

***Peace and Security: Women's leadership
in conflict prevention and resolution
in the Sahel Region***

Half the sky...

By Christiane Agboton Johnson
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With the collaboration of K. Koumé and B. Diouf
For the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

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Introduction

The 1990s were characterized by a multitude of crises of varying degrees of intensity in the Sahel countries which disrupted the social balance (between the North and the South of the Sahel, elder siblings and younger siblings, men and women, policies, society and the State). Sahelian women took advantage of the advent of democracy to get involved in conflict resolution in a visible manner be it in Northern Mali and Northern Niger or in Southern Senegal.

Sahelian women have always contributed to conflict mediation. Though they were often consulted by men to settle some disputes within their families and communities, they always acted in the dark. From the 1990s, they became visible and started getting organized.

Over the last twenty years or so, women have been actually very active in this field commonly reserved for men but they have gained little appreciation in spite of so many peace initiatives they have taken. They are still to date relegated to the back seat and are rarely invited to official negotiation tables.

This study on *Women's Leadership in Conflict Prevention and Resolution in the Sahel Region* aims at drawing up a brief overview of initiatives led by women in the Sahel, especially in Mali, Niger and Senegal. It also outlines the main features of relevant mechanisms at regional level (African Union) and sub regional level (ECOWAS) as well as efforts carried out to strengthen the implementation of Resolution 1325 (2000) of the UN Security Council. This contribution intends to analyse the paradox between the recent widespread development of mechanisms that seek to strengthen women's leadership in conflict prevention and management and the on-going marginalization of women in peace negotiations and official initiatives for conflict prevention/resolution. The final part of the study outlines some recommendations.

WHICH INITIATIVES AT SUBREGIONAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL?

AFRICAN UNION MECHANISMS

The African Union (AU), in conjunction with Regional Economic Communities (REC), has gradually put in place a “gender architecture”. The will behind this is expressed in the following declaration: *“Women’s empowerment and their equality with men has become the foundation for gender mainstreaming in AU; both are the backbone for socioeconomic and political integration of Africa”*.

Several instruments govern the place of women in society. They are the *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women¹ in Africa* (2003-2005), the *Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa* or *SDGEA* (2004), *African Union Gender Policy* (2008), and of recent, the *Fund for African Women* (2010).

The African Union Gender Policy

The African Union Gender Policy is reflected in the development of a ten-year Action Plan which urges States Parties to implement a regional action based on the principles of Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (GEWE), Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and Beijing Platform for Action in Africa (BPFA). More specifically, in connection with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the New Partnership for Africa Development (NEPAD), this policy encourages States to put in place mechanisms/processes (political and institutional) by 2010, principles of equality (by 2015), parity within AU (by 2020), full ratification of the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa by 2015 as well as its full implementation by 2020.

Women, Gender and Development Division (DFDG)

There is a Gender Division within the AU, which is tasked with operationalizing commitments in gender equity and women’s empowerment by mainly working towards gender mainstreaming, coordination, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation, capacity building and women’s empowerment programming. The mandate includes coordinating activities with internal and external partners.

Furthermore, the AU Commission Chairperson has a consultative body which is the *African Union Women’s Committee* (AUWC) and which replaced the African Women’s Committee for Peace and Development (CFAPD). The committee mainly deals with issues of peace and security, advocacy for gender equality and women’s empowerment.

THE ROLE OF ECOWAS

ECOWAS mechanisms regarding women's roles in conflict prevention and management include the *Protocol on Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution Peace-keeping and Security* (1999) and the *Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance* (2001). These two documents serve as basis for the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF).

On **early warning**, ECPF encourages area offices in charge of early warning in the 15 member countries to include women organizations' contributions in data collection and processing as well as during the development and implementation of local conflict resolution initiatives related to collected data.

Concerning **preventive diplomacy**, the framework proposes to build women organizations' skills² in order to mobilize them in due time for local conflict mediation, conciliation, facilitation and alternative resolution.

As for **democracy and political governance**, the framework urges civil society organizations (CSOs) to fully participate in the strengthening of democracy and emphasizes the need to allocate positions of responsibility to women particularly in national commissions.

Lastly, concerning **Women, peace and security** component, ECPF aims at consolidating women's role, participation and impact at all stages of conflict management, including the humanitarian one, while reinforcing various national and regional mechanisms for protecting and promoting them.

