Mapping the Role of Men and Masculinities in WPS Regional and National Policies in Africa

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Introduction

African feminists and women's rights advocates have powerfully elevated the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda across the continent to build peace and advance gender equality. They have championed efforts to promote women's meaningful participation and leadership; prevent and respond to sexual violence in conflict; resolve wars through the power of nonviolent social movements; and prevent armed conflict and violence through community-based early warning systems. As a result of their advocacy, there has been a large uptake of WPS policies and programmes across the African continent.

This work on the WPS agenda is more urgent than ever in the face of growing and evolving regional conflicts and crises. There are currently over 35 armed conflicts in Africa, including in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan, as well as in Morocco, Western Sahara and Libya in North Africa.[1] In 2023, 3.2 million people were displaced by armed conflicts on the continent and there are now more than 40 million people in total displaced, both within and outside their home countries.[2] These realities make it critical to support gender-transformative, resourced and coordinated regional efforts for peace.

The WPS agenda advocates for fulfilling women's participation and rights within a global context that is characterised by violent patriarchal power and rising militarisation. Men overwhelmingly hold the economic, political and social power in our world today, including the power to wage and end wars and the power to hold back women from decision-making. Within the binary category of "men", there are dynamics of intersecting forms of oppression and marginalisation which play a role in producing divergent lived realities. Powerful, elite men often rely on the exploitation of other men to expand and maintain their power. This includes through their conscription into militarised forces or by subjecting men from marginalised ethnic, religious, racial or sexuality groups to oppression and inferior status.

Feminist analysis encourages us to examine the entire spectrum and continuum of violence people and communities face. From this perspective, patriarchy is a root cause of human insecurity, and results in gender-based violence and the propagation of hierarchical and violent domination.

1 "Today's Armed Conflicts." n.d. The Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights. Accessed August 7, 2024. https://geneva-academy.ch/galleries/today-s-armed-conflicts.

2 "African Conflicts Displace Over 40 Million People - World." 2023. ReliefWeb. https://reliefweb.int/report/world/african-conflicts-displace-over-40-million-people.

There are ongoing and vibrant debates within feminist movements and the WPS field about the space and prioritisation that these issues, and men themselves, should occupy. For example one expert interviewed for this paper reflected on how some feminists in her circles disapprove of what they perceive as more space being given to men within a women's agenda amidst poor and uneven implementation of WPS overall. In addition to reflecting political differences, these debates reflect different visions around the purpose of "engaging men" or considering "masculinities" in the first place. As explored in this paper, some feminists view engaging men as an important strategy to make WPS implementation more effective. For example, it is common to hear that it is necessary to "get men on board" to advance work on gender-based violence (GBV) or women's empowerment. By extension, some feminists also believe that the WPS framework can provide an opening for examining how men and boys, as well as gender-diverse and LGBTQ+ people, are impacted by armed conflict.

In contrast, other feminists are hesitant about how the methods of conducting this work could lead to the potential cooptation of feminist spaces and agendas by heterosexual, cisgender men, even if they might support efforts to include other marginalised groups, such as LGBTQ+ communities, within the WPS agenda. Others also note that it is especially important to look at wider systems and structures rather than focusing on changing the behaviours of individual men in any policy or programmatic interventions. However, there is not necessarily a clear dividing line between these divergent perspectives. Indeed many feminists simultaneously hold the tensions and complexities introduced by these questions. Therefore, this paper explores these perspectives with the goal of supporting feminist advocacy on peace, gender justice and WPS implementation as a whole.

Purpose of this Paper

This paper aims to showcase how these concepts and debates have been incorporated within African national and regional discussions on the WPS agenda, and to share insights and recommendations from African feminists about how this agenda can be advanced in alignment with feminist principles to address the root causes of conflict and violence.

This paper focuses specifically on African policy frameworks and uses examples from the continent, but it does not aim to provide a comprehensive gender conflict analysis of any particular situation.[3] It builds upon existing research done by MenEngage Africa[4] and Sonke Gender Justice,[5] organisations that have long been leading the way in critical discussions around challenging patriarchal masculinities and mobilising men for peace and gender equality. It also draws on the extensive and growing presence of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)[6] in Africa, with 19 vibrant and engaged National Sections active across the continent.[7] Many of these Sections

3 Globally, over 100 countries (110 as of July 2024) have developed National Action Plans (NAPs) on WPS. Of these, approximately a third (36 NAPs) are in Africa, although not all of these NAPs are up to date as some have expired. Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte D'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda and Zimbabwe have developed NAPs. https://wpsfocalpointsnetwork.org/resources/ and https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/.

4 MenEngage Africa Alliance. Accessed August 7, 2024. https://menengageafrica.org/.

5 Sonke Gender Justice. Accessed August 7, 2024. https://genderjustice.org.za/.

6 WILPF. Accessed August 7, 2024. https://www.wilpf.org/.

7 "WILPF Around the World: Africa." n.d. WILPF. Accessed August 7, 2024. https://www.wilpf.org/our-work/wilpf-around-the-world/#africa.

have worked closely with the Women, Peace and Security programme at WILPF (known as PeaceWomen) and have done groundbreaking work to advance the WPS agenda in the region. They have been guiding the development of a powerful feminist peace movement in their countries. Simultaneously, several of them are also active in WILPF's growing work to mobilise men for feminist peace.

By looking at different regional and national policies and analysing them from the standpoints of African WPS experts, this paper aims to address the following questions:

- **How and to what extent have issues and language around men, boys and masculinity been incorporated thus far into WPS and other related policy frameworks on the African continent?**
- **How do African feminists believe that language on men, boys, masculinity and patriarchy could help strengthen the implementation of the WPS agenda and peace agendas in Africa? What are the key goals of including this topic within work on WPS?**
- **How are patriarchal masculinities and structural drivers of conflict and violence hindering peace and, by extension, the implementation of peace processes and policies?**
- **What different key thematic areas are priorities for feminists and women's rights advocates under this agenda, and what do African feminists think about the inclusion of men and boys as allies?**
- **Based on research and experience, what approaches might be effective in mobilising men to work together with women for peace and women's rights?**

Despite promising strides, many current government-led efforts to engage men and boys in the prevention of conflict and gender-based violence are insufficiently addressing root causes or holistically addressing the gendered impacts of armed conflicts on the continent. This has placed limits on how thematic topics around masculinities and the roles, behaviours and lived realities of men and boys are surfaced toward prevention efforts and implementation of the WPS agenda.

This paper argues that it is important for policies to address the gendered factors that cause and fuel the cycle of men's violence, both within and outside of armed conflicts. It argues that addressing these factors will contribute to alleviating the challenges of implementing the WPS agenda in relation to prevention, participation and protection. Importantly, activities engaging men and boys should not replace or supersede the WPS agenda's primary focus on women and girls, particularly given the lack of adequate resourcing for women and girls under the agenda. However, the overlapping vulnerabilities faced by people of all genders in armed conflict supports the need for strengthening men's investment in peace and gender equality. When incorporated strategically, addressing the root causes of men's violence will help illuminate the structural drivers of conflict, deepen gender conflict analysis and intersectional understanding of conflict dynamics, address the myriad needs of conflict-affected communities and strengthen the movement for peace.

Therefore, this paper provides insights into where and how member states, regional bodies and other actors can consider incorporating these elements to support the full implementation of the agenda as a whole.

