



SHAPING NARRATIVES & ADVANCING WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY AGENDA IN **AFRICA.**

ANNUAL REPORT

2023



LIST OF ACRONYMS

AfiP Collective	African Feminist Collective on Feminist-Informed Policies
AU	African Union
COP28	Conference of the Parties 28
CRF	Continental Results Framework
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
ECOWAS	Economic Community for West African States
FEMNET	African Women's Development and Communication Network
FFP	Feminist Foreign Policy
GIMAC	Gender Is My Agenda Campaign
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority for Development
NAPs	National Action Plans
REWiB	Researchers Without Borders
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
UAF-Africa	Urgent Action Fund-Africa
UN	United Nations
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WANEP	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding
WPS	Women, Peace, and Security

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Over the past year, Researchers Without Borders (REWiB) Africa has championed various initiatives in pursuit of advancing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in Africa. This report encapsulates the milestones and impact achieved in our commitment to a peaceful continent built on the principles of feminist peace, where individuals live in environments free from violence, inequality, and the violation of human rights.

The past year has been marked by outstanding achievements rooted in the belief that if data is collected through research and dialogues, then information will be made available to advocate for the increased implementation of the WPS agenda. From ground-breaking conversations on Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) in Africa to conducting research on women's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in conflict-affected settings to influence policy changes at regional and international levels, we have reached significant milestones that underscore our commitment to making a tangible difference.

Our initiatives have yielded substantial progress in advancing the WPS agenda. For instance, we have seen a measurable shift in the discourse surrounding FFP on the continent as more African feminists, including young women, have embraced the need to have conversations and question the approaches to FFP that marginalize African feminists' voices and perspectives resulting in a deepened understanding of the concept and increased commitment. Moreover, our work in assessing the SRHR of women and girls in conflict-affected countries has provided actionable insights and recommendations for improving the protection of their rights. The impact of this initiative is not only seen in the research study and policy brief published on the state of women's SRHR in specific African

countries but also in the broader awareness and advocacy generated around the intersection of conflict, SRHR, and the need for comprehensive legal frameworks.



Furthermore, our increased visibility and engagement in key regional and international spaces, such as the GIMAC Pre-Summit Meeting, Commission on the Status of Women, and the AU WPS Forum, have not only allowed us to actively shape discussions but also establish new networks for the implementation of the WPS agenda in Africa.

In the face of challenges such as increased insecurity and the limited resources for the implementation of the WPS agenda, REWiB has embraced adaptability. We also learned valuable lessons on the need for localized solutions and the viability of digital spaces for feminist organizing which have fortified our commitment to sustainable solutions to the challenges that Africa faces. One key lesson is the power of collaboration which has been central to our success.

Partnerships with like-minded individuals and organizations such as African Feminism, FEMNET, Urgent Action Fund-Africa, and the Women's International Peace Centre have expanded the reach of our initiatives and amplified our impact.

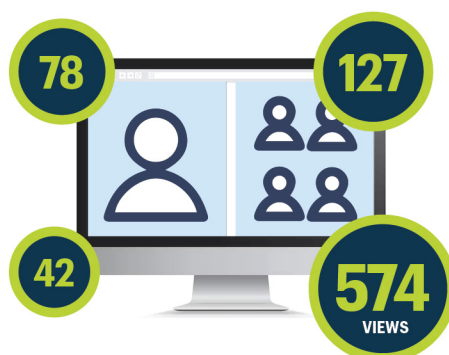
As we reflect on the past, we eagerly look towards the future. Researchers Without Borders Africa remains steadfast in its mission to provide credible research as a tool to advocate for sustainable peace and development in Africa, not just as a goal but as an everyday reality. REWiB aims to develop a Strategic Plan, strengthen collaborations, hold regional WPS dialogues, develop an African feminist-informed policy manifesto, research the implementation of the WPS agenda, and track African Union Peace and Security Council decisions on WPS.

