to implement change by lobbying the women’s agenda, including training military, involvement in peacekeeping operations, and mediation’. The challenge is implementation, and ensuring that the active work of women on the ground such as Julienne, who are mediating in communities and negotiating with armed groups, is recognised politically, and given support. There is also a need to better connect the horizontal and vertical structures: the mediation happening in communities and more formal high level processes.

Madame Diop explained that a central part of her mandate to protect women and children, facilitate women’s participation in peace processes and prevent armed confrontations, is to represent women: ‘I am there to say what I think needs to be said, and monitor behaviour. I also ensure women get the opportunity to speak as high as the UN Security Council.’

One of those who have spoken at the UN Security Council is Julienne Lusenge, co-founder of SOFEPADI. This local NGO now leads a coalition of more than 105 women's groups to defend and protect women's rights in the Eastern Provinces of the DRC. Through the support of Foundations such as the Oak Foundation in Geneva, Lusenge has transformed the experience of women and children at the grassroots level: she has been able to fund access to medical care and education, as well as enable women to access mobile courts, legal training and education on judicial processes because 'there is no peace without justice'. She emphasized, 'Congolese women are not only victims. We are not just sitting and waiting for bad things to happen. We fight. We are change-makers and we are peacemakers in our communities. We are survivors and we transform our villages.'

To further support women's formal participation in peace processes and ensure that the women's agenda is on the agenda, Madame Diop highlighted the need to educate, train and fund women help them take a seat at the table in politics and government positions. Madame Diop has personally supported women with training women on mediation and constitutional drafting skills. In addition, there is a continued need to collect data and measure the impact of women's inclusion to make the case for more inclusive processes and, counter resistance.



Bineta Diop, Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security for the African Union visits Julienne Lusenge and SOFEPADI in the DRC

Madame Bineta Diop has been instrumental in creating gender equality with the leadership of the African Union and highlighted that leaders must be held accountable. There is much more to be done, particularly in the DRC where atrocities continue and peacekeeping troops are being cut. Brave women, such as Julienne entering the 'The Triangle of Death,' where boys and girls as young as 7 years old are raped and murdered, are doing work of immeasurable value. There is a need for stronger advocacy to highlight their work and to create a system of good governance

<http://www.gcsp.ch/News-Knowledge/News/From-the-Grassroots-to-the-Top-Table-Inspiring-Women-Leaders>

to tackle challenges from child marriage through to land rights, migration, climate change and insecurity.

Fleur Heyworth said 'We are honoured to have been able to host this event, both to highlight the power of women to drive transformative change, and the continued conflict in the DRC. We talk about sustainable, resilient peace, and inclusive societies – people like Julienne are making that happen. The international community needs to think about how they can enable influencers within local communities to have greater impact on the national and international stage, and support them politically and financially'.