Additionally, between 2003 and 2004, ECOWAS launched several initiatives in support of gender including the establishment of a "Gender Unit" within its Executive Secretariat in Abuja as well as a "Centre for Gender Development" in Dakar and the adoption of the "Policy Document on Gender". It encouraged the establishment of the Women's Network for Peace and Security in ECOWAS Region (REPSFECO) to better coordinate and optimize women's activities³. In 2010, as part of the 10th anniversary of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), ECOWAS organized a high-level meeting in Dakar themed "*Regional Forum: Women count for peace*". This led to the adoption of the *Dakar Declaration on the implementation of Resolution 1325 in West Africa* and an *ECOWAS Regional Action Plan*⁴.

INITIATIVES CARRIED OUT IN WEST AFRICA

CASE STUDIES: MALI, NIGER AND SENEGAL

³ On the initiative of ECOWAS Commission de and CCDG, network established in Abidjan in 2009 and present in the 15 ECOWAS Member States.

⁴ Regional Forum on UNSC Resolution 1325: West Africa commits itself to strengthening the role of women in peacebuilding, Press release, Dakar, 17 September 2010

MALI

According to a Manding proverb, "*Behind every beard, you can see the tail of a plait*". In Mali, women's role within the community consists traditionally in maintaining social cohesion as well as contributing to stability and peace. Decisions are made by consensus at community level; though women do not appear during the process, they are consulted⁵. They are kept far away from violent conflict areas for their protection and for the survival of the community.

A survey on African traditions and humanitarian law in Africa⁶ reveals that women are never killed during conflicts in the Sahel but are abducted and married by the winners. This is explained by the men's perception of women: "*Women represent the genesis and the source of life. By killing a woman during fight, one dries up the flow of life*".

However, in the early 1990s, women defied the tradition and got involved in the resolution of the "Tuareg conflict"⁷. Following the collapse of President Moussa Traoré's regime, dignitaries of Gao region accompanied by indigenous women and wives of military officers from Gao Firhoun Barrack went to the rebel base of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Azawad (FPLA) in Taïkaraine to engage in negotiations with the movement's leaders. From 1991 to 1993, women joined together in the Women's Movement for Peace and Preservation of National Unity (MFPSUN) and the Women's Association for Peace Initiatives (AFIP) took part in various meetings on rebel bases in Northern Gao and Northern Timbuktu. Though public authorities were vehemently against women's involvement in conflict resolution, they resorted to them in Kidal to convince rebels to forsake their decision to boycott the constitutional referendum.

Women equally negotiated the release of wise men, took care of civilian and armed groups' men casualties, and in some cases, paved way for the restitution of goods looted by the rebels⁸. As acknowledged by public authorities at the time, their involvement helped to pacify the Northern regions. They were invited to the Flame of Peace Ceremony, yet they were not actually involved in various stages of the formal negotiation. From the second half of the 1990s, once peace returned, women were gradually kept away from decision-making circles.

⁵ Poulton R. E.; Youssouf I. « La paix de Tombouctou : gestion démocratique, développement et construction africaine de la paix » (« *Peace of Timbuktu: Democratic management, Development and Peacebuilding in Africa* »), UNIDIR, 1999

⁶ Yolande Diallo, *African Traditions and Humanitarian Law*. Geneva, 1978- p 8.

⁷ Workshop on Malian women's involvement in peace dialogue, Bamako, Mali 16-18 October 2012, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

⁸ Example of a car stolen from CICR, which was given back following women's mediation. See *Institutional Instability and Human Security*- Gorée Institute, 2012

In 2012, with the crisis in Northern Mali, women were one of the rebel groups' major targets; they were harmed both physically (for example through whipping, raping, stoning) and morally (e.g. the imposition of wearing of veils). In response to these practices, the Women's Movement for Peace and Preservation of National Unity, in conjunction with other regional organizations and networks, launched a number of initiatives for assisting displaced persons and sensitizing the youth not to enrol in rebel movements. Contrary to the 1990s, women could not engage in a direct dialogue with rebels mainly for fear of retaliation; in addition the radical extremism of some rebels prevents them from talking with women. In spite of this, some women from movements like AFIP and WANEP took part in negotiations in Ouagadougou in April 2012 without having been invited in order to demand that violence against women be stopped in Northern Mali and ensure that the issue be part of the final Declaration.

