



WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR **PEACE & FREEDOM**

Good Practice Case Study: Engaging the media on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Cameroon

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Overview

Cameroon has long been considered to be a peaceful country by both foreigners and citizens. The country has been largely unaffected by armed conflicts in neighbouring states, including conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Chad, Central African Republic (CAR), and Nigeria. However, this situation has changed over time. Starting in 2013, the deteriorating situation in CAR and Nigeria began to place Cameroon in an increasingly critical situation. Citizens and refugees alike found themselves caught between the aggression of Boko Haram attacks and military operations in the Far North. In this context, women and girls are particularly at risk of separation, forced recruitment, arbitrary detention, indoctrination as well as sexual and economic exploitation and abuse.

Women-led civil society in Cameroon have been at the forefront of developing innovative approaches to addressing rising violence and promoting gender equitable peace. The Women's International League for Peace (WILPF) Cameroon has worked with coalitions to advocate for women's full and meaningful political participation, address the gendered impact of increasing security challenges, and leverage the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda for action. As part of their mission to build sustainable peace with women as key strategic players, WILPF Cameroon has built partnerships with media houses to raise awareness on the WPS Agenda and sensitise communities for change.

Challenges: Implementing the Women, Peace and Security: Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in “non-conflict” situations

Because Cameroon has long been considered a peaceful country, the government, along with other stakeholders and development partners, has been slow to take action on the WPS Agenda. Obstacles to women's political participation and civil society engagement, as well as inadequate recognition of gender-based violence as an early warning indicator of conflict, have contributed to delays in considering the development of a National Action



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Plan on the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) (UNSCR 1325) and creating necessary peace building and conflict management initiatives.

Additionally, the growing humanitarian crisis, the presence of Boko Haram, and the precarious living standard of Cameroonians together have had a tremendous impact on the lives of women and girls, especially within the existing patriarchal institutions and disproportionate levels of violence and discrimination against women. In this context, women civil society leaders have been critical for overcoming blindness to the need for action on UNSCR 1325, building recognition, and strengthening momentum for action.

What are women doing to produce change?

Women-led civil society in Cameroon have been leaders in analysing existing gaps and taking action to address these gaps for concrete change. In 2014, WILPF Cameroon conducted a study in the East Region of Cameroon to assess knowledge of UNSCR 1325 and found that 81,7% of people interviewed (including humanitarian workers and officials) had never heard of this resolution, and out of 20,3% who had some knowledge, 52,2% received their knowledge through media.

Building on this assessment of UNSCR 1325 illiteracy as a key gap area, in October 2014 WILPF Cameroon, in collaboration with UN Women in Cameroon and the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family, launched an information and sensitisation campaign. It included awareness raising outreach workshops with women's organisations and other NGOs to popularise UNSCR 1325 and build a broader coalition to sensitise communities and raise awareness about the role of women in both conflict situations and peaceful societies.

WILPF Cameroon worked to boost the internationalisation of the WPS Agenda by building partnerships with media to strengthen political will for action, and rallying media houses' owners to be allies in the sensitisation and awareness raising process. As part of these efforts, WILPF Cameroon set up meetings with media houses' owners to adopt best strategies for boosting the process, trained media on UNSCR 1325 and the main provisions of the WPS Agenda, participated in TV and Radio programmes to raise awareness on UNSCR 1325, and wrote articles for newspapers and magazines as part of an ongoing outreach strategy.

WILPF Cameroon also partnered with WILPF's Women, Peace and Security Programme to make advocacy tools more accessible to the local populations, including by localising



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WILPF's Advocacy Toolkit developed for the 15th anniversary of UNSCR 1325, generating additional advocacy documents, and advocating for the development of a UNSCR 1325 National Action Plan in Cameroon.

WILPF Cameroon also shared its experiences with the gender unit of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) and provided the unit with technical support to set up a platform called Femmes Éditrices pour la Paix et la Sécurité en Afrique Centrale (FEPPSAC) with a view to promote peace and security, encourage solidarity, and work towards adopting UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans in Central African countries.