Background and Methodology

This paper has been developed as part of a longstanding partnership between WILPF and the MenEngage Alliance, including MenEngage Africa. Founded in 1915, WILPF is the longest-standing women's peace organisation in the world and has National Sections and Groups in over 40 countries that work together to prevent and resolve armed conflicts through feminist nonviolent approaches.[8] The MenEngage Alliance, established in 2006, is a global network with 70 formally constituted country networks in every region of the world. It aims to transform unequal power relations and dismantle patriarchal systems, including by bringing men and boys together under the leadership of feminist movements.[9]

WILPF was instrumental in the passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security in 2000,[10] and has been working on what is now known as the Women, Peace and Security agenda for nearly 25 years. WILPF's Mobilising Men for Feminist Peace initiative has developed in partnership with MenEngage to deepen WILPF's work to mobilise men and boys in support of the WPS agenda and a future of feminist peace, and to understand and transform the structural forces underpinning patriarchal violence.[11]

This paper builds upon an internal paper developed by MenEngage Africa and Sonke Gender Justice in 2021. The original document included a policy scan of 15 different African countries and identified key language related to gender, men, boys and masculinity within different frameworks. It unpacked the peace and security policies of 15 countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region under the auspices of UNSCR 1325 and the continental approach to peace and security adopted by the African Union (AU) embodied in the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA: 2016-2020). This resource drew parallels between the peace and security standards and norms articulated in the APSA and the UN's approach to peace and security. It focused on how UNSCR 1325 can be achieved in these countries and goes country-by-country to outline details about national policies and frameworks and where gender, masculinity, patriarchy and men and boys are situated within them.

Using the insights from the MenEngage Africa Policy Scan as a starting point, this paper analyses how men, boys and masculinities have been included within policy frameworks and assesses gaps, opportunities and areas of improvement. It is informed by a combination of desk research, expert interviews, focus group discussions and validation meetings with WILPF and MenEngage Africa members. These included focus groups at a regional WILPF and MenEngage Africa meeting in Abuja, Nigeria in December 2023 and interviews with experts from Cameroon, Zimbabwe, CAR, DRC, Kenya and Niger. This paper aims to be a resource and tool for African feminist and women's rights movements to support their advocacy with national, regional and international actors.

8 WILPF. Accessed August 7, 2024. https://www.wilpf.org/.

9 MenEngage Alliance. Accessed August 7, 2024. https://menengage.org/.

10 "Landmark resolution on Women, Peace and Security (Security Council resolution 1325)." n.d. the United Nations. Accessed August 7, 2024. https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/.

11 "Mobilising men for feminist peace." n.d. WILPF. Accessed August 7, 2024. https://www.wilpf.org/mobilising-men-for-feminist-peace/.

What Do Global WPS Frameworks Say about Men and Boys?

As of March 2024, the UN Security Council has adopted 10 resolutions on WPS, as well as another on women in peacekeeping.[12] The words "men", "boys" and "masculinity" or "masculinities" are not present in the first WPS resolution, UNSCR 1325 (2000) and do not appear in the subsequent resolutions on WPS until 2013. Since 2013, there have been a few ways in which men and boys have been considered by the UNSC as part of the WPS framework. Thematically, these fall under the following general categories:

- Soliciting the involvement of men and boys in combating GBV;
- Recognising and supporting men and boys as victims/survivors of sexual violence;
- Impacts of men's violence on women's participation;
- Roles men and boys can play as allies in promoting women's participation;
- Providing gender-responsive services for survivors, including to male victims/survivors;
- Lifting stigma and challenging cultural assumptions; and
- Strengthening reporting on sexual violence.

Language on men and boys was first introduced in **UNSCR 2106 (2013)**,[13] which is a resolution that provides greater operational detail for how different actors can work towards accountability for sexual violence in conflict. In the preambular paragraphs, this resolution brings in men and boys in a few specific ways. It highlights how long-term efforts to combat all forms of violence against women, including the prevention of sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict, require the "enlistment" of men and boys. In addition, UNSCR 2106 notes with concern that sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations disproportionately impacts women and girls and that men, boys and individuals who are forced witnesses of sexual violence can experience secondary trauma.

12 "Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security." n.d. UN Peacemaker. Accessed August 7, 2024. https://peacemaker.un.org/wps/normative-frameworks/un-security-council-resolutions.

13 "United Nations Security Council Resolution 2106 (2013), S/RES/2106(2013) | She Stands For Peace." n.d. the United Nations. Accessed August 7, 2024. https://www.un.org/shestandsforpeace/content/united-nations-security-council-resolution-2106-2013-sres21062013.

New issues were introduced into the WPS framework in **UNSCR 2242 (2015)**,[14] including climate change, pandemics, terrorism and violent extremism, and the resolution also addresses WPS agenda implementation. In this resolution, men and boys are linked with the participation pillar. The resolution mentions how men and boys can support women's participation by "reiterating the important engagement by men and boys as partners in promoting women's participation in the prevention and resolution of armed conflict, peacebuilding and post-conflict situations."[15]

A survivor-centred approach to the UNSC's work on sexual violence in conflict was introduced in **UNSCR 2467 (2019)**.[16] This resolution states that services for survivors of sexual violence should include provisions for men and boys who have experienced sexual violence in conflict, including in detention settings, and "contribute to lifting the sociocultural stigma attached to this category of crime and facilitate rehabilitation and reintegration efforts." It also notes that men and boys can be "targets" of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict settings, including in detention and in contexts associated with armed groups. It "urges Member States to protect victims who are men and boys through the strengthening of policies that offer appropriate responses to male survivors and challenge cultural assumptions about male invulnerability to such violence" and for reporting on sexual violence to also look at the gendered dimensions of violence against men and boys.[17]

As Brown and de Jonge Oudraat note, the references to men and boys in the WPS resolutions largely frame men not as perpetrators of violence or initiators of war but rather exclusively as victims or potential allies. While some women's rights activists have been reluctant to include a focus on men and masculinities within the WPS agenda for fear that it might divert political attention and funding away from women's priorities, Brown and de Jonge Oudraat argue that this inadvertently advances a patriarchal agenda. They write that male-dominated governments want men and masculinities to be invisible in the WPS agenda: "They do not want to discuss or even acknowledge the roles of gender inequalities in causing conflicts, and they do not want to discuss the roles of state-run military organizations and individual men in perpetrating conflict-related sexual violence."[18]

Beyond the UN Security Council, in 2017 the Human Rights Council adopted **Resolution 35/10 on Accelerating efforts to eliminate violence against women: engaging men and boys in preventing and responding to violence against all women and girls**. This resolution recognises that violence against women and girls is rooted in historical and structural inequality in power relations between women and men, and makes a number of important calls for how member states can holistically address patriarchy and gender inequality, including in the areas of health, violence prevention, education and accountability for violations.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 M.E. Brown and C. de Jonge Oudraat. Forthcoming 2024. "Mainstreaming Masculinities in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda." In *Routledge Handbook of Masculinities, Conflict and Peacebuilding*. N.p.: Routledge. edited by Henri Myrttinen, Elizabeth Laruni, Chloé Lewis, Philipp Schulz, Heleen Touquet and Farooq Yousaf.