We will strengthen our reach in conflict-affected regions on the continent, advocating for increased implementation of the WPS agenda to ensure that women are not only agents of peace but also equal partners in shaping the continent's future.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

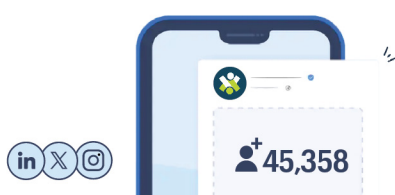
78 participants attended the webinar on 'Defining and Reclaiming Feminist-Informed Foreign Policy in Africa'

42 participants attended the webinar on 'Assessing the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) of Women and Girls in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Countries in Africa'



127 participants attended our inaugural webinar on 'Interrogating Feminist Foreign Policies from African Feminist Perspectives'

574 people viewed our two FFP webinar recordings on YouTube



- Our social media posts reached **45,358** users

INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving landscape of global peace and security, the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda stands as a beacon of progress and inclusivity. In nearly 90 countries, National Action Plans (NAPs) on United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 have been developed to set priorities for action by government bodies and other agencies. In other countries, gender-sensitive peace and security priorities have been considered in sectoral strategies on gender, justice, or national security. To show their commitment to ensuring the implementation of the WPS agenda, several countries have developed Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) aimed at ensuring that funding mechanisms address gender equality and women's empowerment.

However, more than 23 years after the adoption of UNSCR1325, there is an increase in militarized responses to peacebuilding, that do not address the root causes of conflict or the needs of women and girls affected by conflicts, whether it be violent state-based warfare, civil war, internal conflict or violent extremism. Even during transitional and peacebuilding periods, women continue to be marginalized, with domestic and international stakeholders overlooking their contributions and excluding them from formal peace processes.



In Africa, over 30 countries have developed NAPs and 6 regional bodies, including the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), East African Community (EAC), the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS) have developed Regional Action Plans (RAPs) to prioritise African women's peace and security needs. More women are raising their voices in peacebuilding processes, especially at the grassroots where they are playing a crucial role in conflict prevention and reconciliation, fostering dialogue and rebuilding communities from within. Advances in legal frameworks and increased awareness of gender-based violence are paving the way for better protection and support for survivors. A notable illustration of this is South Sudan's ratification of the ground-breaking Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) in the year of the Protocol's 20th anniversary.

Despite improvements, most nations fall short of set quotas, particularly in the Participation Pillar and as a result, women's meaningful engagement in political, social, and economic spheres, especially at higher decision-making levels, remains relatively low. Additionally, the implementation of NAPs faces hurdles, with weak monitoring and evaluation frameworks hindering progress. Limited funding dedicated to the WPS Agenda in national budgets further exacerbates these challenges, particularly concerning the Prevention Pillar.

The under-representation of women in politics, diplomacy, and the security sector, which often serves as the source for negotiators and mediators, remains a fundamental issue. In the ongoing conflict in Sudan, women have been glaringly absent from efforts towards a ceasefire agreement. Efforts to include women civil society experts in peace processes encounter resistance from political leaders, and dedicated resources for their participation are lacking. The data on the extent to which the WPS Agenda has been implemented remains limited, emphasizing the need for robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

The Continental Results Framework (CRF) which was developed by the African Union (AU) Office of the Special Envoy on WPS to monitor and report on the progress and implementation of the WPS Agenda lacks the active involvement of civil society organizations, specifically women's rights organizations, which limits its perspectives.

Over the past year, Researchers Without Borders has endeavoured to respond to the above-mentioned gaps, including the need to track how Feminist Foreign Policy is translated to gender-responsive aid at national and regional levels. This report provides an overview of the efforts made by REWiB in 2023 to advocate for the increased implementation of the WPS Agenda, promote environments that safeguard against violence and ensure the active participation of women and girls in the decision-making processes that shape their lives.

OUR WORK IN 2023:

Researchers Without Borders Africa spearheaded several initiatives over the past year including dialogues to generate information and track the implementation of the WPS agenda in Africa from a civil society perspective; monitoring the implementation of Feminist Foreign Policies in Africa; conducting research on the state of women's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in fragile and conflict-affected settings in Africa; and participating in regional and international spaces such as the Gender is my Agenda Campaign (GIMAC), commemoration of the Maputo Protocol's 20th anniversary, the annual AU WPS Forum and the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

01

INTERROGATING FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICIES FROM AFRICAN FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES

On March 7th 2023, REWiB in collaboration with Women's International Peace Centre, African Feminism and FEMNET held a webinar to interrogate the principles of FFP as it applies to promoting peace in Africa, and more specifically to the WPS agenda. The webinar which was held on the margins of CSW was moderated by Dr Helen Kezie-Nwoha and the speakers were Ms. Memory Kachambwa, Ms. Rosebell Kagumire and Prof. Toni Hastrup.

