

Programme on Women, Gender, Peace and Security

African Union Peace and Security, 9 May 2016

Within the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), the Peace and Security Department (PSD) has launched the Gender, Peace and Security Programme (2015-2020) which aims at developing effective strategies for gender mainstreaming into Peace and Security to take into account men's and women's experiences and potentialities in building secure and stable societies.

The Programme contributes towards gender mainstreaming, debate and policy development in the field of women, gender, peace and security and in so-doing enhances the dialogue around women's effective participation in peace and security in Africa, protection in time of conflict and recognition in the post-conflict phase. In furtherance of the above, the Gender, Peace and Security Programme will develop partnership for joint programming, enhanced coordination and policy formulation in this area by the AUC, the UN, the Regional Economic Communities and mechanisms (RECs/RMs), INGO, CSOs and other multi-lateral and bi-lateral partners working on these issues in Africa. Knowledge development and research will inform the development of long-term strategies and mechanisms to address AU priorities as highlighted in AU strategic plans and policy frameworks.

The African Union Gender architecture, enshrined in the AU Gender Policy (2009), includes policies and legal instruments that address the issue of women, peace and security that have paved the way for an increase in the number of women in senior level position within the Commission; the nomination of women Special Representative in countries in conflict or emerging from conflict; women mediators and Special Envoys.

Gender Parity Principle

In July 2002, at the African Union Summit in Durban, African Heads of States unanimously adopted a gender parity principle which brought the 50-50 policy in the Statutes of the African Union. This was truly a historic achievement, as the voices of African women had never been effectively represented in the continental body. The parity principle has ensured a gender balance of five male and five female commissioners in the African Union Commission.

Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa

In 2003, African Heads of States adopted the legally binding Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, also known as "the Maputo Protocol." According to the African Union up to 2014, 28 States have signed and ratified the protocol while 18 countries have signed, but are yet to ratify it.

Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA)

In 2004 the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA), was adopted with Member States committing to accelerate gender equality at all levels. Both the Maputo Protocol and SDGEA frameworks endorse the provisions of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000).

African Women's Decade

In 2009 the African Union Commission declared 2010-2020 as the African Women's Decade. The goal of the Decade is to accelerate the implementation of commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment from the local, national, regional and continental levels.

Agenda 2063

In May 2013 in the lead up to the 50th anniversary celebrations of the establishment of the Organization of African Unity/ African Union, under the leadership of the AUC Chairperson, women's organizations were consulted for their perspective on issues related to role of women in Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance, and Agenda 2063. The resulting declaration reaffirmed the commitment of the African Union to transform gender inequality in the economy, in human rights, peace and security, human development and technology, and to advocate for cultures that promote women's status. The declaration also states the commitment of the African Union to engage women as an integral part in the formulation of Agenda 2063. Member States, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are urged to organize consultations at country and regional levels on issues the various segment on Agenda 2063 including peace and security. This process will encourage widespread participation and ownership of Agenda 2063 by all stakeholders including women and will accelerate the realization of the objectives of the African Women's Decade across the continent.

In her opening speech during the May 2013 AU Summit of Heads of State and Government, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission underscored the commitments of the AU to women's rights, gender equality and women, peace and security. As the AU looks forward to the next 50 years, she noted that "our women must be empowered as a critical ingredient to the continental development".

The Chairperson envisions Africa's development to be people centered where women and youth play a central role. As such, Agenda 2063, seeks to reaffirm that Africa's growth trajectory in the next 50 years should be people-centered with the vision to build an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven and managed by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena. The AU has demonstrated a strong gendered commitment to this vision by highlighting the need to transform the status of women from being mere victims of conflict and to advance their agency and their participation in peace processes. Women need to be involved in consultations in regards to their security, their needs and challenges, and be engaged in the design and the implementation of rights protocols and protection strategies.

Though recognizing and urging the active participation of women in decision-making processes, particularly in situations of conflict, the implementation of the aforementioned instruments and frameworks has been limited. By appointing a Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, the Chairperson has demonstrated her commitment to translate policy into action.

Eliminating Vulnerabilities of Women and Children in Armed Conflicts

According to the Panel of the Wise report on Eliminating Vulnerabilities of Women and Children in Armed Conflicts, cases in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have demonstrated that rape was utilized as a weapon of war. Similarly 200,000 Congolese women have been victims of sexual violence since 1998. In Sierra Leone records demonstrate the widespread use of children and women as combatants, and sex slaves. It was pointed out that children have faced brutal violations and forced to commit atrocious crimes. Furthermore the inclusion of women war survivor's voices in peace negotiation are hardly been taken into account and female ex-combatant's integration to the society has not received much attention.

Whereas some countries are still lagging behind on matter of women participation and protection, progress has been made in countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone and Rwanda where women have played a central role in peace and security in their respective countries. In Senegal, the creation of women's platforms for peaceful elections such as Women's Situation Rooms has contributed significantly to early warning and conflict prevention. Positive developments were made in terms of the adoption of regional action plans for the implementation of 1325 in the Great Lakes, Mano River, IGAD and ECOWAS regions.