Impact

As part of its engagement strategy, WILPF Cameroon found that people often did not have a clear understanding or recognition of the added value of having women at peace tables. Through its work, WILPF Cameroon was able to build confidence within key institutions and stakeholders and initiate support for further action, including a study with UN Women and the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family on the impact of conflicts on women and girls in Cameroon.

The media strategy adopted by WILPF Cameroon has effectively raised awareness on the WPS Agenda and enhanced the overall support for UNSCR 1325 in Cameroon. Meetings with local media houses resulted in both immediate and ongoing outreach opportunities.

Because media engagement was conducted in parallel to the development of a regional meeting from 27 – 28 November 2015 with the support of WILPF Sweden, WILPF Cameroon was able to share local and regional analysis and recommendations from the regional meeting through media contacts as a basis for continued engagement. Following meetings with media houses, two newspapers then granted WILPF Cameroon the opportunity to produce monthly articles on UNSCR 1325 or peace issues for publication, and the RTS radio station shared highlights about the regional meeting's discussions on UNSCR 1325 with its local audience. Radio Balafon also committed to including UNSCR 1325 sensitisation in its 2016 annual programme.

WILPF Cameroon's engagement with the government and UN entities also had concrete results. As a result of advocacy leveraged around the UNSCR 1325 15th Anniversary, WILPF Cameroon was successful in initiating discussions on the need to develop a UNSCR 1325 National Action Plan in Cameroon. The section was entrusted by UN Women and the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family to conduct a baseline study to



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assess the level of knowledge about UNSCR 1325 in Cameroon and assess the impact of armed conflict on women and girls in affected areas in Cameroon in order to better take into account the situation while developing a National Action Plan. The Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family also recruited two consultants to support the Ministry in drafting a UNSCR 1325 National Action Plan.

WILPF Cameroon also initiated discussions with the gender unit of the UN Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) to explore opportunities for further developing the emerging media network for regional action to promote peace, share the agenda, and work towards a holistic implementation of UNSCR 1325.

Lessons learned

Media is an important tool to deconstruct social prejudice about women's capacity to contribute to building sustainable peace. Partnerships with media and women's civil society organisations can build a pool of UNSCR 1325 advocates through more effective, comprehensive, and inclusive media strategies that reach a greater number of people.

There is a need to include expertise of civil society and local communities, including women, men, youth, religious leaders - both women and men - as well as the media in gender-responsive conflict preventions measures that tackle normative notions of masculinity/femininity and conflict.

Key recommendations include

- Build partnerships with media to challenge patriarchal narratives, build capacities of media practitioners on UNSCR 1325, and mobilise diverse stakeholders for sustainable peace;
- Conduct WPS-sensitive trainings for media contacts to ensure sensitisation and mastery of UNSCR 1325;
- Be persistent: Engaging media takes tenacity (to find contacts and entry points), flexibility (to work with various media contacts), and adequate financing (to develop an effective media engagement strategy and ensure a "win-win" situation);
- Reach out to diverse stakeholders when engaging media engagement (civil society, government, UN, etc.) in order to build and leverage support for concrete action.

To learn more



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- WILPF Cameroon Report on WILPF Africa regional conference (Nathalie Wokam Foko, Guy Blaise Dongmo Feugap and Mariane Nonbo, 2014, Peace in our Hands: Regional Conference on Conflict Prevention in Africa). Accessible at: <http://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/Peace-in-our-hands-regional-conference-report-Africa-Report.pdf>
- WILPF Summary Report of the Public Submissions to the Global Study on Women, Peace and Security (Sonneveld, Shafferan, 2015, Through the Lens of Civil Society). Accessible at: <http://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/May-29-Copy-Through-the-Lens-of-Civil-Society-Executive-Summary-For-Summary-Report.pdf>.