The webinar sought to identify existing African knowledge on FFP and ensure a more intersectional gender justice work and anti-imperial approaches are incorporated as well as agree on the minimum standards of FFP towards the promotion of the WPS agenda. It was attended by 127 participants who included African feminists, WPS and FFP experts in academia and civil society, and young women.

The discussion highlighted the need for FFP to transcend conventional notions of gender equality, advocating instead for robust anti-imperial and anti-colonial commitments to policies that prioritize the needs of marginalized groups. The speakers emphasized the pivotal role of African feminists as trailblazers in shaping FFP narratives, the need for accountability mechanisms for governments, and leveraging existing tools like the African Feminist Charter and Maputo Protocol in defining policies from an African Feminist perspective.

Even in modern times, foreign policy remains an exclusionary domain for women and feminists. It is imperative to examine women's involvement in peace processes and their capacity to make foreign policy decisions as leaders. But just because women or feminists are not in formal decision-making positions, does not mean that African feminists are not thinking or theorizing about foreign policy. Feminists propose a decolonial way of thinking about foreign policy, situated within a broader vision of a new feminist foreign policy that is anti-imperialist centres marginalized communities' social and economic well-being and prioritises human security and dignity.

Prof. Toni Hastrup



The webinar culminated in a shared agreement that the impact of feminist-informed foreign policies can only be realised by strengthening African women's movements and ensuring that governments and regional entities are held accountable for addressing challenges, dismantling masculinist hegemony, and integrating feminist analyses into both global and continental decisions. The overarching objective remains the generation of knowledge, raising awareness and implementing practical actions aligned with a pan-African feminist agenda towards holding states accountable for their foreign policies.

The webinar recording has since garnered at least 414 views on YouTube and following the webinar, the actions below were agreed upon: 

- 1 Develop a research agenda for feminist-informed policies in Africa to identify critical issues and determine their solutions.**
- 2 Engage existing African Feminist Transnational networks in their range of works from climate to economic justice.**
- 3 Develop an African feminist-informed policy manifesto and action plan, that is rooted in the principles of anti-colonialism, anti-racism, and anti-capitalism, using existing tools such as the African feminist charter.**
- 4 Create spaces for connection between different feminists, and in particular engage often marginalized groups such as women in rural areas, to coordinate and amplify collective actions; continuously provide a learning platform to improve the knowledge of the African women's movement and improve their engagement with feminism and policymaking at all levels.**

02

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE AFRICAN FEMINIST COLLECTIVE ON FEMINIST-INFORMED POLICIES (AFIP COLLECTIVE)

Following the above webinar, Researchers Without Borders established the African Feminist Collective on Feminist-Informed Policies (AfiP Collective) to nurture a space for African feminists to collaborate and harness African feminist knowledge to respond to historic and contemporary injustices and challenges that stem from within and without so that Africans can take lead in deciding how foreign policies should be implemented in their countries. The founding members of the AfiP Collective are Toni Haastrup, Rosebell Kagumire, and Helen Kezie-Nwoha who have worked together since 2022 to articulate African feminist perspectives in the wake of the multiple adoptions of Feminist Foreign Policy. Together, they bring expertise and many years of experience from academia, media and the civil society space, having also worked in various African countries, diaspora and feminist communities.

The AfiP Collective seeks to prioritise the voices and perspectives of African feminists within ongoing global discourses that shape policies. This is to ensure that policies from the global North address the implications of hierarchical power relations and are informed by African feminist principles.

In recognition of limited research on the reproductive health and rights of women in conflict settings in Africa, REWiB with support from Urgent Action Fund Africa (UAF-Africa) conducted research to assess the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls in six fragile and conflict-affected countries in Africa, including Sudan, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Mali, Ethiopia, and Nigeria.