Global Study on Women, Peace and Security (2015)

To follow up on the progress made on WPS thus far for the 15th anniversary of UNSCR 1325, the UN commissioned a **Global Study on the WPS Agenda** in 2015.[19] The term "militarised masculinities" appears in the Global Study in a paragraph about militarism and how it "metastasizes" into culture and other aspects of political, economic and society life in our world. The Global Study also includes the term "violent masculinities" in relation to disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) policies,[20] as well as in relation to addressing root causes of conflict.[21] In a section on new technologies in an increasingly militarised world, it notes that drone strikes specifically have a gendered impact, disproportionately targeting men and resulting in a high number of women-headed households in communities that have been impacted by drone warfare:[22]

> "Militarism and cultures of militarised masculinities create and sustain political decision-making where resorting to the use of force becomes a normalised mode for dispute resolution. Militarism also metastasizes, taking on forms outside of traditional armed conflict. In consultations for the Global Study, participants identified the various ways in which their lives had been militarised: through military support to extractive industries in Asia; the 'war on drugs' in Latin America; militarised anti-migration initiatives in Europe; and of course, the global 'war on terror.'…Critically, militarism serves to uphold and perpetuate structural inequalities that in turn operate to disenfranchise women and girls from public goods, entrench exclusion and marginalisation, and create the ingredients for a platform of broader inequalities that increase the potential for violent conflict to occur."[23]

There is some analysis in the Global Study about how efforts to engage men and boys can have tangible results for gender equality. For example, it cites evidence from the development sector that states that sensitisation of men and boys, including for them to take on nontraditional gender roles, results in "significant, concrete benefits for the whole community."[24] The study also highlights how patriarchal cultural bias of local men and humanitarian workers is a major barrier to women's needs being met in humanitarian action.[25]

Prevention and early warning received some attention in the Global Study. The study emphasises short-term prevention measures such as early warning systems, preemptive dialogues and deeper measures to address the root causes and structural drivers of conflict. It calls for dealing with the proliferation of arms,

19 Coomaraswamy, Radhika. 2015. "Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council 1325 on Women, Peace and Security." Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. https://wps.unwomen.org/.

20 Ibid, page 179.

21 Ibid, page 15.

22 Ibid, page 136.

23 Ibid, page 207.

24 Ibid, page 87.

25 Ibid, page 87.

violent masculinities and climate change. In the section on early warning, the study identifies ways in which changes to men's experiences and lived realities can be early warning signals of violence and conflict.[26] These include indicators such as:

- Sex-specific movement of populations;
- Increased harassment, arrest and interrogation of civilian men by security forces;
- Training in weapons for men, women and children at community levels;
- Propaganda, news stories and programmes glorifying militarised masculinities; and
- Increased numbers of meetings by men for men.

In terms of recommendations on men, boys and masculinities, the study recommends that member states, the UN and civil society should provide financial, technical and political support to encourage educational and leadership training for men, women, boys and girls, and that support should reinforce and supports nonviolent, non-militarised expressions of masculinity.[27] The study also recommends that these actors engage men and boys to strengthen gender equality within DDR and security sector reform (SSR) processes and prevent and respond to human rights violations, including sexual abuse.[28] To media outlets, the Global Study recommends that they commit to accurately portraying women and men in all their diverse roles in conflict and post-conflict settings, including as agents of conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding.[29]

The Global Study also makes the case that "[H]aving only women working on women, peace and security sends the incorrect signal that this is an agenda that impacts, and is the responsibility of, only one half of the population, rather than a peace and security issue for both men and women."[30]

26 Coomaraswamy, Radhika. Global Study, pages 198-199. https://wps.unwomen.org/
27 Ibid, page 214.
28 Ibid, page 184.
29 Ibid, page 297.
30 Ibid, page 272.

How are African Regional-Level Policies Addressing Men and Boys in their Gender Frameworks?

On a regional level, there are various regional and subregional policies in Africa that deal with gender, WPS and peace and security, which include men and boys to varying levels.

The Maputo Protocol (2003)[31] is a groundbreaking treaty adopted two decades ago that is considered one of the most progressive and comprehensive legal frameworks for women's rights in the world. In relation to peace and security, Article 10 provides the right to peace, stating that "women have the right to a peaceful existence and the right to participate in the promotion and maintenance of peace." Linked to this right is a call to "reduce military expenditure significantly in favour of spending on social development in general, and the promotion of women in particular." Article 11 on protection reinforces international humanitarian law, protection of civilians, the right to asylum and an end to the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

The AU Solemn Declaration (2004)[32] expresses deep concern about "the status of women and the negative impacts on women of issues such the high incidence of HIV/AIDS among girls and women, conflict, poverty, harmful traditional practices, high population of refugee women and internally displaced women, violence against women, women's exclusion from politics and decision-making, and illiteracy, limited access of girls to education."

The AU Gender Policy (2009)[33] identifies the need to look at the socially and culturally constructed differences between men and women, "which give them unequal value, opportunities, and life chances," and masculine and feminine characteristics, and calls out the ways that power relations manifest themselves in both private and public spheres. It emphasises the role both women and men have played in the African continent's liberation. It states that there

31 "Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa." 2003. African Union. https://au.int/en/treaties/protocol-african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights-rights-women-africa.

32 "Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa." 2020. African Union. https://au.int/en/documents/20200708/solemn-declaration-gender-equality-africa.

33 "African Union Gender Policy." 2009. LSE. https://www.lse.ac.uk/women-peace-security/assets/documents/NAPS-Website/6.Policy/2009-African-Union-Gender-Policy-AU-2009.pdf.

is a need to consider the African societal context and highlights how unequal power relations and gender stereotypes block the process of development for men and women.

The Kinshasa Declaration on Positive Masculinity (2021)[34] calls on "men to be role models for boys so that tomorrow's male leaders take ownership of the fundamental values that define the positive expressions of masculinity in Africa." It expresses concern about the persistence of violence against women and girls and links this to harmful sociocultural norms and practices. In addition, the declaration recognises the role of champions of women's rights and launches the Circle of Champions to advance these efforts. The Kinshasa Declaration was subsequently adopted as an Assembly Decision during the 35th Ordinary Session of the AU Heads of State and Government in February 2022.

Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want[35] does not contain language specifically on masculinity or masculinities, but does discuss gender equality and parity, empowerment of women, ending harmful practices and ending the exclusion of women from decision-making. The **AU Continental Results Framework on WPS (2018-2028**)[36] outlines a strategy for WPS as part of Agenda 2063. This framework shows how WPS should be integrated across policy arenas to make progress on **Silencing the Guns**,[37] democracy, human rights, justice and the rule of law. It identifies that the mandate of the Office of the Special Envoy on WPS is to "ensure that the voices of women and the vulnerable are heard much more clearly in peacebuilding and in conflict resolution." Within this context, it highlights how "Women's participation in decision-making positions is mainly hindered by prevailing social and cultural practices that are largely discriminatory against female leadership." The African Union's **Silencing the Guns** campaign is an initiative within this framework that is specifically focused on ending armed conflict and violence. It highlights the root causes of instability, including the "political history of the African continent, which has been marred particularly by three major tragedies, namely, slavery, colonisation and the unpaid for extraction/exploitation of natural resources."[38]

The **African Union Strategy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) 2018-2028**[39] was launched during the AU Summit of February 2019. It builds on the lessons learned from the 2009 gender policy. The Strategy contains a reference to the Agreed Conclusions of the 48th Commission on the Status of Women, which recognised the role of men and boys in gender equality. It defines key terms including masculinity, patriarchy, gender equality and more, and identifies patriarchy as being at the root of gender inequality.

On a sub-regional level, different frameworks have included elements relating to men and boys. For example, the **SADC Protocol on Gender and Development** defines key terms related

34 "Kinshasa Declaration and Call for Action of the African Union Heads of State on Positive Masculinity in Leadership to End Violence Against Women and Girls in Africa." 2021. African Union. https://au.int/sites/default/files/pressreleases/41226-pr-Declaration_Mens_Conference_English.pdf.

35 "Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want." n.d. African Union. Accessed August 7, 2024. https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview.

36 "Continental Results Framework. Monitoring and Reporting on the Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Africa (2018-2028)." n.d. African Union. Accessed August 7, 2024. https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/35958-doc-continental_result_framework_on_wps_agenda_in_africa.pdf.

37 "Silencing the Guns: A Developmental Approach." 2022. United Nations Development Programme. https://www.undp.org/africa/publications/silencing-guns-developmental-approach.

