



WPS BULLETIN

Welcome to the September Issue of the WPS Bulletin

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Introduction

This Bulletin offers insights into the top trends, stories, and social, economic, political analogies of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda in Africa. The continent is manifesting new, increased, and emerging threats to women, peace, and security, including but not limited to prolonged war, violent conflict and extremism, climate change effects, human trafficking, unprecedented and protracted refugee and humanitarian crises, and increased femicide rates in countries like Nigeria, Kenya, and Sierra Leone. These precarious situations have differential and devastating consequences for women and girls.

In the face of this, women in Africa are leading movements for peace and rebuilding communities, with strong evidence spotlighting women's critical role of participating in peace processes which contributes to longer and more resilient peace after conflict. In spite of this, women remain largely invisible to and are excluded from peace processes and negotiations.

It is against this backdrop that Researchers Without Borders (REWiB) is presenting top trends and stories on WPS that highlight the gaps in advocacy and redress and a call to attention to prioritize gendered peace processes and conflict resolution.





Trends to Shape Feminist Resistance & Resilience on Women, Peace and Security in Africa

Ensuring School Re-entry for Pregnant Teenagers and Young Mothers in Ugandan Refugee and Host Communities

Ensuring school entry for pregnant teenagers and young mothers is a multifaceted challenge that involves social, educational and health consideration. In Uganda the rate of teenage pregnancy has increased, and many girls are dropping out of school due to their pregnancy and this has affected the country greatly, the government was prompt to approve a revised guideline for the prevention and management of teenage pregnancy in school settings in Uganda. However, how far will the country go in operationalizing this guideline!

The headline about ensuring school re-entry for pregnant teenagers and young mothers in Uganda's refugee and host communities relates to the WPS agenda in several ways, particularly in the areas of education, empowerment, and rights protection.

The WPS agenda, primarily anchored by UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), emphasizes the need to protect the rights of women and girls, ensure their participation in decision-making, and promote gender equality during and after conflicts. In this context, education becomes a crucial tool for empowerment and long-term peace-building. The WPS mandate includes the protection of women and girls from violence and discrimination in conflict and post-conflict settings. For pregnant teenagers and young mothers, ensuring access to education through re-entry policies is a form of protection against marginalization and the perpetuation of gender-based violence, including early marriage and forced pregnancy. The WPS agenda advocates for women's and girls' full participation in society, including their economic and educational development. By promoting school re-entry, the policy seeks to ensure young mothers and pregnant girls are not excluded from educational opportunities, which are vital for their socio-economic participation and leadership potential in rebuilding communities.

Nigeria Registers a Surge in Early Marriage

Marriage has long been viewed in various cultures as a potential means of providing stability, security, and social acceptance for vulnerable girls. Girls or orphan girls to be specific are being married off in Niger and in Zamfara states, where about 100 girls were married off in Niger state and 105 in Zamfara state, and according to the reporters it is not something new in these two states despite the national laws prohibiting forced or arranged marriage.

The surge in early marriages in Nigeria has a direct connection to the WPS agenda, particularly in the areas of gender inequality, security, and human rights. Early marriages, often driven by economic instability, conflict, and cultural norms, are deeply intertwined with the vulnerabilities women and girls face, particularly in conflict-affected and fragile environments. Here's how the issue relates to the WPS agenda. Early or forced marriage is a form of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), which directly contravenes the principles of the WPS agenda. The WPS framework calls for the protection of women and girls from violence, particularly in conflict-affected areas, where the prevalence of early marriage tends to increase. In situations of conflict, insecurity, and displacement, families may resort to marrying off their daughters as a perceived form of protection or survival strategy, which places young girls at greater risk of violence, exploitation, and loss of autonomy.

Girls who are married off at an early age are more likely to experience domestic violence, sexual abuse, and limited access to healthcare, education, and justice. This perpetuates a cycle of poverty and disempowerment, undermining women's rights and security, which are core tenets of the WPS agenda, and early marriage often leads to the end of educational opportunities for girls. The WPS agenda emphasizes the importance of women's participation in peace-building, governance, and economic development, and in view of education as a critical pathway for women to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to contribute to peace and security efforts in their communities. When girls are married early, they are denied access to education, which limits their ability to engage in political and peace processes, thus weakening the WPS agenda's goal of increasing women's participation.

