

Committee: Special Political and Decolonization Committee**Issue: The role of women in conflict prevention and resolution in Africa****Student Officer: Konstantinos Konstantinou****Position: Co-Chair****Introduction**

Women have come to play a pivotal role in helping society progress. Their contribution in fields such as family, healthcare and education is undeniable and they have introduced themselves into the world of diplomacy as well. However, their potential in helping to solve various conflicts has not been fully realized yet. Especially in less economically developed countries, women are still regarded as vastly inferior to men. It is at this point that the subject of the present study guide pertains specifically to Africa. The UN has deemed a society, in which all members have the chance to participate equally, as a major condition of achieving sustainable development. Unfortunately, the African society is still a far cry from what is described by the UN in the formulations of its Sustainable Development Goals. Women's participation is an important key to reaching not only the goals listed by the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, but also those included in Africa's Vision of Agenda 2063.

The purpose of the inclusion of this topic in this year's GA4 agenda is therefore to ameliorate the integration of women into African societies with the eventual aim of enhancing the possibilities they offer in solving conflicts to the fullest extent.

Definition of Key-Terms**Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)**

A very commonly used acronym in the context of this and similar issues, it refers to any act that is perpetrated against a person's will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships¹.

¹ Source: UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Processes

The term used to collectively refer to the processes that a country undergoes in order to achieve post-conflict reconstruction. More specifically, DDR processes intend to tackle the problem of former combatants being deprived of their livelihoods and support networks after the end of a conflict. One of the core aspects of the current issue is that women seem to be heavily neglected in these processes.

Background Information

Women's current role in conflict and post-conflict

In order to possess adequate understanding of the issue at hand, one must first comprehend the position of women in situations of conflict. Women are largely victims of war; they are very frequently subjected to rape, forced to turn towards prostitution in order to survive, abducted or widowed.



Image 1: Women in conflict. Source: UNFPA

Nevertheless, women sometimes take up a more active role in conflict; primarily through supporting male combatants, but also being directly involved in combat themselves. The percentage of female combatants in African countries reportedly ranges from 10% to 33%. Nigeria offers an example of women's involvement in war; women in the Umeleri and Aguleri Women's Development Associations supported combatants through donating resources such as food as well as engaging in armed fights. The motives that drive them to participate in conflict

sometimes differ from those of men; many women do so out of desire to question the standard family hierarchy. Finally, due to the absence of males during war, the economy of a country can be severely affected, especially in LEDCs where women are usually relegated to mundane tasks. Men's departure leaves families with no reliable source of income and many job positions vacant. Women then attempt to take up these positions until the end of the conflict.

Then the importance of their role seems to plummet. On the one hand, women demonstrate remarkable activity when it comes to forming pro-peace movements, a task exemplified by the Mano River Women's Peace Network, which successfully compelled state leaders to enter a negotiation process in 2001. On the other hand, women are heavily underrepresented in formal peace negotiations, being only a meager 10% of the negotiators, according to a 2008 estimate by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM, now merged into the larger UN-Women organization). Attempts have, however, been made to include women in such processes. For example, Rwandan constitution imposes a minimum 30% of female representation in parliament. Economic reconstruction is the most problematic sector for women, as it takes precedence over the reformation of social infrastructure and the return of men from combat renders women unable to resume the roles they had undertaken during the conflict, as previously described. This is a result of the fact that DDR processes are largely focused on men.

Why should women take up a more active role in conflict?

Women can substantially enhance the success rate of peace negotiations, with certain research bodies reporting an increase of up to 64%². Furthermore, one of the implications of women's participation in conflict is progress towards achieving gender equality, thereby eliminating a major cause of interstate and intrastate conflict. As a result, although it might be counterintuitive, one may say that allowing women to take part in conflict will prevent the outbreak of wars in the future.

It is important to recognize the main obstacles that stand in the way of women trying to participate more actively in war. Women are usually only seen as victims, associated with images such as the one inserted in the previous paragraph. However, there is a need to acknowledge the complexity of women's role in conflict, as well as their capacity to improve post-conflict situations. Only then will any proposed solution address the problem.

² Source: <https://www.cfr.org/report/how-womens-participation-conflict-prevention-and-resolution-advances-us-interests>

Future goals

As mentioned in the introductory section, it is unfeasible to complete the 2030 United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development without the assistance of women. One of the goals is of particular interest when discussing the role of women in conflict prevention and resolution in Africa, namely goal number 16, which states: *“Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”*. Women have the capacity to contribute to a great extent in sectors such as diplomacy, peacebuilding processes and peacekeeping missions. It is therefore a matter of recognizing the said capacity and converting it into meaningful and fruitful actions.

There is a more specialized agenda that pertains directly to the region; namely, the agenda of the seven African Aspirations for 2063. Formulated by the African Union, the agenda, commonly referred to as Agenda 2063, defines certain goals that the members of the African Union aim to achieve within a timespan of 50 years. The sixth aspiration in the list is the one most closely related to the role of women in conflict prevention in Africa, as it states: *“An Africa whose development is people driven, relying on the potential offered by people, especially its women and youth and caring for children”*. Making a clear reference to women, this point confirms the wish of the African Union to acknowledge women’s potential to be a driving force for Africa’s progress.

