Submission to the Office of the
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Response to questions on the mainstreaming of
the human rights of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations

3 April 2021

Summary

In Africa, and in Mali in particular, challenges remain for women's protection, participation and empowerment in preventing and responding to conflict. Political will to implement gender equity commitments remains a critical deficit at both national and international levels. This is true both in terms of real action (such as the persistent and ongoing failure to counteract the exclusion of women from formal and informal political processes) and in terms of a lack of consistent and targeted funding to promote women's empowerment and gender equity.

Efforts to empower women should aim to educate and train women to understand their rights as well as their potential power and status in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Such efforts should also aim to build on women's current foundations of strength in their communities and societies. In Africa, women's power is often rooted in their power within families, *e.g.*, as mothers or sisters, and in terms of their communal relationships to one another as women, including intergenerationally. While stereotypes that limit women should not be emphasized or perpetuated, women's positive understandings of their own roles and place in society can and should form part of their empowerment.

1. Legal and Normative Frameworks in Africa and in Mali in particular

In the context of the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), for example, States Parties have been asked to put in place National Action Plans (NAPs). At the level of ECOWAS, twelve states out of fifteen have done so, most of which do not have adequate funding and the involvement of women in national security issues has never been welcomed or supported by those in power, nor by the armed forces.

The objective of Mali's NAP is to promote the participation of women in post-conflict governance and in the implementation of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation resulting from the Algiers process.

The priority areas are:

- Prevention of conflicts and gender-based violence linked to armed conflicts
- Prevention and rehabilitation of victims
- Participation and representation
- Promotion of gender and women
- Coordination and monitoring-evaluation of actions

Strategic framework plan of Mali's National Action Plan on Security Council Resolution 1325

Priority axis 1 : PARTICIPATION	
Objective	**Indicator**
Women participate actively and equitably in the peace and reconciliation process and occupy decision-making positions in governance bodies at all levels.	Rate of representativeness and significant participation of women in peace and reconciliation mechanisms and in decision-making positions in governance bodies at all levels.
Priority axis 2 : PREVENTION	
Objective	**Indicator**
Conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is prevented, and women contribute significantly to the prevention of conflicts and other threats to human security.	Prevalence of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, and level of women's involvement in preventing conflict and other threats to human security.
Priority axis 3 : PROTECTION	
Objective	**Indicator**
The fundamental rights of women and girls during all phases of conflict and in peacetime are respected, protected and promoted and their human security is guaranteed.	Protection of the fundamental rights of women and girls by national legislation and level of confidence in the security measures in place.
Priority axis 4 : AID AND EMPOWERMENT	
Objective	**Indicator**
Women and girls are agents of change, their specific needs and strategic interests are taken into account and their human security is ensured in crisis and reconstruction situations.	Level and type of participation of women and girls in crisis and reconstruction situations.

2. Roles of Women's Organizations in Conflict Management and Resolution

Despite policy frameworks developed at the international and national levels, women face enormous challenges in their participation in peacebuilding processes and in translating normative instruments into real rights. Texts and mechanisms are struggling to translate into policies. Meanwhile, women continue to be the preferred target in armed conflicts. They are the main victims of violations of fundamental human rights: cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment (rapes, mass rapes, harassment, unwanted pregnancies, HIV / AIDS or STIs contamination, sexual slavery, stoning, restrictions, etc.).

Much remains to be done in terms of local ownership of sub-regional and regional mechanism texts. A great deal of work must be done at the level of the authorities at the local and national levels, in particular parliamentarians and the defense and security forces, who are sorely lacking in information in this area. Reflection on the roles and responsibilities of women in governance and conflict prevention is needed in order to identify the status of women in the societies concerned, because it is the status that makes it possible to frame the role in society, in all its aspects. Finally, women's associations and NGOs are not sufficiently coordinated and connected in order to maximize their influence and impact.

Women's roles in prevention

Women play a key role in the processes of prevention, maintenance and consolidation of peace, and reconstruction of democracy. Women have high levels of awareness of various changes in their environments, and are key communicators of information pertinent to their communities. They often act as mediators and facilitators between factions, and they are well placed to restore and strengthen mutual trust within and between communities. Nevertheless, women's organizations and peace initiatives on the ground continue to be marginalized or ignored by national, regional and international actors.

Women's roles in conflict resolution

Women are well placed to transmit messages between factions, to identify useful strategies in negotiations and mediations, and to craft relevant strategies. To make better use of these advantages, it is necessary to adopt a gender-sensitive approach to policing and among the armed forces.

Women's roles in peacebuilding

It is critical that States follow through with their commitments to facilitate women leaders' participation in negotiation and conflict resolution processes at the highest level. At the moment, women are neither adequately represented at the decision-making level nor involved in negotiations and peace agreements, although they still bear the burden of war. Differentiated gender needs are often

ignored during periods of post-conflict reconstruction. Women's ability to effectively influence peace processes is often compromised by the threat or actual experience of sexual gender-based violence (SGBV), which usually worsens during and after armed conflict, and by social prejudices (including customs and traditions) that are obstacles to the full political participation of women in many countries.

Peacebuilding must be conceived as a broad political framework and a collective, sustained effort aimed at building lasting peace, in which women have a key role to play. In African societies in general, although institutional and public power is dominated by men, women hold significant strategic power. Women are socially positioned to play a regulatory role in society as a "force of integration," whereas men often act as a "force of disintegration." Women may therefore act as disrupters in cycles of violence. It is important to note, however, that African women may prefer to act in the shadows, or in a natural extension of their roles as mother and sister, and more in the domestic sphere than in the public sphere. Where they are respected and included in peacebuilding processes, they are well-placed to consolidate links or focal points of the mediation chain.

3. **Suggested Strategies and Actions**

Women are more than 50% of African populations. They can and must take their destinies into their own hands. The sharing of experiences between women of yesterday and today can be a real driving force for new generations. This could encourage the young people to continue the struggles led by the old ones and for the former to pass the torch to the young.

Women must:

- Arm themselves with courage and political will, to conquer the heights of governance, however high they may be;
- Have clear ideas of their importance and role in governance, which is not that of political "electoral cattle" only;
- Strengthen solidarity and cooperation between individual women, associations, and women's NGOs for the promotion of women's status, roles and responsibilities at the national, sub-regional, regional and international levels;
- Be heard in all aspects of peace negotiations;
- Have access to education and training in good governance, including through scaling up successful capacity-building initiatives for women;
- Be empowered to strengthen their civic awareness in the same ways as men do.

The national governments and the international community must:

- Contribute to the emergence of female leadership in building peace and social restructuring for a more equitable society;

- Support survivors of SGBV to access holistic financial and psychological support where needed to cope with the repercussions of SGBV;
- Ensure women victims of violence are supported and protected sufficiently so that they are recognized as legitimate victims and so that they can access adequate and holistic justice processes in national and / or international courts, including by providing adequate protection from reprisals and combatting social stigma;
- Establish programs of visits and exchanges at local, national and regional level;
- Undertake activities to promote national, sub-regional and regional solidarity among women's organizations, including by encouraging meetings between women leaders from various backgrounds;
- Increase funding for gender equality;
- Support the dissemination of information on gender, and on Women, Peace and Security.