Early marriage limits girls' opportunities for economic empowerment by preventing them from pursuing further education or vocational training. This economic disempowerment makes women more vulnerable to conflict-related violence and exploitation. The WPS agenda promotes women's economic independence as a foundation for their participation in peace building and post-conflict recovery efforts, and early marriage undermines this objective by trapping women in cycles of poverty and dependency.

In conflict-affected areas of Nigeria, such as the northeast (due to Boko Haram insurgency), early marriages are often used as a survival strategy by families facing extreme poverty and insecurity. Conflict therefore exacerbates these conditions, leading to the collapse of social structures, lack of access to education, and weakened law enforcement, all of which contribute to the rise in early marriages. This practice further entrenches gender inequality, making it harder for women and girls to assert their rights and participate in peace building processes.

<https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/marriage-redeeming-feature-vulnerable-girls>

Advancing Women, Gender and Youth Empowerment at the African Union

African Union's Women, Gender, and Youth Directorate (WGYD) continued its focus on advancing gender equality and women's empowerment across the continent. One notable event was the AU's involvement in promoting youth development on International Youth Day. The Directorate emphasized the elimination of barriers that hinder women's access to education, as well as supporting innovative youth-led solutions through digital technology programs. Additionally, in alignment with ongoing gender strategies, the Directorate played a crucial role in initiatives such as the African Women's Decade on Financial and Economic Inclusion (2020-2030), aiming to enhance women's participation in economic, political, and social spheres. The Directorate has consistently worked to fulfill the AU's strategic goals under Agenda 2063, particularly Aspiration 6, which focuses on a people-driven development agenda, giving special attention to women and youth. Programs such as the "What African Women Want" campaign have been instrumental in advocating for gender equality and ensuring the implementation of gender-responsive policies throughout Africa.

Rising Protests in Nigeria over Bad Governance

Thousands of Nigerians were out on the streets protesting against bad governance, corruption and the increasing cost of living, with about 13 people killed and 300 arrested. The issues of bad governance and soaring costs tie directly into the WPS agenda because economic crises disproportionately affect women, particularly in fragile or conflict-affected areas. Under the WPS framework, which seeks to protect women's rights and promote gender equality, economic stability is crucial for women's participation in peace building, governance, and social development. When economic crises arise due to bad governance and rising costs, women often bear the brunt of the impact, especially in terms of economic sustenance and access to resources.

Furthermore, bad governance often leads to poor management of resources and corruption, exacerbating poverty. Women, who are often already economically marginalized, face even greater challenges during economic downturns. They may lose access to income, food, healthcare, and essential services, making them more vulnerable to exploitation, including gender-based violence, trafficking, and forced labor. Women are more likely to be employed in informal sectors, which are the hardest hit during economic crises. With rising costs, their already limited income becomes insufficient to meet basic needs, leading to higher levels of poverty and food insecurity among women and their families.

There are so many women's rights organizations in Nigeria that responded to the protest for instance, in August 2024, Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) highlighted the particular impact of these issues on informal workers, especially women, who often bear the brunt of economic instability. The organization called for greater attention to the conditions faced by these workers and advocated for policies that would protect their rights and livelihoods. They emphasized the need for inclusive economic policies that address the challenges of inflation and lack of adequate social safety nets.

In addition, in August 2024, the African Women Empowerment Program (AWEPON) played a vital role in mobilizing women and advocating for their rights amid the economic turmoil. The organization emphasized the need for policy reforms that prioritize the welfare of marginalized communities, particularly women, who are disproportionately affected by economic crises. During the protests, AWEPON and similar organizations encouraged peaceful demonstrations while calling for dialogue with the government to address the citizens' grievances.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/8/2/nigerians-are-tired-protesters-fed-up-with-bad-governance-soaring-costs>

Addressing Sexual Violence in Communities Displaced by Conflict

In Kenya, addressing sexual violence in communities displaced by conflict is a critical issue. A recent needs assessment by Doctors without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in Baringo County shows significant gaps in the detection and management of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) cases in camps for displaced people. Addressing sexual violence in communities displaced by conflict in Kenya has however become a complex and multifaceted challenge that requires a comprehensive approach.