38 "Silencing the Guns by 2020." African Union. Accessed August 7, 2024. https://au.int/en/flagships/silencing-guns-2020.

39 AU Strategy for Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment (2018-2028)." 2018. African Union. Accessed August 7, 2024. https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36195-doc-au_strategy_for_gender_equality_womens_empowerment_2018-2028_report.pdf.

to gender programming, including "gender-sensitive" and "gender stereotypes". It identifies that "gender-sensitive" refers to "acknowledging and taking into account the gender needs of both women and men", and "gender stereotypes" refers to beliefs about the characteristics, traits and activities of women, men, girls and boys. It recommends that states parties:

- will ensure the inclusion of men in all gender related activities;
- put in place measures for equal representation and participation;
- encourage the media to give equal voice to women and men in all areas of coverage;
- promote active participation of all genders in the protection of the environment and climate mitigation;
- adopt gender-sensitive educational curricula to address gender stereotypes and GBV.

There are also sub-regional action plans on WPS. For example, the Eastern Africa Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) adopted its second regional action plan in 2023.

Trends in Language on Men, Boys and Masculinity within WPS Efforts on the Continent

As a continent, Africa is a leader in adopting National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security. Approximately one third of NAPs globally (36 NAPs) are in Africa as of 2024, spanning across different sub-regions. Twenty (20) countries are on their first NAP; 13 are on their second NAP; and three are on their third NAP.[40]

A smaller subset of NAPs looks at issues related to men, boys and masculinity. Their incorporation of these themes draws heavily from the language provided in the global and regional policy frameworks described above. The most frequently included topics are men's involvement in perpetrating GBV; men and boys as victims of armed conflict; men as allies in promoting women's participation; and activities to engage men and boys. The NAPS of South Africa (2020-2025) and Namibia (2019-2024) include the term "violent masculinity."[41] Burundi's NAP (2017-2021)[42] includes the term "positive masculinity." Cameroon's second NAP (2023-2027), launched in 2024, contains the language "Lutter contre les perceptions néfastes sur les masculinités dites dominantes" ("Combating negative perceptions of so-called dominant masculinities") and calls for promoting "positive masculinity."[43] As of 2024, no NAPs on the continent are believed to include the term "militarised masculinity", used in the 2015 Global Study.

40 All WPS NAPs are available on WILPF's NAPs database. "1325 National Action Plans". Women's International League for Peace and Freedom – Women, Peace and Security Programme. 1325naps.peacewomen.org/. WPS National Action Plans can also be accessed on the websites of the WPS Focal Points Network https://wpsfocalpointsnetwork.org/resources/ and the London School of Economics WPS National Action Plans website. https://www.wpsnaps.org/. The citations in this paper refer to NAPs by citing the country and planned timeline for implementation.

41 "Namibia (2019-2024)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/index.php/namibia/.

42 "Burundi (2017-2021)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/index.php/burundi/.

43 "Cameroon (2023-2027)." n.d. WPS Focal Points Network. Accessed August 7, 2024. https://wpsfocalpointsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Cameroon-Second-NAP.pdf.

Men's Violence against Women and Engaging Men and Boys in Ending GBV

Men are the primary perpetrators of gender-based violence against women, girls, gender-diverse people and other men and boys, both within and without armed conflict.[44] Sexual violence in conflict, a major focus of many resolutions on WPS, is rooted in a continuum of gender-based violence that stems from gender inequality and patriarchy. Multiple NAPs on WPS incorporate some analysis or activities to address men's responsibility to end gender-based violence.

The Liberian NAP (2019-2023) provides context analysis recognising the link between GBV and armed conflict. It cites the Liberian Strategic Roadmap for National Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation (2013-2030), which indicated that one conflict trigger in Liberia is "suppressive cultural practices against women, SGBV [sexual and gender-based violence] and gross abandonment and persistent non-support by most men to their families."[45]

The WPS NAPs of Cameroon (2018-2020),[46] Mali (2019-2023),[47] Rwanda (2018-2022)[48] and South Africa (2020-2025)[49] call for engaging men and boys in eradicating sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and sexual violence in conflict. The Namibian NAP includes activities to develop an "improved understanding by men on the construction of masculinity and the conditions that foster violence against women."[50] The South African NAP calls for more emphasis on changing social norms and behaviours and addressing violent masculinity rather than responses to violence that centre on policing. It notes that it is important to address widespread societal violence overall to successfully reduce violence against women.[51] On the other hand, the DRC NAP (2019-2022) states that men in the security sector need to be trained better as a way of addressing gendered harms.[52]

These references reflect variations in terms of the ways that states are linking gender-based violence with structural phenomena, as well as a range of potential solutions.

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44 UNFPA. 2012. "From Perpetrators of Violence to Agents of Change: Men and Boys in Times of Conflict." https://www.unfpa.org/news/perpetrators-violence-agents-change-men-and-boys-times-conflict.

45 "Liberia (2019-2023)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. Page 10, https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Liberia-NAP-2019-2023.pdf.

46 "Cameroon (2018-2020)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/index.php/cameroon/.

47 "Mali (2019-2023)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/index.php/mali/.

48 "Rwanda (2018-2022)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/index.php/rwanda/.

49 "South Africa (2020-2025)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/index.php/south-africa/.

50 "Namibia (2019-2024)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. Page 23, https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Namibia-NAP-2019-2024.pdf.

51 "South Africa (2020-2025)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. Page 40, http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/sa_national_action_plan_women_peace_security_2020-2025.pdf.

52 "Democratic Republic of the Congo (2019-2022)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/DRC-NAP-2019.pdf

Weapons and Gender-Based Violence

Guns are involved in many femicides[53] and in some countries they are used in the majority of these crimes. The gun lobby and gun manufacturers have long marketed guns as signifiers of manhood, successfully using traditional print advertising and online platforms, product placement in films and video games, influencers on social media and fears of tighter gun regulations to drive sales, especially amongst men, and to shift the market from handguns to semi-automatic weapons.[54]

A 2020 report on the WPS agenda and arms control by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) notes that the WPS resolutions contain few references to arms control and disarmament.[55] However, the report offers more positive findings on the extent to which WPS NAPs address arms, finding that, as of 2020, 39% of NAPs contained at least one mention of disarmament-related terms, such as small arms and light weapons (SALW), the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), landmines, cluster munitions, weapons of mass destruction and cyberwarfare, with SALW being the most popular sub-theme.

Of particular relevance for this paper, UNIDIR found that Sub-Saharan Africa is amongst the regions with the strongest focus on arms in NAPs. This illustrates the opportunities for using existing NAPs in Africa to address the nexus between men, guns and various forms of violence, including gender-based violence. As the UNIDIR report states, "Given the intimate links between weapons, men and masculinities, critically engaging with and transformation of masculinities is essential for effective arms control and disarmament."[56]

Impacts of Armed Conflict on Men and Boys, and Men and Boys as Victims/Survivors of Violence

While the WPS agenda focuses on the disproportionate impacts of armed conflict on women and girls and emphasises the need for gendered approaches to peace and security, wars also affect the entire social fabric of conflict-affected societies, including the lives and experiences of men and boys. Recognising this, a few NAPs have included language, analysis and/or activities on men and boys as victims/survivors of sexual violence, as well as on the gendered impacts of armed conflict on men and boys.

Language on men and boys as victims/survivors of sexual violence is included in the NAPs of

53 "Five essential facts to know about femicide." UN Women. Accessed August 7, 2024. https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/feature-story/2022/11/five-essential-facts-to-know-about-femicide.