At the same time, these organizations got involved gradually in another field which had been so far the preserve of men, which is the fight against the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW). Going beyond the community level, these initiatives led to the creation of networks and coalitions which took part in all the campaigns on arms control, moratorium on the importation, exportation and manufacture of small arms within the ECOWAS region (1998), the ratification of the ECOWAS Convention on small arms and light weapons (2006), the adoption and implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (2001). Women involved in international meetings always strived for the gender dimension to be included in the texts⁹.

NIGER

In the 1990s, the involvement of women was significant especially at the beginning of the Tuareg conflict during which many of them perished. In fact, women singled themselves out on the side of the rebels by mobilizing funds and helping them to hide their weapons. Then, little by little, having noticed the devastation caused by the conflict, they served as informal mediators and this contributed to the crisis resolution.

In 1992, the peace agreement led to solutions for substantive problems such as decentralization law, better resource allocation, demobilization and integration of fighters in public administration, amnesty, commitment to developing all Northern regions on an equal footing etc. Yet, once again, after the signing of peace agreements, women have been relegated to the back seat; their role is not mentioned in the agreement. The Women's Network for Peace (REFEPA) was practically very active, particularly in Agadez region where they engaged in talks with mothers for them to discourage their children from enrolling in armed groups¹⁰.

⁹ The UNSC Resolution 1325 is in the Preamble of the Convention owing to women's perseverance during the last RevCon.

¹⁰ Bamako Workshop, cité en 2

Among these women engaged in these initiatives since the 1990s, we have Mariam Bayard Gamathié, a 2011¹¹ presidential candidate and Aïchatou Ben Wahab, former Secretary of State to the Minister for Trade, Transports and Tourism (1993) then Minister of Industry, Crafts and Small and Medium Enterprises (1994).

Today, Niger's Women's organizations for peace and security gathered together under the auspices of the Niger Chapter of the ECOWAS Women's Network for Peace and Security (REPSFECO) to get involved in the Sahelian crisis. They wanted to show solidarity to Malian women refugees in Niger by collecting basic necessities and clothing for them.

SENEGAL

In the face of a separatist conflict of more than 30 years, which "cancelled efforts towards women's promotion"¹², women from the Casamance region¹³ got involved in solution-finding by resorting to cultural and traditional methods of the region, namely *Kabonketoor*¹⁴ "priestesses of sacred groves" and *Usoforal*¹⁵, traditional tales, drama, and the symbolic use of woven cloths. They organized a travelling exhibition referred to as "the talking cloth", which toured several countries to explain women's situation during the conflict as well as peace initiatives taken by women¹⁶. The organization also resorted to endogenous mechanisms for conflict resolution. It developed a programme on traditional values in conjunction with CICR. In Casamance, women and children are traditionally considered as sacred human beings even though they have been victims of conflict for a long time. By using this status, they were able to gain acceptance by armed groups and organize a dialogue.

To strengthen their advocacy activities, they established partnerships in Casamance¹⁷ and the sub-region, especially with women in Mali and Guinea¹⁸. They also established a *Platform for Women for peace in Casamance (PFPC)*¹⁹ which brought about 170 women's associations from Casamance, accounting for over 30,000 members. In schools, they initiated programs on culture of peace by training students as mediators and establishing mediation committees. Their contribution to peace helped to lower violence rate as well as "opening up" the conflict²⁰. Though they had been well informed from the early stages about UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) which was translated into local languages, Casamance women had difficulties in imposing their participation in Foundiougne negotiations in 2005. Later, their activism and vigour helped them to get results. In 2012, the Head

¹¹ Through an independent candidature with the Independent Candidates Rally for a New Niger (Rassemblement des Candidats indépendants pour un Niger Nouveau).

¹² Interview de Tacko DAFPE, Paroles de Femmes, Paroles de Paix, MALAO/UNIFEM, 2006

¹³ Male Seynabou: Expériences in Senegal, in « *Human security in West Africa*, Challenges, Synergies and Actions for a Regional Agenda, the Sahel and West Africa Club / OCDE, Lomé (Togo), Summary Report, Volume 1, Oct. 2006, 28-30 March 2006, Volume 1, Summary Report, October 2006

¹⁴ KABONKETOOR: « to reconcile » in Diola language

¹⁵ USOFORAL : « Let us unite » in Diola language

¹⁶ Workshop on Malian women's involvement in peace dialogue, reference in footnote 2

¹⁷ With the assistance of UNIFEM and MALAO: Coalition for Women Peacemakers, 2005.