Sexual violence in conflict-affected communities in Kenya has been an ongoing challenge, particularly in regions experiencing ethnic violence, resource conflicts, and displacement due to instability. Organizations play a crucial role in addressing this issue by providing protection, support, and advocacy for women and girls who are most affected.

Displaced women and girls face an increased risk of sexual violence, including rape exploitation and trafficking, often by armed groups, local militias, or even humanitarian workers. There are key challenges in addressing this issue including insecurity and lawlessness, displacement which often results in weakened law enforcement and fragmented local government, making it difficult to protect survivors, limited access to services, displaced populations may struggle to access healthcare, legal support and psychological services.


Survivors of sexual violence may face social stigma, both within their displaced communities, leading to isolation and reluctance to report abuse. To effectively address sexual violence, Kenya needs comprehensive strategies such as: strengthening community-based protection mechanisms which ensure that displaced populations have access to specialized services for survivors of sexual violence and implement accountability measures that hold perpetrators accountable while promoting a supportive environment for survivors.



<https://reliefweb.int/report/kenya/kenya-addressing-sexual-violence-communities-displaced-conflict>

North Darfur's Remaining Hospital Risks Closure as Sudan's Civil War Intensifies

The humanitarian situation in north Darfur continues to deteriorate as the ongoing civil war in Sudan escalates. The region's remaining hospital is facing the threat of closure due to a variety of challenges. Local and international aid organizations are struggling to provide the necessary assistance as infrastructure is damaged and access to medical supplies is severely limited, due to the fierce fighting between the country's rival military factions that have left more than 18,000 people dead and 33,000 injured. The last operating public hospital in Sudan's North Darfur state is therefore at risk of closure. The lack of health care services impacts on women's health and their human security which is a vital component of the WPS agenda. The war in Sudan has had a huge impact on the general population but more specifically women and girls, many have suffered from conflict related sexual violence and have limited access to health care. With many hospitals closing down, the right of women to protection and the required relief and recovery called for by UNSCR1325 remains a mirage for Sudan women and girls.



The closure of hospitals in Sudan has significant negative consequences for women's health, which in turn affects the broader Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. Sudan, already facing health system challenges, sees these closures exacerbate issues such as maternal mortality, lack of access to essential reproductive health services, and increased vulnerability to gender-based violence. Women in rural or conflict-affected areas are particularly hard hit, as they often face longer travel distances to reach the few remaining health facilities, increasing the risk of complications during pregnancy or childbirth. This health crisis undermines the WPS agenda, which emphasizes the importance of women's health, safety, and participation in decision-making, particularly in conflict or post-conflict settings. With fewer healthcare options, women are deprived of critical services, and their ability to contribute to peace building efforts and broader societal stability is diminished. The closure of hospitals not only threatens the physical well-being of women but also exacerbates social and economic inequalities, reinforcing cycles of poverty and conflict. Addressing these issues is vital for advancing the WPS agenda, ensuring women's health rights, and fostering sustainable peace in Sudan.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2024/08/14/africa/north-sudans-remaining-hospital-risks-closure-intl/index.html>



Youth Revolutions over Economic Downturn

Africa has a rapidly growing youth population, with many young people unemployed and disenfranchised. This growing frustration has led to protests and unrest in countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, DRC, and South Africa, often sparked by poor governance, economic hardship, and inequality. In Kenya for example, protesters vowed to take control of the country's main airport demanding significant changes from the government.

The WPS agenda connects youth unrest with gendered impacts by emphasizing the vulnerabilities women face in these situations. Economic instability and unrest exacerbate existing gender inequalities, making women more vulnerable to exploitation, gender-based violence, and loss of livelihood. Women in informal economies - who make up a large percentage of Africa's workforce - are among the first to suffer from economic shocks, with many losing jobs or facing increased risks of violence during times of unrest. WPS links instability and insecurity to poor economic governance, often influenced by broader global fiscal policies. Poor governance, lack of youth empowerment, and mismanagement of resources lead to security issues, which in turn affect women's safety and access to basic resources like healthcare, education, and employment.