The research reviewed existing literature through the analysis of various reports from humanitarian organizations, academic research and online news articles to respond to the research goal. The research identified legal instruments for the promotion and protection of SRHR of women at global, regional and national levels, examined policy implementation gaps including availability and sufficiency of SRHR services; and provided recommendations to improve the protection and promotion of the SRHRs of women and girls in these fragile countries. The research which produced a report and policy brief made the following key recommendations:

- 1 In Nigeria, the government should close the gaps in health outcomes, by rehabilitating destroyed health facilities and building more healthcare facilities to provide a wide range of reproductive health services in the northeast region to mitigate the high levels of preventable maternal deaths due to poor quality of care and ensure access to comprehensive SRHR services, including psychosocial counselling and support. The government should also take immediate steps to comply with international and regional human rights obligations regarding access to maternal health care services, abortion, and other related SRHR services for survivors of sexual violence.
- 2 In Ethiopia, the Government should strengthen GBV response by increasing Women and Girls' Friendly Spaces and One-Stop Centres, increasing community awareness raising on GBV and distributing dignity kits, especially to displaced women and girls. Strengthen GBV referral pathways including improving the capabilities of frontline service providers, and mainstream GBV into humanitarian efforts by establishing GBV evaluations and standard operating procedures (SOPs) to guide programming and trends.
- 3 In Mali, government funding for reproductive health services should be increased in addition to expanding access to comprehensive sexuality education and family planning services, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas. The capacity of the healthcare system should be increased to provide quality reproductive health services, through strengthened partnerships between the government, international organizations, and civil society organizations.
- 4 The government of CAR must strengthen legislation to protect the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and ensure resources are available for law enforcement agencies to effectively prosecute cases of gender-based violence. Increase collaboration with civil society organizations to provide comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information and services to women to increase access to crucial services. Additionally, community-based initiatives should be established to empower women and girls, such as providing education and skills training to help them become more self-sufficient and less vulnerable to violence.

- 5 In South Sudan, development partners, international organizations, and the private sector should increase their support for the provision of sexual and reproductive health services to women. Efforts should be made to expand access to health services, including sexual and reproductive health services, to women and girls in rural and conflict-affected areas. Addressing societal barriers that restrict women's access to sexual and reproductive health information and services and promoting gender equality and women's empowerment is crucial.
- 6 In Sudan, efforts should be made to increase the safety and security of women and ensure their access to services that can enable them to recover from the impacts of violence. Addressing social and cultural attitudes towards sexuality and reproductive health is critical to ensuring that women can fully exercise their rights. Civil society organizations should also be engaged to address the issue.

Subsequently, Researchers Without Borders published a research study and policy brief on the state of women's SRHR in the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Mali, Nigeria, South Sudan, and Sudan.

04

WEBINAR ON ASSESSING THE SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS (SRHR) OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN FRAGILE AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED COUNTRIES IN AFRICA

Following the research, Researchers Without Borders in collaboration with the Women's International Peace Centre and the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) hosted a webinar to assess the SRHR of women and girls in fragile and conflict-affected countries in Africa, including Mali, Nigeria, Central African Republic, South Sudan, and Sudan. This webinar which was held on 24th May 2023 was attended by 42 participants and discussed the impact of conflict on women's SRHR in the mentioned countries and identified recommendations for improving the protection of their rights. The objective of the webinar was to share the research findings and also generate input from a wider population on SRHRs of women in fragile and conflict-affected countries in Africa. It was moderated by Sandra Tumwesigye and the speakers were: Latifah Namutebi, Queeneth Tawo, Dr. Rabab Baldo and Sarah Abeja.

The webinar unanimously agreed that ongoing conflicts and socio-political instability in the identified countries negatively affect women's access to SRHR services due to the destruction of infrastructure; inaccessibility of services as a result of heightened insecurity and displacement; and impunity resulting from the limited implementation of legal protection measures. Moreover, the above challenges are exacerbated by negative cultural norms and religious taboos that limit women's control over their bodies. Because women are excluded from peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes, their health needs are not prioritised in relief and recovery efforts, including by humanitarian actors. A reflection on the situation in Sudan indicated there has been an increase in SGBV with limited data on incidences; and survivors limited access to services.