54 Peacock, Dean. A Women's International League for Peace and Freedom desk review on militainment, militarization, gender stereotyping and the marketing of militarized masculinities, for WILPF-GENSAC, Small Arms Survey meeting July 15-17, 2024.

55 Myrttinen, Henri. 2020. Connecting the Dots: Arms Control, Disarmament and the Women Peace and Security Agenda. Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research. https://doi.org/10.37559/GEN/20/01.

56 Myrttinen, Henri. 2020. Connecting the Dots: Arms Control, Disarmament and the Women Peace and Security Agenda. Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research. https://doi.org/10.37559/GEN/20/01.

Mali,[57] Rwanda[58] and South Africa.[59] Niger's NAP (2020-2024) highlights the importance of looking at the gender-differentiated impacts of armed conflict and the NAP of Cameroon mentions the specific violations and gendered harms experienced by men in conflict. Furthermore, it states that men are particularly targeted by violations such as kidnappings, assassinations and forced recruitments and are often the direct and immediate victims of conflict.[60] However, the NAP also states that it is women and children who usually suffer the impacts of conflict for a longer duration of time.

South Africa's NAP notes high rates of murders of men as one example of a gender-differentiated phenomenon,[61] while Liberia's NAP highlights that potential conflict triggers include a lack of opportunities for youth, although this applies to youth of all genders.[62]

Engaging Men to Support Women's Participation

Within the current status quo, men are overrepresented in decision-making and elite men continue to hoard power and control, including when it comes to peace and security. This is a problem that the WPS agenda, from its outset, has aimed to address by promoting the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in peace and security. To support WPS efforts on participation, some NAPs are incorporating language on men's roles as allies in promoting women's participation, stemming from the language of UNSCR 2242.

The Liberian NAP has a thematic context analysis on participation, stating that "Exclusion of women, rural women, women with disabilities and youth from peacebuilding processes is exacerbated by discriminatory practices where male political leaders discredit women's contributions and hence hinder a sustained peace and weaken social cohesion in communities. This, in part, is influenced by dominant traditional and cultural perceptions that women belong at home, and therefore, matters such as security are 'male' issues. This results in men dominating and having control over formal peacebuilding and security mechanisms and priorities."[63]

The NAPs of Sierra Leone (2019-2023)[64] and Liberia (2019-2023) look at the attitudes of male leaders towards women's leadership and participation and the need for men to get on board in promoting women's participation. The NAPs of Mali[65] and Namibia[66] mention the role of religious and traditional leaders or authorities, and DRC's

57 "Mali (2019-2023)." National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/index.php/mali/.

58 "Rwanda (2018-2022)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/index.php/rwanda/.

59 "South Africa (2020-2025)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/index.php/south-africa/.

60 "Cameroon (2018-2020)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. Page 34, http://pwnap1.tetra.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Cameroon-2018-English.pdf.

61 "South Africa (2020-2025)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. Page 38, https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/sa_national_action_plan_women_peace_security_2020-2025.pdf.

62 "Liberia (2019-2023)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. Page 10, https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Liberia-NAP-2019-2023.pdf.

63 Ibid, Page 11.

64 "Sierra Leone (2019-2023)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/index.php/sierra-leone/.

65 "Mali (2019-2023)." National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. Page 11, https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Mali-2019-2023.pdf.

66 "Namibia (2019-2024)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. Page 18, https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Namibia-NAP-2019-2024.pdf.

NAP mentions how peace consolidation efforts are largely the prerogative of a male elite.[67] The Rwandan NAP states that to advance women's participation, it is important to address the underlying causes of the barriers that women face.[68] It includes as an indicator "Percentage of men and women who perceive women as equally legitimate and effective leaders as men."[69]

Similarly, the Kenyan NAP (2020-2024) highlights the need to address the patriarchal and cultural barriers to participation.[70] And Uganda's NAP (2021-2025) states that men will be engaged in NAP implementation, including through CSOs that promote mediation and peaceful resolution of conflicts.[71]

Positive Masculinity

"Positive masculinity" is a term that is used to denote norms of manhood that are pro-social, advance peace and equality and reject the use of aggression, domination and violence.[72] While it is an important concept, WILPF has raised concerns about the limitations of the term "positive masculinities," given the ways in which the term reinforces gender essentialism and gender binaries.

Thus far, there has been some degree of attention to "positive masculinity" within NAPs, although not all this work is labeled as such. The NAPs of Sierra Leone and Gabon (2020-2023)[73] recommend awareness raising and community sensitisation programmes; Rwanda mentions the UN's HeForShe campaign,[74] and Burundi explicitly includes the need to raise awareness of unequal household roles. As one example, in the Burundi NAP, under Objective 2: "Contribute to changing mentalities and promoting positive masculinity and femininity" and Result 3: "Men and women adopt a behavior favorable to gender equality," Burundi will "Organize training sessions for men, women, young boys and girls on the promotion of positive masculinity and femininity."[75] In Namibia, there is an activity to "Increase the number of trainings of men and boys on violent masculinity and eliminate values that promote patriarchy."[76]

67 "Democratic Republic of the Congo (2019-2022)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. Page 22, https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/DRC-NAP-2019.pdf.

68 "Rwanda (2018-2022)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. Page 8 https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/NAPRwanda2018.pdf.

69 "Rwanda (2018-2022)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. Page 27, https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/NAPRwanda2018.pdf.

70 "Kenya (2020-2024)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. Page 14, https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Kenya-2nd-1325-National-Action-Plan-KNAPII-2020-2024-English.pdf.

71 "Uganda (2021-2025)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. Page 57, https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Uganda-2021-2025.pdf.

72 "Positive masculinity — English." n.d. Graines de Paix. Accessed August 7, 2024. https://www.grainesdepaix.org/en/resources/peace-dictionary/positive-masculinity.

73 "Gabon (2020-2023)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/index.php/gabon/.

74 "Rwanda (2018-2022)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. Page 32, https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/NAPRwanda2018.pdf.

75 "Burundi (2017-2021)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. Page 7 and 9, https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Burundi-NAP-3.pdf.

76 "Namibia (2019-2024)." 1325 National Action Plans. Accessed August 7, 2024. Page 23, https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Namibia-NAP-2019-2024.pdf.

Where and How Should States Incorporate a Focus on Men and Boys?

In the research interviews and focus group discussions, participants were asked for their insights about the importance of themes around men, boys, patriarchy and masculinities to implement the WPS agenda, as well as the top three issues they hoped governments address on this topic. Overall, these discussions revealed that the current state of WPS implementation on the continent has seen uneven progress on the agenda's pillars and lacks a sufficient focus on prevention and structural dimensions.

It was seen as very relevant and important for WPS efforts — as well as other peace and security efforts — to recognise and aim to address the variety of gendered factors causing and fueling different forms of violence on the continent. Therefore, some of the most promising avenues for considering and incorporating elements around men, boys and masculinities in WPS policies are more structural in nature. Specifically, the most impactful ways to consider these elements include work to challenge male-dominated and militarised governance; address imperialism and the economic drivers of violence and instability; examine the factors perpetuating gender-based violence and impunity; provide gender-transformative programmes to support conflict-affected communities; and understand the reasons behind men's participation in armed conflicts in order to provide positive alternatives.

Some of these priorities — including addressing GBV promoting "positive masculinity" and transforming male-dominated political and peace structures — are already reflected in WPS efforts, as seen above in the section on current language in NAPs. However, some experts believe that the current ways that these issues are seen by many governments and manifested into actions can be too narrow, therefore inhibiting implementation and progress. To this end, interviewees hoped to see governments implement the WPS agenda in its entirety, while also promoting policy coherence with other agendas and initiatives, such as human rights, disarmament and sustainable development. In addition, implementation should be rooted in country-specific gender conflict analysis that considers the factors listed above, to ensure targeted interventions.

