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WPS BULLETIN

# Welcome to the January 2025 Issue of the **WPS Bulletin**

**A Message from the Editor**

Dear Readers,

Conflict reshapes societies in ways that are often devastating, and its impacts as always affect those who are already vulnerable, like women and girls. Women and girls bear the brunt of war and instability-facing heightened risks of gender-based violence, displacement, and loss of livelihoods. In this Bulletin, there are various articles that highlight a new threat to women and girls' sexual and reproductive health, peace and security, and their livelihoods. We choose however to not only look at women as victims, but as leaders, peace builders and agents of change.

This WPS Bulletin unveils the urgent need for women and girls' protection during conflict and their inclusion and leadership in peace efforts. The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda, established through the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and its subsequent resolutions, recognize that sustainable peace is only possible when women are actively involved in decision making and in conflict resolution. Despite progress in some areas, challenges remain as women continue to be underrepresented in peace negotiations, and their voices are often silenced in rebuilding efforts. However, their resilience and contributions cannot be ignored. This edition explores the realities women face in conflict zones, amplifies their stories and discusses the policies and actions needed to ensure a more just and peaceful world. Thank you for joining us in this crucial conversation. Your engagement, advocacy, and commitment to gender-responsive peace efforts can help to make a difference.

In solidarity and peace,

Helen Kezie-Nwoha

Editor

## Attacks on the Last Functional Health Facility in Sudan

As the conflict in Sudan rages on, health care is under strain. A recent drone airstrike on the Saudi Teaching Maternal hospital in El Fashser killed at least 70 people and injured dozens, many of whom were women and children seeking care. This incident is the latest escalation in a 20-month civil war sparked by a brutal power tussle between the RSF forces and the SAF troops, contributing to one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with over 20,000 lives lost and millions displaced. The conflict has also escalation of gender based violence, further hindering progress on the WPS agenda, as women and girls are disproportionately affected. Pregnant women and survivors of rape now face severe barriers to accessing reproductive health services, as hospitals have been destroyed or taken over by the insurgents who divert medication and medical personnel away from civilians, leading to a spike in maternal deaths. This situation calls for immediate humanitarian action, including urgent deployment of mobile clinics, field hospitals, and skilled medical personnel to provide life-saving care to the injured, displaced and pregnant women; ensuring that medical and humanitarian aid can safely reach affected communities; enhancing support services for survivors of violence and ensuring robust protection for women and girls; and empowering women from Darfur to have a voice in peace negotiations and in rebuilding healthcare infrastructure

https://www.cnn.com/2025/01/26/africa/sudan-hospital-north-darfur-airstrike-70-killed-intl/index.html#:~:text=At%20least%2070%20people%20were,and%20the%20World%20Health%20Organization

## Escalated Conflict in Eastern DRC

The conflict in Goma, in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, has escalated significantly following intensified offensives by the M23 rebel group. In late January 2025, the M23 rebels, allegedly and reportedly backed by Rwanda, launched a major offensive, capturing Goma, the capital of North Kivu province. With a population exceeding one million, this strategic city lies in a mineral rich region, raising questions about whether external interests are exploiting the conflict for economic gain. As in most conflicts women, girls and other minority groups bear the brunt of the violence threatening the achievement of the provisions of the WPS agenda.

Reports indicate that nearly 3,000 people have been killed, thousands more injured, 700,000 displaced and numerous women and girls subjected to sexual violence, often with no prospect for justice. These developments underscore the urgent need for the international attention and a coordinated response to address both the humanitarian crisis and the structural factors perpetuating the conflict.

https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/new-m23-offensive-goma-why-long-lasting-conflict-not-only-about-minerals-and-what-are-its-implications-qa

# Climate Change and Conflict

Climate change has become a global concern, evident in increasing frequency of wildfires, hurricanes, floods and droughts. In Africa, particularly in conflict affected regions are disproportionately impacted by climate induced crises, largely due to existing gender inequalities and social structures. Key consequences include;

- Food and water security: Droughts, floods, and changing weather patterns reduce agricultural yield and limit clean water supplies. Women, who often form the backbone of small holder farming, face heightened economic instability.

- Displacement and vulnerability: Climate disasters displace millions;, women and girls are especially at higher risk of gender based violence in refugee camps and other displacement settings.