The war, which began on the fifteenth of April, has disrupted government systems, making it difficult to address SRHR issues. Sexual and gender-based violence cases are on the rise, with challenges in verifying accurate numbers due to mobility issues and social stigma preventing survivors from reporting.

Dr Rabab Baldo on Sudan



The speakers called for changes in laws that criminalize HIV infection and the development of comprehensive reproductive health legislation. They also urged that advocacy efforts should aim to repeal restrictive laws, provide comprehensive sexuality education programs, and create legal frameworks supporting women's SRHR. The following recommendations were proposed: 

- 1 **Improved data collection and monitoring to track progress on SRHR issues through the use of enhanced data systems and analysis to inform evidence-based policies and programs.**
- 2 **Multi-sectoral collaboration to address women's SRHR comprehensively through partnerships with international organizations and civil society to supplement national efforts.**
- 3 **Ensuring access to SRHR information for women in rural areas and conflict zones.**

05

STATEMENT OF INTENT ON FEMINIST-INFORMED POLICIES ABROAD AND AT HOME

In July 2023, the AfiP Collective published the Statement of Intent on Feminist-Informed Policies Abroad and at Home, informed by African decolonial feminist ethos. The statement emerged from the need to address the lack of representation of African feminist perspectives in discussions on feminist foreign policies. It seeks to articulate the aspirations of African feminists and address the need for change both within Africa and in how other countries and international entities relate to the continent.

We believe the only way forward for feminist-informed policies to work for Africans is to reclaim feminism within African policymaking spaces beyond tokenism as essential to social justice. Technocratic demands of gender equality within this unequal system are not enough. We want an end to the extractivist exploitation of African people, labour and resources that serve growth elsewhere even when the majority of Africans are stuck in cycles of impoverishment. We maintain that any fruitful engagement in this global discourse of change that feminist foreign policy ostensibly brings must account for us to tell our own stories.

AfiP Collective



The statement is currently one of the tools that support ongoing efforts to promote feminist-informed policies in Africa and is structured around several key themes, including: 

- 1 **Advocating for the creation of spaces for African feminist bodies and knowledge to underpin interpretations of feminist futures across policy areas.**
- 2 **Highlighting the need for funding for feminist research, especially that which centres on Africa, as it tends to be underfunded.**

- 3 Challenging global militarization, emphasizing its impact on conflicts and the need to address the increasing investments in weapons transfer, at the expense of social services.
- 4 Addressing the importance of integrating indigenous perspectives, particularly in the African context, in climate policies and actions.
- 5 Identifying migration justice as a feminist issue.
- 6 Calling for attention to existing mechanisms like the Maputo Protocol.
- 7 Advocating for reparations and reparative justice at the heart of development, challenging the hierarchical relationship between the global north and the global south.

06

DEFINING AND RECLAIMING FEMINIST-INFORMED FOREIGN POLICY IN AFRICA

On November 24th 2023, the AfIP Collective hosted an online conversation to reflect on the journey and developments in FFP. The conversation sought to explore how promises can be translated into inclusive and transformative realities for African women and marginalized populations. The webinar arose from a recognition that mainstream policy approaches have often failed to address the nuanced and complex issues faced by many socially, economically, and politically marginalized populations in African countries.

The webinar which was attended by at least 78 participants explored how FFP aspirations align with African feminist narratives and practices, taking into account the continent's rich diversity and the imperative to develop solutions relevant to its countries and histories. During the conversation, several gaps between feminist principles in foreign policy discourse and the lived realities of African women were identified. The webinar also provided a platform for African feminists and women to develop feminist alternatives to the status quo in Africa through care and conversation.

The speakers including Rosebell Kagumire, Toni Haastrup, Reem Abbas and Memory Kachambwa reflected on the relationship between decolonization, FFP, and the WPS agenda in Africa. They outlined challenges to the WPS agenda, including the militarization of states, proxy wars, and the disconnect between military spending and national security. They called for Feminist Foreign Policy to be demilitarized, emphasizing the need for coherence between a country's internal and foreign policies. It was noted that in many African countries where the political marketplace is dominated by men with guns, armed forces, and militias as well as traditional leadership and flawed political parties, women's meaningful participation in decision-making and peace processes cannot be guaranteed.