The following sections provide further analysis, divided by sub-theme, on the

priorities under this topic. They provide insight into reactions to current approaches as well as analysis on the gaps that would enable more holistic work to advance prevention, women's participation in peace and human rights on the continent.

Preventing and Responding to Gender-Based Violence

Many key research informants highlighted the importance of further work on engaging men and boys in preventing and ending GBV. This is also the thematic focus of Human Rights Council Resolution 35/10 (2017) and of the Kinshasa Declaration. As seen above, this theme is to some extent present in the WPS UNSCRs, and in a few current NAPs in the Africa region. Experts hoped to see NAPs include more attention on the patriarchal norms and other factors driving the prevalence of GBV, as well as men's responsibilities to end GBV and violence in general.

Within this theme, it is critical to view GBV, including sexual violence in conflict, within a broader continuum of violence and against the background of evidence about the drivers of men's violence against women. According to the recently concluded multi-country *What Works to End Violence Against Women* research project, three structural factors underpin GBV.The first of these is "gender inequality in the form of patriarchal privilege and the disempowerment of women." The second is "the normalisation, and acceptability, of violence in social relationships" and the third is poverty. Based on an analysis of findings from 17 countries, the report concluded that these three structural factors "individually, and synergistically, drive men's perpetration of intimate partner violence (IPV) and increase women's risk of experiencing IPV."[77]

In the context of patriarchal power, where men's dominance is deeply rooted in cultural norms and enshrined in legal frameworks, key informants highlighted that women and girls are routinely subjected to a series of collective instances of violence and are subordinated under norms that define their worth and place in society by elements such as marriage status. This context for understanding GBV is important in order to identify the solutions that would most effectively address it.

Understanding contextual realities can also help shine a light on the factors fueling GBV and ultimately the path towards prevention. For example, in Somalia, some UN programmes are considering how to improve their work, based on evidence that livelihood factors and men's drug abuse are increasing the prevalence of gender-based violence in the country. Although these factors alone do not cause GBV, they are exacerbating it. It is important to consider this so that policy and programmatic interventions can correctly prioritise resources — in this case, in better public health.

The role of weapons in perpetrating GBV (and armed conflict) was also highlighted as a frequent gap in WPS efforts and as an essential element for conflict prevention. This finding reflects a longstanding critique from antimilitarist feminists, who emphasise the need for WPS to centre peace instead of militarised concepts of security that rely on weapons and military strength, and to avoid

77 Andrew Gibbs , Kristin Dunkle , Leane Ramsoomar , Samantha Willan , Nwabisa Jama Shai , Sangeeta Chatterji , Ruchira Naved & Rachel Jewkes (2020) New learnings on drivers of men's physical and/or sexual violence against their female partners, and women's experiences of this, and the implications for prevention interventions, Global Health Action, 13:1, 1739845, DOI: 10.1080/16549716.2020.1739845.

militarising the WPS agenda. Most NAPs on the continent currently lack attention to the gendered possession, proliferation, use and impact of different forms of weapons. This is despite the many different gendered forces and dynamics behind the proliferation, possession and use of weapons, as well as the existence of African regional efforts on disarmament and arms control such as the Silencing the Guns Campaign of the African Union.

In one example, as shared by an informant from Zimbabwe (and analysed in further detail in a recent WILPF report) many men in artisanal mining are in situations of vulnerability where they obtain weapons to protect themselves from gangs that operate in the sector.[78] As a result, militarisation is increasing in society overall and the violence that men are experiencing in their mining jobs is also spilling over into households. According to a 2021 report by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime,[79] the proliferation of illegal firearms has contributed to rising violence, conflict and political instability in Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe. An estimated 3.8 million unregistered firearms are believed to be in circulation in these three countries alone.[80]

One informant from Cameroon shared that there has been some receptiveness from the government to incorporating small arms and light weapons (SALW) control within the NAP, and there has been progress on disarmament frameworks in the country due to advocacy and collaboration between government and civil society. However, there is pushback from some actors in government who view weapons discussions as being under the purview of "national security" and therefore inappropriate for civil society — particularly women — to discuss or advocate for. This goes against the WPS framework, which calls for the participation of women in all aspects of peace and security.

Challenges with Training-Centric Approaches to Engaging Men and Boys on GBV

Among the most popular activities and strategies under this topic are programmes to engage and train individual men and boys, including on issues of gender-based violence. While these programmes can provide many benefits, there is a significant gap between an academic understanding of issues and applying these concepts in men's daily lives and behaviours. In addition, male fragility in training and workshop settings can also be a problem. An informant who has conducted extensive training for men on gender equality issues reflected that, in her own experience delivering training for men, many men become defensive when topics such as domestic violence or safer sex practices come up, especially when training material moves from the abstract into a more personal reflection. Male trainees are often open to learning about gender equality in general terms, but do not always want to think about how these topics show up in their own lives or in the lives of the men around them. For some men, the problem is therefore not that they lack information, but that they are unwilling to reflect upon and stop practicing harmful behaviours. This could be remedied by more investment in other activities such as psychosocial support and counseling, direct support to survivors/victims of violence and reforms to the education system from a young age.

78 Madzimure, Edwick. 2022. "Confronting militarised masculinities: Transforming the artisanal mining sector in Zimbabwe from a culture of patriarchal dominance to a safe space for women and girls." https://www.wilpf.org/mmffp_documents/confronting-militarised-masculinities-transforming-the-artisanal-mining-sector-in-zimbabwe-from-a-culture-of-patriarchal-dominance-to-a-safe-space-for-women-and-girls/.

79 Irish-Qhobosheane J. 2021. How to Silence the Guns. Available at https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/GITOC-ESA-Obs-How-to-silence-the-guns-Southern-Africas.REV_.pdf.

80 Ibid.

"Positive Masculinity" in Contexts of Armed Conflict and Militarisation

"Positive masculinity" was seen as another important topic for the advancement of peace on the continent, with interviewees emphasising that men have a duty to promote peace and nonviolence. An informant from Cameroon highlighted that a central WPS issue, in her view, is how men perpetuate harmful behaviours within patriarchal power structures to dominate (or to have "power over") rather than to have "power with." She also highlighted how harmful expressions of masculinity are causing obstacles to women's empowerment and health.

It is important for policies and programmes to recognise that "positive masculinity" should take on specific dimensions within the contexts of armed conflict, post-conflict and fragility. Although the WPS agenda is not only an agenda for conflict countries, "a positive masculinity agenda" within WPS must necessarily look at factors related to weapons and militarisation. This is because under the status quo, men are disproportionately the perpetrators of violence and participants in militarised institutions such as militaries, police forces and armed groups. Within the WPS context, "positive masculinity" could therefore include active promotion of men's roles and responsibilities in advancing peace and security through nonviolent means, rather than war. This is both to show that men can — and do — support gender equality, but also that men can make the choice not to use violence.

Challenging Men-Dominated Governance

Advancing women's representation in government, politics and peace processes were key priorities. In Cameroon and Zimbabwe, women-led civil society movements are advocating with their governments for strengthened language on how men are responsible for supporting women's participation and leadership. Patriarchal norms, values, behaviours and structures are well-documented barriers to women's participation and leadership. Therefore, interviewees wanted to see a more explicit recognition of men's responsibility to share (and yield) power within the NAPs, which is the language that they can use to hold them accountable on both an individual and systemic level.

