



SUMMARY POLICY BRIEF

Patriarchy, Masculinity and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda on the African Continent

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Policy Brief: Patriarchy, Masculinity and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda on the African Continent

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Background

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. Today, this work 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. 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.¹ These realities make it critical to support gender-transformative, resourced and coordinated regional efforts for peace.

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.

There are ongoing and vibrant debates within feminist movements and the WPS field about the space and prioritisation that issues relating to men, boys, concepts of masculinities and gendered dimensions of armed conflict, and men and boys themselves, should occupy. This brief explores these perspectives with the goal of supporting feminist advocacy on peace, gender justice and WPS implementation as a whole.

About this Policy Brief

This new policy brief from WILPF aims to showcase how concepts and debates on the role of men and patriarchy have been incorporated within African national and regional discussions on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

Focusing specifically on African policy frameworks and using examples from the continent, it shares insights and recommendations from African feminists about how the WPS agenda can be advanced in alignment with feminist principles to address the root causes of conflict and violence.

This brief includes a review of African regional-level policies and how they are addressing men and boys in their gender frameworks; trends in language on men, boys and masculinity within WPS efforts; a look at where and how states should incorporate a focus on men and boys; and recommendations for strengthening implementation.

¹ "African Conflicts Displace Over 40 Million People – World." 2023. ReliefWeb. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/african-conflicts-displace-over-40-million-people>.

By looking at different regional and national policies and analysing them from the standpoints of African WPS experts, it 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 Women, Peace and Security 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?

This policy brief was developed as part of a longstanding partnership between WILPF and the MenEngage Alliance, including MenEngage Africa, and was informed by desk research, expert interviews, focus group discussions and validation meetings.

Key Findings

- There are various regional and subregional policies in Africa that deal with gender, WPS and peace and security and include men and boys to varying levels. For example, the **Kinshasa Declaration on Positive Masculinity (2021)** expresses concern about the persistence of violence against women and girls and links this to harmful sociocultural norms and practices.
- As a continent, Africa is a leader in adopting National Action Plans (NAPs) on WPS. Approximately one third (36) of NAPs globally are in Africa as of July 2024. A small subset of these NAPs looks at issues related to men, boys and masculinity. The most frequently included topics are men's involvement in perpetrating gender-based violence; men and boys as victims of armed conflict; men as allies in promoting women's participation; and activities to engage men and boys.
- WPS implementation on the continent has seen uneven progress on the agenda's pillars and lacks a sufficient focus on prevention and structural dimensions.
- Key informants expressed that it is crucial to recognise and address the variety of gendered factors causing and fuelling different forms of violence on the continent.
- Specifically, some of the most impactful ways to consider these elements include challenging patriarchal, militarised governance, addressing the economic drivers of violence, examining the root causes of gender-based violence, supporting gender-transformative programming in conflict-affected areas and providing positive alternatives to men's participation in armed conflict.

Key Recommendations for Strengthening Implementation of the WPS Agenda

In the interviews and focus group discussions conducted for this policy brief, participants were invited to reflect on the gaps in implementation of the WPS agenda thus far and offer recommendations for improvement.

Many of the interviewees echoed the well-documented barriers to implementation, which include militarisation, political and patriarchal undermining of the WPS agenda, cherry-picking of priorities rather than holistic approaches and lack of political will. Notably, all interviewees called for greater financing and resources for the agenda.

Based on extensive research, interviews and focus group discussions, the brief surfaced several key recommendations for strengthening implementation on of the WPS agenda on the African continent.

Related to Men and Boys

- Strengthening approaches on engaging men and boys can enhance support for the WPS agenda and holistically address the impacts of armed conflict.
- Examples of positive developments in programming with and for men and boys include:
 - Projects being undertaken by UN agencies to look at cross-border early warning systems that flag the exploitation of boys in Mali and Guinea.
 - Efforts in CAR to support trauma healing and mental health initiatives for boys and men.
- However, this is a need to link any efforts on men and boys to WPS implementation and, when relevant, to implementation of Youth, Peace and Security programming.
- Some of the most promising avenues for considering and incorporating elements around men, boys and masculinities in WPS policies are more structural in nature and should include:
 - Work to challenge male-dominated and militarised governance
 - Addressing imperialism and the economic drivers of violence and instability
 - Examining the factors perpetuating gender-based violence and impunity
 - Providing gender-transformative programmes to support conflict-affected communities

- Understanding the reasons behind men's participation in armed conflicts to provide positive alternatives

Other Approaches

- ➔ Donors must fund feminist movements so that movements can advance their own self-identified priorities grounded in local, gendered conflict analysis, rather than being required to pursue donor-driven projects that may not align with their true and critical goals.
- ➔ Governments must not only advance the WPS Agenda in words, but must match their rhetoric with concrete action and political will to ensure implementation, even when it is difficult to do so.
- ➔ Cherry-picking of priorities remains a particular concern, posing the risk of aligning with donor-driven agendas rather than addressing contextual realities. This should be recognised and addressed.
- ➔ Some governments are using the WPS agenda to secure money for projects but are not doing the work required to implement it, pointing to a lack of political will and deprioritisation of the agenda.
- ➔ Greater financing and resourcing are required to enable the full and effective implementation of the WPS agenda. NAPs should be built into budgets to support their implementation and evaluation.
- ➔ Governments and leaders need to protect civil society spaces for dialogue and organising. Many government officials are increasingly limiting the spaces available to women and human rights defenders, who are sometimes viewed as being part of a "hidden agenda" – a reality that puts their work and lives at risk.
- ➔ More information and data on the scope of the challenges is required to better understand how to address them.
- ➔ Regional leadership and policies, such as the work of the African Union, has been crucial to the advancement of the WPS agenda and should continue to be prioritised.

Conclusion

This policy brief concludes with an overview of its objectives, including outlining 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 and identifying promising practices, challenges and opportunities for incorporating consideration of these themes within WPS implementation.

The conclusion notes that certain key themes, such as men's violence against women and girls, militarisation and engaging men to support women's participation, among other areas, are already receiving some degree of attention in policies on the African continent, both in terms of regional policies as well as National Action Plans on WPS. At the same time, missing elements and gaps – such as intersectionality, economic and structural drivers and risks of further securitisation – must be effectively addressed in order to advance true change.

The brief ends by noting that efforts related to examining and addressing the role of men and boys in the implementation of the WPS agenda are fundamental to the achievement of feminist peace and should be seen as complementary to gender equality, peace and conflict prevention work under the leadership of women and feminist movements.