¹⁸ Giesing Cornelia : Femmes pour la Paix and « gens de la Parole » in cross-border settings, First regional meeting of Alliance for peace initiatives, Kankan (Guinea) ,28 April – 5 May 2006, Gorée Institute (West African Alliance for Peace Initiatives), December 2006.

¹⁹ The activities include assistance to victims of armed conflict, meetings and dialogues with various stakeholders, campaigns for signing petitions for public involvement in peace building.

²⁰ Paix, L'observateur N°2850 – Wednesday 20 March 2013, page 2.

of State expressed his support for them with lyricism: “*I have been looking for and believe to have found [...] the secret door that leads to the splendour of cities of peace. You are that door [...]. The torch of peace is there: take hold of it to enlighten our relentless quest for peace*”.²¹

During the last presidential campaign, the PFPC developed and handed over a memorandum for peace in Casamance to the fourteen presidential candidates. Nine candidates signed it as a document which bound them to the cause of peace. During a hearing ceremony witnessed by hundreds of women, PFPC questioned the two candidates for the run-off elections on their programme for Casamance.

After the 2012 presidential elections, PFPC resumed dialogue with some representatives of the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC), politicians from Casamance, religious and traditional leaders and military officials so as to lay the foundations for negotiations. In January 2013, during a new phase of the negotiations, Ndèye Fatou Thiam Diédhiou who is PFPC Coordinator was invited by the Government to be part of the delegation tasked with engaging dialogue with protagonists.

PEACE NETWORKS AT SUB-REGIONAL LEVEL

For the past fifteen years or so, following the Tuareg rebellions in Mali and Niger, many civil society organizations’ networks for peace and securities issues have been established. All of them, including the oldest one, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), Ghana, and the most recent one, REPSFECO, are led by women and/or include a gender component.

Established in 2009, the *Women’s Network for Peace and Security in ECOWAS Region* (REPSFECO) initiated the implementation of its regional action plan towards achieving peace within the region by helping to organize trainings on conflict mediation, prevention and resolution for thirty or so women leaders from the civil society and government circles²².

Other sub-regional programs like the Movement against Small Arms and Light Weapons in West Africa (MALAO)²³, the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET)²⁴ or the *Alliance of African Initiatives for peace and stability in West Africa*²⁵ have also developed initiatives mainly dedicated to women leadership in conflict prevention/resolution. The Gorée Institute organized workshops for training and exchanging knowledge on women’s role in conflict management and prevention

²¹ http://www.lesoleil.sn/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=17318:rencontre-avec-la-plate-forme-des-femmes-de-casamance-l-le-senegal-vous-donne-mandat-pour-reussir-cette-paix-r&catid=140:actualites

²² REPSFECO: 32 female mediators for peace in the sub-region, *Le Patriote*, 28 March 2012.

²³ Assistance to rural women of Kabonketoor, “Women Peacemakers” Project, PSR/ALPC, 8 March celebration, SALW and Women, lobbying for inclusion in Ministry of Women Development, radio programmes,

²⁴ WIPNET Objectives: Strengthening women’s participation in all initiatives and in all WANEP programmes, Building women’s capacities to build peace at local, national, sub-regional and international level coherent with the Resolution 1325 ; cf. Report on Discussions during the 6th WIPNET Regional Conference, *Grand Bassam, Cote d’Ivoire, 20 - 21 July 2010*

²⁵ The African Initiative Alliance for Peace and Stability in West Africa (2005) of the Gorée Institute aims at harnessing actions for peace in West Africa, as well as providing platform for exchange, information and research for conflict management and dissemination of endogenous mechanisms for conflict resolution and management.

or in reforming security sector²⁶. It also organized an exhibition and produced a documentary on Aline Sitoé Diatta²⁷, Casamance resistance activist, heroine of anti-colonial struggle and symbol of feminism in Senegal.

Women in the fight against small arms and light weapons

By engaging in the fight against proliferation of SALW, women from conflict areas defied yet another taboo and acted as trailblazers. Five women from some female or women-led organizations²⁸ were among the initiators of the West African Action Network on Small Arms (WANSA). This intrusion of women in an area which is largely reserved for men brought about a new dynamic. Their advocacy activities within various female organizations²⁹ helped to take into account SALW in national and sub-regional agendas, sensitize many players on SALW at national, regional and international level, adopt the ECOWAS Moratorium on SALW which was later changed into a Convention³⁰ as well as establish national commissions. It should be pointed out that these organizations did not include any well-defined gender dimension. Yet, women's dynamism helped to create linkages with specifically female organizations involved in peace and security issues.