Women's political participation has seen some progress in the past few decades, due to the introduction of quotas and other policies to promote women's involvement in politics. In the DRC, because of the work of civil society and government on the WPS NAP, women's representation in government increased to 27%, and there is a favourable set of laws promoting women's participation in decision-making bodies. Similarly, there is a quota system in Zimbabwe that started in the parliament but has expanded to local councils. However, electoral violence is a persistent problem that receives insufficient attention, despite its impact on social cohesion and women's political participation. Increased political participation has not always been mirrored by increased participation of women in peace processes, which remains low despite obligations under international frameworks and national commitments.

In terms of engaging with traditional leaders, this is an area with high potential and many challenges and barriers for women-led civil society. Many of the experts interviewed for this paper actively work to engage religious and traditional leaders because of the important roles they play in communities. However, in contexts of low accountability for implementation, it can be commonplace for male leaders to engage with but ultimately disregard women's analysis and contributions, fail to make genuine changes beyond vague words of support or have their undemocratic power further reinforced by efforts to engage them.

Interview Findings: Increased Women's Representation but Risk of Reversals

Advancements in women's representation and participation can also unravel due to male-driven political crises and armed conflict, as exemplified by the situation in Niger. An interviewee from Niger shared that one current barrier to women's participation and leadership in the country — and to WPS implementation — is political instability. Prior to the coup that occurred in July 2023, women reflected a growing percentage of members of parliament; however, since then, governance structures working for women's rights such as the Ministry of Women have been suspended. Additionally, there have been reservations to CEDAW, and the country has not ratified the Maputo Protocol due to backlash from religious leaders. This has undermined efforts to advocate for gender equality language in domestic legislation.

To advance the WPS agenda in Niger, it is necessary to have a body accountable for this work. Therefore interviewees believed it is important to bring back the Ministry of Women to promote key goals on gender and women's empowerment.

Missing Elements and Gaps

Most interviewees expressed optimism around the future of the WPS agenda because they felt that their advocacy has advanced the discourse around gender and peace on the continent, and they have seen increased uptake of civil society recommendations. However, despite this progress, participants suggest improvements still need to be made in terms of perceptions and policies on masculinity, militarisation and securitisation, intersectionality, human rights, health and economic factors behind conflicts. Addressing root causes is particularly key to advancing the core purpose of the WPS agenda, namely, women's rights, participation and gender-responsive approaches to peace and security. Therefore, interviewees also emphasised that policy coherence was paramount.

Interviews revealed that **intersectionality** — or the intersecting barriers to participation and well-being that people experience according to age, gender diversity and sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability and other factors — was viewed as missing in much of WPS implementation on the continent. Some NAPs contain gender analysis reflecting on these elements. However, this analysis is not always matched with activities in this regard that target specific populations, and NAPs are not always linked with other national policies and treaty obligations. As a result,

current policies continue to reinforce binary categories of "woman", "man", "girl" and "boy", and privilege a smaller subset of perspectives in the WPS space.

Africa is the world's youngest continent in terms of population age. Therefore, an informant from Kenya reinforced the need for greater connection between the YPS and WPS frameworks. She believes more work must be done to include young people in peacebuilding and understand their experiences. This is also the case in terms of understanding young people's priorities — many of which are daily necessities like food, housing and jobs — and the intersections between issues they face.

Interview Highlight: Linking WPS and YPS to Address Impacts of Conscription

Young men and teenage boys are the primary groups targeted by armed forces and groups for recruitment. The drivers behind joining armed groups vary widely, including elements such as an armed group's association with their tribe, land disputes, grievances against the government, economic factors such as unemployment or forced recruitment. Because of these myriad factors, one interviewee highlighted the potential of using the WPS and YPS frameworks in conjunction to address the underlying causes and impacts of conscription into militaries and armed groups. In her view, governments must shift away from hard security and counterterrorism stances and instead find more ways to support young people, including young men and boys. Rather than cracking down on them and perceiving them as potential threats, the interviewee believes that young people, including boys, should have their human rights fulfilled and protected, and should be empowered and included in peacebuilding and decision-making.

Another gap is the lack of a more robust examination of the **structural drivers of violence, rooted in patriarchy and militarism**. Economic dimensions and realities, including colonialism and neocolonialism, poverty, land dispossession and land grabbing, corruption and extractive economies are relevant to the WPS agenda, but are often ignored or treated as out of scope by certain WPS actors. Aside from some focus on women's economic empowerment, current WPS policies do an inadequate job of recognising and addressing the systemic root causes behind conflict and violence, including economic drivers. This is despite the fact that male power historically has been — and continues to be — at the helm of almost all of these realities.

Indeed, as one informant from Zimbabwe shared, peace and security policies are also often completely disconnected from other sectoral policies that may in fact be perpetuating instability and conflict. For example, international financial institutions (IFIs) have had a well-documented and notable impact on the development trajectories of African countries, advancing harmful policies of austerity and privatisation and undermining the enjoyment of human rights. At the regional economic community level and the international level, the policies of IFIs and free trade agreements often have adverse impacts on communities that fuel local-level violence. Smaller businesses are disadvantaged by free trade agreements that give priority to larger ventures, even when these large corporations extract profits out of communities, and exploit both local labour and the environment. In Cameroon, land

grabbing and dispossession are persistent issues and drivers of conflict but remain excluded from policies and conflict analysis.

These factors are critical to consider because they directly impact communities and have highly gendered dimensions.

> "To address the gendered dimensions of conflict, we must look beyond individual choices to the political economy that creates the conditions for individual behaviour. Specifically, we need to understand, name, and address the structural forces that put people and entire countries into a position of exploitation and impoverishment and that profit from militarising men's identities and fomenting violence and conflict."[81]

In line with this, Jacqui True argues that "Patterns of violence against women from the home to the transnational realm are structurally linked to patterns of global transformation instigated by economic, political, military and natural environmental forces."[82]

Recent WILPF research highlights licit and illicit sales and rapid proliferation of small arms and light weapons; land dispossession; the failure of the state to deliver on its obligations to its citizens as a result of structural adjustment and foreign debt; military aid and training; inter-group grievances; and foreign aggression as drivers of violence.[83] Other analysts point to a common set of drivers: weak states, corruption, repression of dissent by state military and police forces, unequal access to resources and a lack of mechanisms for peaceful redress.[84]

One participant from Kenya shared that although she has seen some promising practices on engaging men and boys, these generally lack any more substantial reflection around masculinity or structural drivers, thereby limiting the potential ambition of these efforts. One participant from CAR echoed that there is a low understanding of gender-related concepts such as "militarised masculinity" within her country, which is making it difficult to bring up these ideas with decision makers. She believes this is an important concept to convey, but low understanding of gender issues overall has been limiting. This perspective was shared by other participants from a range of countries who gave feedback on earlier drafts of this research.

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81 Peacock, D. Pascoe, L. Welsh, P. & Pino, A. Seeing the forest for the trees: The case for a more structural approach to countering militarized masculinities and mobilising men for feminist peace, in Myrttinen, H. Yousaf, F. Lewis. C. Schulz, P. Touquet, H. Laruni, E. Masculinities, Conflict, Peacebuilding Handbook, forthcoming from Routledge.

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Interview Highlight: Impacts of Artisanal Mining on Young Men and Boys in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, as shared by a key informant, there is a great deal of violence associated with the small-scale and artisanal mining sector that reinforces existing patterns of corruption, inequality and impunity. This violence is impacting entire communities but has specific impacts on young men and boys. Communities in mining regions of Zimbabwe lack sufficient livelihoods and resources, but the few international interventions and livelihood programmes that exist often aim to fill gender gaps by targeting women and girls. While laudable, this focus leaves boys with no targeted support, leading many to drop out of school and enter artisanal mining. As the interviewee stated, this sector is "characterised by violence": violent gangs operate in the mining fields, and there is impunity for mining-related violence due to lack of accountability and ineffective local governance. Because of prevailing norms around masculinity and the need to maintain their livelihoods, men and boys feel like they cannot run away from the violence but instead are led to take up arms in defense. This perpetuates cycles of violence in the community, which also comes home to women and girls. Therefore, the interviewee believes that a specific focus on men and boys is needed in this context to curtail the cycles of conflict and violence they are being drawn into.