In solidarity with the women of Sudan amidst the ongoing conflict, the webinar called for a comprehensive approach to address the conflict's root causes. For instance, the use of rape as a weapon of war cannot be untied from social norms that turn women's bodies into commodities for exploitation. The crucial role of women's participation in peace talks, which presently empower men with guns without paying attention to women's lived experiences, was also stressed.

The speakers also discussed African feminist perspectives regarding climate action and advocated for the prioritization of the climate crisis in FFP, particularly in addressing colonial legacies as well as allocating adequate resources and challenging the diversion of resources to militarization.

In the face of climate challenges, it is imperative to critically examine existing financing models. As we anticipate the discussions at COP 28 regarding adaptation and loss and damage funds, it's crucial to highlight the absence of reparations discourse. I call on governments with Feminist Foreign Policies to courageously confront systemic gender inequalities and oppressive systems in this crucial dialogue.

Memory Kachambwa



The webinar recording has since garnered at least 160 views on YouTube.

07

PARTICIPATING IN KEY REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SPACES ON WPS AND FFP

Researchers Without Borders actively engaged in multiple continental and global gatherings, focusing on critical themes related to Women, Peace, and Security as well as Feminist Foreign Policy. Our involvement extended beyond mere participation, having played a pivotal role in shaping discussions, examining the current landscape to guide future programming, and contributing to amplifying these conversations in the digital space. Some of the significant include: 

- **39th GIMAC Pre-Summit Meeting (February 2023)**
- **Commission on the Status of Women (March 2023)**
- **20th Anniversary Commemoration of the Maputo Protocol (July 2023)**
- **5th GIMAC Mid-year Coordination Meeting with the AU and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) (July 2023)**
- **UNSCR 1325 Week (October 2023)**
- **Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy Conference (November 2023)**
- **4th Annual AU WPS Forum (December 2023)**

At these meetings, new networks and partnerships were established for the implementation of the WPS agenda in Africa.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED



Researchers Without Borders encountered an array of challenges over the past year, such as:

- Increased insecurity in fragile and conflict-affected regions limited our interactions with constituents, especially those in hard-to-reach areas.
- Limited resources for the implementation of the WPS agenda posed challenges to the effectiveness of our initiatives, for instance, the coverage of our research and meaningful participation in regional and global spaces.

In response to the above challenges, we embraced new technologies and partnerships to achieve our goals. We learned lessons below on the ongoing need for adaptability and collective advocacy.

- There is strength in collaboration as it promotes an intersectional approach that recognises the interconnectedness of social justice issues and holds greater strength in reshaping policy narratives.
- Digital spaces are a viable alternative for feminist organising where physical convenings are not feasible.
- There is a need to incorporate localized solutions, to navigate the unique challenges posed by cultural contexts and insecure environments.

LOOKING AHEAD

Building upon our achievements and lessons learned during the past year, we shall focus on providing more cutting-edge information for improved implementation of the WPS agenda through strengthening collaborations and partnerships to enhance the impact of our initiatives and addressing resource limitations by exploring diverse funding avenues.

We shall:



Develop a Strategic Plan



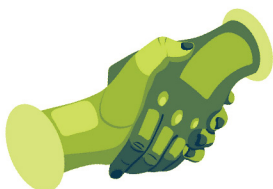
Develop the African Feminist-Informed Policy Manifesto.



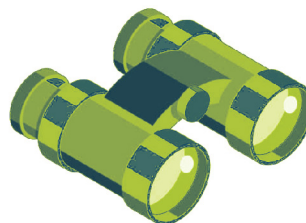
Hold online regional WPS and FFP dialogues to generate information and track the implementation of the WPS agenda and the application of FFP in Africa.



Research the implementation of the WPS agenda in Africa.



Establish a working group on FFP beyond the AfiP Collective, drawing on the expertise of African feminists across the continent including peace and security, defence, feminist economy, climate justice, migration, and sexual and reproductive health and rights.



Track the African Union Peace and Security Council decisions on WPS.

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

PARTNERS