Women's role in early warning

In West Africa, civil society contributes to the ECOWAS local early warning system through WANEP. It is noted that the gender aspect and discriminations or violence against women are inadequately taken into account in the ECOWAS mechanism: though it aims to involve more the civil society in collecting information and identifying early signs of conflicts, it doesn't pay any particular attention to women.

Religious influence in peace organizations

In countries where the Christian religion is more dynamic, there is a strong link between churches and peace organizations as well as an important role played by women within these organizations. At the eve of the signing of the Moratorium, Norwegian Initiative on Small Arms Transfer (NISAT) assisted the Fellowship of Christian Church in West Africa (FECCIWA) in getting involved in lobbying. MALAO which is a joint organization of Christians and Muslims worked with animistic women of the "sacred groves" in Casamance. In countries where Islam is more predominant, women who are often very attached to religious practices did not have strong

²⁶ Seminars held in Ziguinchor for women from Casamance, Guinée Bissau and Gambia on developing a common position on conflict negotiations, namely that of Casamance (27 Oct. 2007); as well as conflicts in the Séné-Gambian and Sahelo-Saharan areas (2-7 Sept. 2010).

²⁷ Resistance activist from Casamance who promoted peace through cultural values during colonial era, 1st half of 20th century. Exhibition of the book "Si Aline Sitoé Diatta m'était contée" IFAN (Dakar, July 2007)- Documentary (Feb. 2008)- The book entitled « *Aline Sitoé Diatta ou les voies féminines du vivre autrement* », will be published in 2013 (Odile Tendeng, Coordinator).

²⁸ MNFSPUN Mali – Dr. Mariam Djibrilla Maïga; FEFAM, Niger – Mariam Bayard Gamathié ; (FOSDA, Ghana) –Afi Yakubu ; Council of Churches in Sierra Leone (CCSL) – Florella Hazeley ;MALAO, Sénégal – Dr. Christiane Agboton-Johnson.

²⁹ Thelma Ekiyor, « The role of West African Civil Society in conflict prevention and management », UNIDIR, Disarmament Forum, n°4, Dec 2008..

³⁰ The preamble refers to the Resolution 1325 and women's role appears in public education and awareness activities, Art 23.

relationships with imams. However, regional networks like WANEP which maintain open relations with evangelical churches have established branches in countries of Islamic tradition like Mali and Niger and work with Muslim women. Therefore, there is no separation between various religions as far as advancement of peace is concerned given that this forms the foundation for all revealed religions.

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ANALYSIS

Female actors engaged in “reserved areas”

For about twenty years now, women have been engaged in mediation, raising awareness on peace, supporting displaced persons and refugees, and victims of conflict and sexual and gender-based violence, the fight against SALW, community conflict management as well as security and development programmes. From informal actions associated with survival reflexes in the face of severe situations at community level, women have developed programmes and often contributed to political progress at national and regional level. In addition, they do not mind resorting to endogenous mechanisms (so-called ‘kinship of pleasantries’ or ‘cousinage à plaisanterie’ or traditional roles) which allow a better understanding and ownership by relevant populations as well as modern techniques of advocacy and lobbying in partnership with traditional and modern media. Here, the fight against SALW is a good example.

However, these gains are facing some hindrances such as lack of recognition of their legitimacy by public authorities. Though operating on the ground, women’s organizations only dedicate limited time to promoting their achievements and do not enjoy visibility at national and international level. A number of organizations have challenges regarding financial assistance, management and leadership which slow down or put an end to their actions. In addition, they struggle in passing the torch to the new generations. This is one of the striking weaknesses of these initiatives, which is also seen within other kinds of organizations like political parties. The intergenerational aspect is not adequately taken into account even though some initial efforts at programmes for perpetuation of initiatives have been attempted in Senegal.

Women victims of violence forced into silence

With the crisis in Northern Mali, the Sahel region is no exception among other regions of the world in that sexual violence in armed conflict situation which is considered as crime against humanity has become an “ordinary” act. According to testimonials gathered by Amnesty International, women as well as young girls have been raped, sometimes in groups by armed men in Ménaka and Gao³¹, including members of the Tuareg armed group, the National Movement for Liberation of Azawad (MNLA). Though these violations were condemned by the society in general,

³¹ [Mali is experiencing an unprecedented human rights crisis for the last 50 years ...www.amnesty.org/.../mali-s-worst-human-rights-situation-5...](http://www.amnesty.org/.../mali-s-worst-human-rights-situation-5...)

it is difficult to raise these cases specifically, especially in regions where Islam is strongly rooted³².