Another key gap is around the **securitisation of the WPS agenda**. As found by PeaceWomen's 2020 report, *UNSCR 1325 at 20 Years: Perspectives of Feminist Peace Activists and Civil Society*, many governments primarily focus on the WPS agenda by prioritising a security sector agenda, for example through quotas and financial interventions to add women to militaries, police and security forces. This has been critiqued by antimilitarist and pacifist feminists, who have highlighted that the transformative potential of WPS is not to make militaries stronger but to shift the way peace and security are understood and advanced in the first place.

The interviewees emphasised the need to focus on conflict prevention and on advancing peace through nonviolent means. In this regard, looking at masculinity and the roles of men and boys can potentially help challenge the idea that men's violence — or any violence — is inevitable. Some current WPS approaches are deconstructing the essentialist binary whereby women are seen as "peaceful" and men are seen as "violent" but are doing so in ways that show women can also be part of violent structures. Instead, the interviewees believe it is important to support people of all genders who are working for peace through nonviolent means. Weapons possession and proliferation and rising militarism were also seen as critical to address and curb. This reflects the importance of initiatives such as the Silencing the Guns campaign of the African Union, which emphasises violence prevention and disarmament.

Health is another issue that relates to gendered experiences in conflict and fragile contexts and where men exercise a great deal of control. Women's bodily autonomy is limited by patriarchal power, impacting women's rights, safety and ability to participate in peacebuilding and the economy. Informants from multiple countries, including Niger, said that health needs more attention under WPS and could also benefit from some thinking around masculinity and patriarchy.

One informant from Cameroon agreed that health is vital to address, but also shared that it is "harder to bring to the table." In her experience, men have been very reluctant to engage on topics like HIV/AIDS and safer sex practices, as well as polygamy. Another participant from Kenya shared that she has seen examples where health programming can in fact reinforce harmful norms, thereby making a feminist lens essential. For example, she observed that one community health programme required a husband's permission for a wife to participate, which reinforced the idea that it was acceptable for a man to refuse his wife access to family planning services. Health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, is also an issue highlighted in Human Rights Council Resolution 35/10.[85]

There also remains the persistent misunderstanding of the WPS agenda as being an agenda for conflict-affected and post-conflict countries only, as opposed to being an agenda that can also support the advancement of conflict prevention. For example, in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Eswatini, there have been questions about the relevance of WPS given that these states are not involved in interstate wars or armed conflicts. But as of 2020, South Africa has developed a NAP based on its local context. Zimbabwe has also developed a NAP as of 2024, and Eswatini is considering one due to the efforts of civil society and other WPS proponents. One participant also shared the need to include conversations around masculinity within transitional justice and truth and reconciliation processes, including in post-conflict periods.

85 Resolution 35/10. 2017. United Nations Human Rights Council. See: https://www.wilpf.org/mmffp_documents/use-and-impacts-of-the-united-nations-human-rights-council-resolution/

Recommendations for Strengthening Implementation

Numerous reports have outlined the extensive gaps in implementing the WPS agenda at the global and regional levels. WILPF's 2020 report, *UNSCR 1325 at 20 Years*, found that several key barriers to implementation of the agenda have been militarisation; political and patriarchal undermining of the agenda; cherry-picking of priorities rather than holistic approaches; and lack of political will.

In the interviews and focus group discussions conducted for this research, participants were invited to reflect on the gaps in implementation of the WPS agenda thus far. Many of the interviewees echoed the well-documented barriers to implementation listed above, and shared that continued **cherry-picking of priorities** remains a particular concern, posing the risk of aligning with **donor-driven agendas rather than addressing contextual realities**. Several cited **political will and deprioritisation**, with one person sharing that she believes "the 1325 agenda is being used by governments to get money for projects...but they don't do the work." Notably, all interviewees called for **greater financing and resources for the agenda**. One participant from Kenya brought up the significant evidence that NAPs which are budgeted have been implemented to a far greater extent, in part because they also had better monitoring and evaluation frameworks to ensure accountability. **Information and data** was also an important gap: as one interviewee shared, "We need to learn so much more in order to know how to address [the problems]."

Shrinking space for civil society and reprisals were of serious concern for several of the interviewed experts, most of whom have been engaging in feminist, women's rights and peace work for many years. One expert shared that there have been more and more actions from government officials to "limit the space of women and human rights defenders," including smear campaigns accusing civil society of being spies or working for "the West". Civil society actors are sometimes viewed as being part of a "hidden agenda", which makes their work riskier and more dangerous. Since there is a global trend of backlash against gender issues, including against LGBTQ+ persons and movements, there are also growing risks to some of this advocacy in particular.

Regional leadership is one of the most important forces that several participants believe is advancing the agenda. One participant expressed that in the face of shrinking space and uneven implementation at the national level, the African Union's role has been critical. Because the

African Union has strong policies and leadership on WPS, women's civil society and their allies have made the case more strongly that WPS is an African agenda and that masculinity, within that, is also a relevant topic. In the words of one participant, the AU is "setting the tone, and member states are going along." In her view, the AU's adoption of progressive positions and language on men, boys and masculinity, from an African standpoint, has helped to galvanise progress in the past few years. In addition, some participants shared that they believe work has been able to advance partly because men in government have politically and publicly supported the agenda's goals, setting the example of "power with". The AU is also in the process of consulting stakeholders across the continent in drafting an AU Convention around Ending Violence Against Women — a process that includes a consideration of positive masculinities. WILPF and MenEngage Africa have contributed to this process, specifically by making a submission on positive masculinities.

In some cases, there are also positive developments in programming with and for men and boys. For example, one participant shared that UN agencies are pursuing projects to look at postcolonial grievances in Northern Ghana, and in Mali and Guinea they are looking at cross border early warning systems which look at the exploitation of boys and their experiences in pastoralist conflict. In CAR, there are efforts on trauma healing and mental health. There is a need, however, to expand and link up these efforts with WPS and YPS programming to avoid siloing of efforts.

Because of the above, and the strong, coordinated work of civil society, many participants felt hopeful despite implementation barriers. One participant said that she is very hopeful for the agenda's future and feels like progress is finally happening in her country because government officials are beginning to take up their recommendations. Another shared her hope that strengthening such approaches on men and boys can help to holistically address the impacts of armed conflict on people's lives and help bring people of all genders together for peace.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined the different ways in which topics around men, boys, masculinities and patriarchy are present in a selection of existing WPS and gender-related policy frameworks, both at a global level and in the African continent. Through interviews with experts, it has proceeded to identify promising practices, challenges and opportunities for incorporating consideration of these themes within WPS implementation. Themes such as men's violence against women and girls, the use of weapons including small arms and light weapons, militarisation, impacts of armed conflict on men and boys, engaging men to support women's participation and "positive masculinity" are already receiving some degree of attention in policies in the region, both in terms of regional policies as well as National Action Plans on WPS.

Experts believe that it is important to prioritise incorporating these issues in discussions around preventing and responding to GBV, root causes and drivers of armed conflict and challenging male-dominated governance. Further, they identified a number of missing elements and gaps, such as intersectionality, economic and structural drivers and risks of further securitisation. Above all, this paper has underscored the importance of not considering these themes in isolation or engaging men for the sake of it. Rather, it is fundamental to ground these efforts as complementary to gender equality, peace and conflict prevention work, under the leadership of women and feminist movements. =