- Health risks: Malnutrition, heat- related illnesses, and waterborne diseases disproportionately affect pregnant women and those lacking healthcare access.
- Conflict over resources: Climate stress increases competition over land and water, frequently exacerbating existing conflicts and violence in vulnerable regions.

Though disproportionately affected by climate change, women are powerful agents of change. Women led organizations play a pivotal role in mediating resource-based conflicts and promoting sustainable land and water management. Women farmers are adopting resilient agricultural techniques, improving food security, and bolstering community resilience. In indigenous and rural communities, women leaders advocate for climate policies that prioritize vulnerable populations, while their knowledge and networks enhance disaster preparedness and emergency responses, making climate adaptation more inclusive.

To fully integrate climate change into the WPS framework, governments and organizations must ensure women's participation in climate and security policymaking, including in climate negotiations. This requires increased funding for women- led climate resilience projects in conflict-affected areas and the implementation of legal protections and support services to address gender based violence among climate displaced communities. Finally, gathering and applying gender- sensitive climate data will inform more equitable policies, strengthening both climate security and women's empowerment.

www.unhcr.org

## The South Sudan Conflict, Cholera Outbreak and the Impact on the WPS Agenda

The ongoing conflict in South Sudan, compounded by recurrent cholera outbreaks that began in September 2024 and have affected seven states especially Unity, Upper Nile, and Central Equatorial has severely impacted women and girls, and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. Widespread displacement, food insecurity, and the collapse of healthcare systems has increased vulnerability to disease and exploitation, particularly sexual exploitation. Cholera exacerbated by limited access to clean water and sanitation in overcrowded displacement camps, disproportionately affects pregnant women and girls. These women, who take on the roles of household heads and providers, must travel long distances for water, exposing them to attacks by insurgents who perpetrate rape and other forms of violence. The presence of diseases further weakens their immunity, contributing to high maternal mortality rates.

Additionally, the crisis has heightened gender based violence, intimate partner violence, and sexual exploitation. This insecurity and the associated health challenges restrict women's ability to engage in peace processes and community leadership, furthering their exclusion from decision making roles. The situation underscores the urgent need for targeted health interventions, stronger gender sensitive humanitarian responses, and inclusive peace building efforts to protect and empower women in South Sudan.

https://www.who.int

## Advancing the Rights of Ethiopian Migrant Women Domestic Workers: A Step Towards Equality and Dignity

Ethiopian migrant women domestic workers, like most African women have had to look for better economic opportunities outside their home country. They have often faced exploitation, abuse, and poor working conditions, particularly in the Middle East and Gulf countries. African countries whose citizens must export labour must do more to protect their rights under international labour laws. Advancing the rights of migrant workers should involve the following: legal protection, safe migration and providing pre-departure training on workers' rights and financial literacy. Without these strategies women and girls are more likely to be subjected to all forms of sexual violence, abuse and exploitation that infringe on their rights, wellbeing and empowerment.

There have been efforts by international organizations and the Ethiopian government to develop bilateral agreements to regulate employment conditions and ensure accountability from employers. However, more needs to be done to ensure that these agreements are honored and workers' rights upheld. It is also important to ensure that returnees are empowered through programs and economic opportunities which are crucial for their reintegration, recovery and long-term stability.

https://africa.unwomen.org

## Pathways to Advance the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in West and Central Africa

West and Central Africa remain regions affected by persistent conflict, insecurity, and humanitarian crises, which disproportionately impact women and girls. The WPS Agenda offers a transformative framework for fostering peace, security, and gender equality in such settings. In line with the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, ECOWAS launched the ECOWAS network of Women Mediators to promote women's involvement in peace negotiations. The network identifies, trains, and deploys women mediators in conflict resolution processes across the region. Some of the women leaders ECOWAS has actively collaborated with in these efforts include; Dr. Mariatou Kone', an Ivorian academic and Professor of Anthropology at Universite' Felix Houphouet-Boigny, who since 2013 has served and offered her expertise as a peace mediator for ECOWAS and the West Africa Network for Peace building (WANEP).