Additionally, many African countries are trapped in cycles of debt, and as they try to meet repayment obligations, social welfare programs are cut. These fiscal constraints often result in reduced healthcare, education, and social protection services, all of which disproportionately impact women. For instance, healthcare budget cuts lead to increased maternal mortality rates, and educational cuts affect girls' access to schooling.

https://edition.cnn.com/2024/07/30/africa/africa-youth-led-uprisings-intl?utm_medium=social&utm_source=whatsappCNN&utm_content=2024-07-31T07:49:22

The Crisis of Migration in Africa

In The illegal migration of Nigerian women to Libya has significant implications within the context of the WPS agenda. This issue involves human trafficking, forced migration, and exploitation, intersecting with the WPS pillars of protection, prevention, and participation. Understanding the plight of Nigerian women in Libya within this framework is essential for addressing both the root causes and the effects of this migration crisis. A large number of Nigerian women are being trafficked to Libya under false pretense of being taken to Europe for better opportunities, but once in Libya, many face sexual exploitation, unpaid labor, and denial of healthcare access and freedom of movement.



The protection pillar of the WPS agenda calls for the safeguarding of women and girls from sexual violence, trafficking, and other forms of gender-based violence, during conflict and in post-conflict settings. Libya's instability, which followed the 2011 revolution, has exacerbated the conditions for such abuses. Addressing the trafficking of Nigerian women in this context requires international and regional cooperation to disrupt trafficking networks and provide legal frameworks for protection.

In the context of Nigeria-to-Libya migration, this requires measures such as: raising awareness in source communities in Nigeria about the dangers of illegal migration and smuggling, providing economic opportunities and vocational training for women in Nigeria to reduce the push factors that lead them to migrate illegally. In Francophone Africa illegal migration is increasingly influenced by climate change, which exacerbates economic, social, and environmental stressors, particularly in vulnerable regions like the Sahel and West Africa. Climate-induced migration intertwines with the broader challenges of illegal migration, as people are forced to leave their homes due to deteriorating living conditions, including droughts, floods, desertification, and resource scarcity. This movement often involves dangerous routes and illegal crossings, heightening the risks for migrants and complicating the legal and humanitarian responses.

In regions like the Sahel, desertification and increasingly frequent droughts are reducing the availability of arable land and water resources. This makes agriculture—the primary source of livelihood for many - untenable, forcing people to migrate in search of better living conditions. For example, countries like Mali, Niger, and Chad face severe land degradation, pushing communities to move southwards or towards the coast, or even across borders into countries like Libya, where illegal migration routes often develop. Coastal and riverine areas in countries such as Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, and Guinea are increasingly vulnerable to rising sea levels and flooding, displacing populations. This often leads to rural-to-urban migration, but when cities cannot absorb the influx of people, many look for opportunities abroad, frequently using illegal routes. The collapse of agricultural sectors due to climate stress is leading to widespread food insecurity. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has pointed out that food crises in regions like the Sahel are increasingly climate-driven. This insecurity often becomes a tipping point for migration, with people choosing to take the risk of migrating illegally rather than face starvation or economic collapse.

<https://radionigeria.gov.ng/2024/08/14/libyan-police-arrest-man-for-smuggling-six-nigerian>

The Impact of Climate Change on Sudan

The Displacement Tracking Matrix (DMT) flash alert regarding rains and flooding in Reifi Aroma locality, Kassala (Sudan) highlights a critical humanitarian situation that disproportionately affects women and girls. In such disasters, the gender dimensions become crucial to understanding the specific vulnerabilities, needs, and opportunities for addressing inequalities. Here's how the gender aspect relates to this report and its implications for women: Displacement due to flooding often forces families into overcrowded and insecure temporary shelters or camps, where women and girls are at heightened risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). The collapse of community structures and lack of privacy further expose them to violence and exploitation. Women, especially those in rural areas like Reifi Aroma, are often responsible for agriculture, water collection, and food security.