Conclusion

It is apparent that the source of the problem itself has been recognized and steps have been made to solve it, beginning with the setting of long-term goals that require this issue to have been tackled beforehand. Nonetheless, while the intentions of organizations such as UN-Women, the United Nations as a whole, the African Union as well as individual Member States have been clarified and there are positive trends in addressing this topic, little has been achieved in the grand scheme of things. Thus, it is now the Special Political and Decolonization Committee’s task to find practical solutions that can bring about change.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

UN-Women

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women was founded by the United Nations General Assembly in July 2010. UN-

Women has the utmost aim of achieving gender equality and cooperates with governments as one of the leading forces of this movement. It also focuses on reaching the goals of the 2030 United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development.



Image 2: The logo of UN-Women.

African Union (AU)

The African Union was established by the Organization for African Union (OAU) during the Durban Summit in 2002. The aim of the organization is “an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena”³. One of its priorities is enhancing the position of women in society as a means of achieving crucial goals in the long term.



Image 3: The logo of the African Union.

³ Official statement by the African Union.

Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET)

The Mano River Women's Peace Network is an NGO that was established in May 2000 and is made up of approximately 30 sub-organizations. It was formed during a meeting of NGOs female leaders of the Mano River region that took place in the city of Abuja, Nigeria. Its purpose is to uphold peace and development in the said region. Since its founding, it has provided valuable assistance in conflict resolving and peacebuilding processes in the three Mano River countries (such as the Second Liberian Civil War), which was formally recognized by the UN in 2003, when the organization was awarded the UN Prize in the Field of Human Rights.

Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET)

The Women in Peacebuilding Network was formed during the First Liberian Civil War in 1991 in order to prevent the reestablishment of patriarchy after the war. However, its actions continued during the second war (2000-2003) forcing the two rival parties to negotiations and paving the way for the Accra peace summit. Afterwards, the organization focused on peacebuilding and disarmament.

Timeline of Events

Date	Event Description
December 19 th , 1979	The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is adopted by the UN General Assembly.
December 20 th , 1993	The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women is adopted by the UN General Assembly.
September 9 th , 1999	The fourth Extraordinary Session of the Organization of African Unity is held in Sirte, Libya. The decision is made for the African Union to be created.
November 10 th , 2000	The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone continues to practice SGBV even after the Abuja Ceasefire, which occurred on that date.
July 9 th , 2002	The Durban Summit marks the first session of the Assembly of States of the African Union and the official creation of

	the African Union.
April 2 nd , 2003	The Final Act of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue is signed but atrocities against women persist.
January 1 st , 2008	The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights takes over responsibility to service the committee established by the CEDAW in 1979.
January 30 th , 2015	The 24 th Ordinary Session of the African Union takes place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Agenda 2063 is formulated and adopted.
September 25 th , 2015	The UN unanimously adopts a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which are to have been accomplished by 2030.

Relevant UN Treaties, Resolutions and Events

Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

The CEDAW was the first international treaty to concern the issue at hand. It is widely regarded as a declaration of women's rights. The convention has been ratified by 189 states; non-parties include the USA, Palau, the Holy See, Somalia, Iran, Tonga and Sudan.

UN Resolution 48/104

This resolution, which was adopted in 1993, contained the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. It acknowledged the need for the universal application to women of the rights and principles with regard to equality, security, liberty, integrity and dignity of all human beings. This declaration is sometimes considered to be a supplement to the CEDAW.

UN Security Council Resolution 1325

UNSCR 1325 was adopted on the 31st of October 2000. Certainly one of the most closely related official documents to this question, it underlines the significance of the role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, as well as post-conflict reconstruction.

2030 United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda was adopted as a successor to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2015. It consists of 169 individual targets that form 17 goals to tackle various socioeconomic issues. Progress is being reported as of 2018, however it will be severely held back as long as gender equality is not a priority.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Effort was made to deal with this crucial matter in the form of treaties and resolutions, including the CEDAW and the resolutions 48/104 and 1325. Moreover, the African Union has a history of a number of successful endeavors, such as the launching of the Peace Operation in Burundi in 2011 and acting as mediator for the solution of the 1998 conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Assuredly, the existing documents fulfill the purpose of outlining necessities and setting common objectives. However, when it comes to practical, tangible solutions that cause visible change in the grand scheme of things, progress has been relatively scarce despite numerous minor successes.

Possible Solutions

It should be every delegate's first concern to come up with a means to foster gender equality. Since the role of women in conflict resolution and prevention in Africa is generally overshadowed by that of men, if gender equality is not achieved, no advancements can possibly be made. On that front, the raising of public awareness along with alterations in the African educational system to be more inclusive and accepting towards women would be viable measures to start from.

Moreover, it is imperative to revise one's perception of the role of women in conflict and recognize their potential in DDR processes. Additionally, the aforesaid processes must be modified in order to better suit the interests of women and facilitate their inclusion in them. As far as the financial aspect of the issue goes, more funds need to be dedicated to peacebuilding projects to the purpose of promoting gender equality, as evidenced by the fact that UN fund allocation remains below the 15% limit that was designated by the Secretary General.

Lastly, the majority of experts find themselves in agreement with the statement that the solution of this issue is mostly a matter of better enforcement. There is little need for further treaties or conventions judging by the outcomes of those that are already in effect. Enforcement could be improved through the implementation of laws regarding both gender equality as a whole and the topic in question, which is a more specific aspect of it. As outlined in an earlier section of this guide, Rwanda serves as an example of the efficacy of a legally based approach.

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