Failure to translation texts and mechanisms into effective policies

A lot remains to be done in terms of local domestication of sub-regional and regional texts and mechanisms. Public authorities at local and national level need targeted information and education on the existing frameworks, especially parliamentarians as well as defence and security forces who are cruelly short of information in this area.

For instance, the development of National Action Plans (NAP) for implementing Resolution 1325 has often been an exercise led by Ministries for Women's Affairs. All too frequently there has been an imbalance in favour of civil society activists who master the intricacies of these texts much better than public authorities who only discover them upon assumption of office at ministerial or parliamentary level.

Cautious development partners

Women's organisations involved in peace and security issues such as all CSOs in Sahelian countries, largely depend on funding from development partners. Often times, those partners disburse funding through international NGOs to support national initiatives. However, it is often challenging for organizations to respond to invitations to tender which require an expertise they do not have. This reduces available financial resources for them.

In the area of peace and security, conflict management and development programmes require time to have a serious impact. Abrupt ends to programmes can have negative effects on a country's security situation. Yet, development partners rarely work with a long term perspective and they demand short term results which are not easily achieved in fragile or unstable situations.

Also, in view of 'donor fatigue' and the tendency to follow 'trends' in funding noted among development partners, some organizations are ready to reorient their programmes in order to better meet the needs of donors even if this does not match the needs of the people on the ground. Organizations which started out with a social welfare mission have been easily tempted to broaden their scope of action by introducing a "peace and security" component in their programmes when they perceived a growing interest by donors for such issues..

Lack of political will by the States?

In the framework of the implementation of Resolution 1325 states parties were required to develop National Action Plans (NAP). In ECOWAS, twelve states in fifteen have complied. Yet, in most cases, these plans are not properly funded. In fact, they cannot mobilize political will in these States for which subject matter is not a priority. They face implementation challenges. Furthermore, women's involvement

³² Islam Feminism: from re-reading of Koran to political practices, gender focus – Thematic newsletter of Gender in Action, International francophone Network on Gender and Development- Newsletter N°11 , December 2011

in national security issues has never been welcomed nor supported by those holding political power or in the army.

In short, women and their priorities become decreasingly relevant the further we go from the grass roots, from the informal to the formal, towards structured decision-making circles where national security policies and security needs are determined.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is important to take into account the valuable solutions and recommendations already shared in so many meetings, gatherings and declarations.

The following recommendations are preliminary stages for encouraging the emergence of women's leadership in the areas of peace and security in West Africa and particularly in the Sahel. As far as conflict prevention/resolution is concerned, we must bring about a proportionate balance of power and pave the way for the actual presence of women, legitimized through their mastery of the relevant substance and knowledge/know-how, and anchored within a larger process of institutional, social and personal change.

VISIBILITY OF WOMEN LEADERS

Support women's programmes/projects or programmes/projects developed for them: it is essential to enhance the visibility of women leaders and that of their initiatives by identifying them. This also implies that viable and adequate financial resources be allocated for them to enable them to continue their initiatives.

Promote research on issues facing women involved in peace and security processes, which is still very limited. This research would help to document experiences, identify projects which have a significant impact and determine needs in a better way. It would also help to highlight the effects of violence against women in terms of economic productivity in cross-border trade and of destruction of the social fabric.

STRENGTHENING OF LEADERSHIP

Build the capacities of women leaders: women leaders need to be better equipped to access decision-making organs. To that effect, there is need to invest more in training for women so that they can be genuine players in negotiations at various levels (community, national, regional, international) and effectively play their role. Apart from training, there is also need to support their presence in decision-making, mediation and negotiation organs. This would gradually make men to understand their roles differently.

Enforce States' commitment towards an increased participation of women leaders in high-level negotiation and conflict resolution process.

ESTABLISHMENT OF ALLIANCES

Promote meetings of women leaders from various backgrounds: Regardless of their focus area, women leaders face similar challenges. Convening women leaders with different areas of expertise (parliamentarians, lawyers, officials from defence and security forces, diplomats, and women leaders in their religious community) should make it possible to create synergies as well as a community of interest.