Flooding devastates crops, water sources, and livestock, directly impacting women's ability to sustain their households. The destruction of assets not only leaves them financially vulnerable but also increases their dependency on aid and external support. Flooding and displacement often lead to inadequate access to healthcare, particularly for pregnant women and mothers with young children. Flooding increases the spread of waterborne diseases, and women may have limited access to maternal healthcare, hygiene products, and clean water during emergencies. When homes are destroyed, women, who typically bear the responsibility for caring for children, the elderly, and the sick, face increased burdens. The lack of safe and adequate shelter forces women to navigate survival in precarious conditions while meeting the needs of their dependents.

The gendered specific needs of women affected by these environmental disasters include protection from GBV such as safe spaces for women and girls and awareness campaigns. Other responses could include creating secure and private spaces in shelters, improving lighting, and ensuring the presence of security personnel. Women also need access to reproductive healthcare and safe WASH facilities.

Women play a crucial role in climate mitigation and adaptation efforts globally, particularly in communities where their livelihoods are directly tied to natural resources. As primary caregivers, farmers, and resource managers, women are often at the forefront of dealing with climate change impacts and are integral to developing and implementing solutions.

Their role is pivotal in both mitigating the effects of climate change (by reducing greenhouse gas emissions) and adapting to its impacts (by building resilience within their communities). Women, especially in rural areas, are involved in farming and natural resource management. They play a key role in implementing sustainable agricultural practices that reduce carbon emissions, such as agroforestry, organic farming, and improved soil management techniques. These practices contribute to carbon sequestration, which helps mitigate climate change. Women are increasingly involved in promoting renewable energy solutions at the local level, such as solar cooking, biogas, and energy-efficient stoves. These technologies help reduce deforestation (by lowering the need for firewood) and greenhouse gas emissions from traditional biomass use. For example, women-led initiatives in Africa have played a significant role in expanding access to solar energy and clean cook stoves.



A Call to Security for Journalists during Conflict and Political Unrest

The incident where police aimed tear gas at a CNN reporter during protests in Kenya can be leveraged to highlight critical aspects of the WPS agenda and issues related to the freedom of the press, especially in engendering the media. Freedom of the press is a cornerstone of democracy and peace building. Attacks on journalists during protests, like the use of tear gas, threaten not just the press but also the public's right to information.

The WPS agenda emphasizes the importance of inclusive and transparent governance, where the media plays a crucial role in reporting on conflict, violence, and human rights abuses. Advocating for the safety of journalists, particularly female reporters who are often more vulnerable to violence, can be framed as part of broader efforts to promote peace and security. Women journalists often face unique threats, including gender-based violence, intimidation, and harassment. This incident call for gender-sensitive protection for journalists, ensuring that female reporters, especially those covering conflict or political unrest, are safeguarded. This aligns with UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which emphasizes the need to protect women in conflict and post-conflict settings. Media workers, particularly women, should be included in discussions on how security forces interact with the press.



The incident brings to light the role of women in media and the challenges they face, both from state violence and patriarchal structures within the industry itself. There's an opportunity to push for gender equity in media and encourage more women's voices in covering stories related to protests, governance, and peace. Advocating for women in media leadership positions can ensure that gender-sensitive reporting is prioritized. Even though the incident happened to a male journalist, this situation still highlights the need for specialized safety training for journalists, especially women, who face unique vulnerabilities. Media organizations and advocacy groups can use this incident to call for training on conflict-sensitive reporting, digital security, and personal safety for women reporters covering protests and high-risk situation.

Using tear gas on journalists during protests is indicative of efforts to suppress the freedom of speech and the public's right to information. It highlights how state violence is not only directed at protesters but also at those documenting and reporting the truth. By framing this within the WPS framework, advocates can call for transparent and accountable security measures that respect the rights of women, civilians, and the media during protests.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2024/08/08/world/video/larry-madowo-kenya-protest-tear-gas-fragment-digvid>