Another notable figure is Dr. Funmi Olonisakin, a Nigerian scholar and founding director of the African Leadership Centre. She has collaborated with ECOWAS in different capacities, focusing on women's roles in peace building, governance, and security sector reforms. Leymah Gbowee, a Liberian peace activist renowned for her role in ending the second Liberian civil war has made contributions through WANEP's Women in Peacebuilding Network. Her efforts in this regard, and in ending the Liberian civil war, have earned her worldwide recognition and awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Advancing the WPS Agenda in West and Central Africa requires a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach that places women at the center of peace and security efforts. By fostering inclusion, addressing GBV, and empowering women economically and socially, the region can move closer to a more peaceful and equitable future. https://dppa.un.org/en/women-peace-and-security

## Intersection between Femicide, Women, Peace and Security

The interconnection between femicide and the WPS Agenda is rooted in the shared focus of addressing gender-based violence (GBV), promoting women's rights and ensuring their protection and participation in peace building and security processes. Femicide, defined as the gender motivated killing of women, represents the most extreme and violent form of abuse and violence against women. It directly undermines women's physical security and fundamental rights. The rising prevalence of femicide highlights the systemic failure on the part of states to protect women and girls.

A 2024 United Nations report revealed that the proportion of women killed in conflict zones doubled in 2023, which accounts for 40% of all deaths in these areas. Additionally, there was a 50% increase in verified cases of conflict- related sexual violence between 2022 and 2023. The report went further to emphasize the severe impact of war on women, including restricted access to essential healthcare.

In regions like Sudan, survivors of sexual violence often lack necessary medical care, and many women die from pregnancy and childbirth related complications. The report further noted the underrepresentation of women in peace negotiations, with less than 10% of negotiators being female, despite evidence that their inclusion leads to more durable and effective peace agreements (theguardian.com).

These reports underscore the persistent and alarming issue of femicide in conflict zones, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to protect women and hold perpetrators accountable. In conflict settings there is breakdown of legal and social systems that should protect women. There is need to end impunity through the establishment of special investigative units and fast-track courts to handle femicide cases efficiently and fairly.

The WPS Agenda calls for the adoption of policies to protect women from violence and ensure accountability. Addressing femicide requires robust legal systems, accountability mechanisms, and protective measures that align with the WPS priorities.

https://reliefweb.int/report/world/highs-and-lows-women-peace-and-security-2024-and-looking-ahead-2025

# The Plight of Violence Extremism on Women and Girls: Who is Boko Haram?

Boko Haram is a violent extremist group primarily based in northeastern Nigeria, with activities extending to neighboring countries like Cameroon, Chad and Niger. Founded in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf, the group initially opposed western-style education and sought to establish an Islamic state governed by the Sharia Law. Since its radicalization in 2009, Boko Haram has carried out numerous terrorist attacks, including bombings, mass killings and abduction of young girls. The most infamous incident was the April 2014 kidnapping of 276 school girls from Chibok. These girls were subjected to severe injustices and human rights violations such as forced marriages to their captors, coerced conversion into Islam, and were compelled to participate in attacks against their own communities. Survivors have recounted experiences of sexual violence, forced labor, and psychological abuse during their time in captivity.

As of April 2023, 98 of the Chibok girls remain unaccounted for, highlighting ongoing concerns about their well-being and the challenges in securing their release. (amnesty.org)

Boko Haram has been responsible for the deaths and displacement of thousands, especially vulnerable groups like girls and women, contributing to a major humanitarian crisis in the Lake Chad region. With this continued insurgency, they continue to significantly impact the WPS agenda, and the strides made since its adoption, particularly in northeastern Nigeria, and the broader Lake Chad basin. The group's activities exacerbate challenges related to gender-based violence, displacement, marginalization and deterrence of women to properly take part in peace building processes in their communities. There is urgent need for the Nigerian government and all stakeholders to uphold the WPS Agenda and ensure lasting peace by prioritizing the protection of women through strengthened security measures to prevent abductions and GBV, and ensure holistic humanitarian aid reach displaced women and girls.

On January 14th, 2025, 40 civilians were killed by ISWAP in Dumba, this means women and girls in the attacked villages are at a high risk of sexual violence, abduction, and forced marriages - all these are the tactics that Boko Haram has used to violate and abuse women and girls.

https://www.aljazeera.com/tag/boko-haram/

## Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) - Culture Or Barbarism?

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a deeply contested practice, often framed as a cultural tradition by its practitioners and defenders, but a violation of human rights and abuse by human rights standard. This centuries old practice pre dominantly found in parts of Africa, the Middle East and Asia frequently justified through arguments of preserving purity, upholding tradition, or fulfilling religious obligations. However, at its core, FGM is a brutal act that inflicts irreversible harm, physically, mentally and emotionally on millions of girls and women worldwide. The act strips the women and girls of their dignity, self-worth, autonomy of their bodies is taken away and so is the chance to explore their sexuality to its fullest potential.