Strengthen the gender approach within the military and the police: the gender approach should be strengthened in trainings and initiatives on civil-military relations. This would help to initiate changes in perceiving and understanding women's role in peace and security issues within structures for the management of armed violence. Special attention should be given to women in defence and security forces who are often marginalized from within their own ranks yet they can be useful allies to the civil society organizations involved in conflict prevention and management. The introduction of quota in recruiting defence and security agents and the promotion of women to higher grades can make it possible for them to be better represented in the various branches of the police and armed forces.

Increase awareness of men and women of defence and security forces as well as that of all judicial officers on violence against women during conflicts, committed not only by national combatants but also international ones, in the framework of an international peacekeeping force. This issue should be introduced in the training modules provided to prevent exploitation and sexual abuse against women.

Promote intergenerational women's meetings: Sharing of experiences among women from older and younger generations could be a real driving force for the new generations and could encourage the youth to continue the fight of the older generation and the latter to pass the baton to the former. Thought could be given to establishing an *intergenerational council* in every country bringing together experienced women (collective memory), contemporary women and youth (perpetuation, introduction of different kinds of style and knowledge).

IMPLEMENTATION OF MECHANISMS AND RESOLUTIONS

Encourage the effective implementation of mechanisms and resolutions on gender, peace and security (AU, ECOWAS, and UN). Initiatives such as mobile caravans or travelling exhibitions with portraits of the older generation and modern African women leaders, round table discussions, documentaries and media involvement would help institutions and populations to know these mechanisms better and implement them through a wider process of accountability and ownership.

Provide financial and psychological support to women victims of violence who wish to file complaints so that justice can be served for them by national and/or international courts. Very often, women victims of violence dare not seek justice for fear of retaliation or stigmatization by their community. These women should be assisted in order to be recognized as victims and for their physical wounds, psychological trauma and social stigma to be given attention and healed.

CREATION OF LINKS BETWEEN ECOWAS AND AU

Establish a High-level Women's Forum: The question of women's involvement in peace and security issues must not be limited to the Sahel but extended to the whole of African continent. Sahel and ECOWAS countries could initiate the establishment of a High-level Women's Forum on peace and security issues, which would bring together ministers, diplomats and high-level experts. This forum could be sustained through a working group of women on the Sahel.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFIP: Women's Association for Peace Initiatives/Association des Femmes pour les Initiatives de Paix

SALW : Small arms and light weapons

AUWC : Africa Union Women's Committee/ Comité des Femmes de l'Union Africaine

BPFA : Beijing Platform for Action

CADHP : Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights/Protocole à la Charte des Droits de l'Homme et des Peuples

CCSL : Christian Council in Sierra Leone/Conseil Chrétien en Sierra Léone

ECOWAS : Economic Community of West African States

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women

REC: Regional Economic Communities

CFAPD: African Women's Committee for Peace and Development

CPPC: ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework

PSC: Peace and Security Committee

DFDG : Women, Gender and Development Division

DSEG/ASDGEA: Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa

FAC: Forces en Attente de la CEDEAO/ECOWAS Stand-by Forces

FOSDA : Foundation for Security Development in Africa

GEWE/ EGAF : Gender Equality and Women Empowerment

KABONKETOOR: "To reconcile" in Diola language

MALAO : Movement against Small Arms and Light Weapons in West Africa

MFSPUN: Women's Movement for Peace and Preservation of National Unity/
Mouvement National pour la Sauvegarde de la Paix et de l'Unité nationale

NEPAD : New Partnership for African Development

UN: United Nations Organisation

MDGs: Millennium Development Goals

PFPC : Platform for Women for peace in Casamance/Plateforme des Femmes pour la Paix en Casamance

SRP/SALW: Sub-regional Program/Small Arms and light weapons

WANSA: West African Action Network on Small Arms

REPSFECO : Women's Network for Peace and Security in ECOWAS Region

CEWS: Continental Early Warning System

AU : African Union

EU : European Union

WAEMU/UEMOA : West African Economic and Monetary Union/Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest-Africaine

UN Women : ONU Femmes

USOFORAL: "Let us unite" in Diola language

WANEP: West Africa Network for Peacebuilding/ Réseau ouest-africain de l'Edification de la Paix

WIPNET: Women in Peacebuilding Network/Réseau des Femmes dans l'Edification de la Paix.

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