In communities where FGM is prevalent, it is often seen as a rite of passage signifying a girl's transition into womanhood and is also believed to increase girls' marriage prospects. Some religious and cultural leaders argue that it curbs promiscuity and immorality, maintaining social order, thereby ensuring chastity and fidelity. For many, abandoning the practice would mean going against social norms and may risk stigma and exclusion from the community.

FGM leaves lasting physical and psychological trauma on its victims. The procedure usually done under no anesthesia and under unsanitary conditions, leads to severe pain, infection and in some cases have led to death. The long-term complications include chronic pain, difficulties in childbirth, increased risk of still birth, and absence of sexual satisfaction. The United Nations and WHO, classify FGM as a form of gender-based violence and a violation of human rights, as a result many countries have outlawed this practice, but the implementation and enforcement remains a challenge. True change will come from within the communities, survivors' stories and activists challenging the status quo and offering alternative rites of passage.

In a world striving for gender equality and human dignity, practices that harm and oppress women and girls must be left in the past. For instance, The Gambia maintains its legal ban on female genital mutilation. In July 2024, the National Assembly of Gambia rejected a bill that sought to repeal the 2015 Women's (Amendment) Act, which criminalizes FGM. This decision was widely praised as a significant step in upholding the rights and well-being of women and girls. The Gambia's stance on FGM therefore, and WPS Agenda is evident in the commitment to protect women and girls from gender-based violence and harmful practices such as these, that exist today.

https://www.undp.org

# Angola's Solar Kitchen: Fostering Sustainable Development and Empowering Women

The Angola solar kitchen- Cooking with the Right Energy Initiative, launched by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Angola, aims to empower women in rural communities by providing solar-powered kitchens.

Access to energy is key for sustainable development, yet in Angola 83% of villages have no electricity. Empowering women through clean energy initiatives is pivotal for advancing the WPS Agenda, because access to affordable, reliable and sustainable energy not only enhances women's quality of life but also promotes gender equality and economic growth. According to UN Women, globally, approximately 1.1 billion people lack electricity and depend on solid fuels like firewood and animal dung for cooking and heating, leading to indoor pollution. In women headed households, the women and girls are mostly affected by the pollution accounting for 60% of the 4.3 million pre-mature deaths caused by indoor air pollution in 2012. Providing access to clean energy reduces health risks, the time women and girls spend on traditional fuel collection, allowing for more time for education and economic activities, community engagement, which are all vital for social cohesion and peacebuilding.

Angola's solar kitchen campaign empowers women because it not only provides income opportunities, but also positions women as leaders in their communities. Involving women in the planning and implementation of energy projects ensures that their perspectives are included, leading to more inclusive and effective solutions.

https://www.undp.org

# CSO Women Representatives from Tumaini Initiative discuss challenges and explore support for gender equality and disability inclusion.

The Tumaini Peace Initiative launched on May 9th, 2024, in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi, is a high-level mediation effort aimed at resolving the ongoing conflict in South Sudan. The term "Tumaini" translates to "hope" in Swahili, reflecting the initiative's mission to foster lasting peace and stability in the region, by addressing unresolved issues and incorporating diverse stakeholders into the peace process. The Tumaini Initiative, whose focus is empowering women and the marginalized in the community, had its women representatives cite several challenges hindering their meaningful participation in South Sudan's peace process and governance.

Some of the issues highlighted included underrepresentation in leadership roles. Despite the stipulated 35% quota for women's representation in the Revitalized Peace Agreement, this target remains unmet in various government sectors, with women occupying only 16% of positions in the executive branch with notable absence of female governors. Additionally, societal and institutional barriers like deep rooted cultural norms and institutional practices continue to marginalize women, limiting their opportunities for leadership and participation in governance. The delegates stress the need for transformative actions to overcome these barriers. Addressing these challenges therefore is crucial for fostering an inclusive peace process and ensuring women's voices are integral to South Sudan's future governance.

The conference highlighted the progress made by the involved parties, underscoring the importance of unified efforts in achieving sustainable peace and security for women in conflict-zones. The initiative indiates a commitment to cohesive strategies that address the unique challenges faced by women amidst ongoing conflicts, especially in Sudan.

www.womenpeacesecurity.org