

# IMPLEMENTING THE GLOBAL WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA IN ETHIOPIA, KENYA AND MALI

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# ABSTRACT

This report examines how and to what extent national action plans (NAPs) are a useful tool for fostering local ownership of the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda. Focusing on three case countries, Ethiopia, Kenya and Mali, the report interrogates different actions that can generate ownership and how these manifest in institutional approaches to WPS or UNSCR 1325 adoption and implementation. The three countries present very different circumstances for engaging with the WPS agenda and for doing so through NAPs. The report shows that the WPS agenda is also implemented by civil society beyond the scope of NAPs, while the narrow purview of actors involved with NAPs has led to limited ownership by government and civil society actors beyond those directly involved. NAP implementation is further challenged by unsustainable funding strategies and while diverse actors engage with WPS in their localities, a lack of data and reporting limits the monitoring of NAP implementation. Notwithstanding these limitations, the drafting and adoption of NAPs can link the work people do on the ground to official government policy and thereby legitimise the WPS work of different stakeholders who can mobilise around WPS NAPs strategically. NAPs are also used to monitor governments' engagement with the agenda, to mobilise funds and to debate the gendered aspects of new and old security challenges and gender equality more broadly, all of which can facilitate holding governments to account and advancing the WPS agenda.




GA72 - High-Level Briefing on the African Women Leaders Network. 21 September 2017.  
Photo and description: Ryan Brown / UN Women.

# INTRODUCTION: WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AS A GLOBAL POLICY AGENDA

With various crises shaking the world, and a major gap between the goals of women, peace and security (WPS) and interventions, the WPS agenda is as relevant as ever. Crystallised into a global policy agenda through the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000, the WPS agenda calls for inclusive peacebuilding, with women at the centre of conflict prevention and resolution, peace negotiations, peacebuilding and peacekeeping, and post-conflict reconstruction. The adoption of a national action plan (NAP) is the promoted strategy for implementing the WPS agenda into locally relevant policy frameworks and translating it into national contexts. This report examines how or whether African countries take ownership of the WPS agenda through NAPs or other strategies. The report discusses the openings for and limitations to stakeholders' and partners' ability to mobilise NAPs for WPS implementation. The final section of the report considers opportunities to enhance WPS ownership within and beyond NAP frameworks, and opportunities for alliances in such work.

NAPs are intended to create a space to adjust and localise the globally-agreed agenda and to foster participation and ownership at national level. By 2023, 54% (104 countries) of the UN Member States had adopted NAPs, but some of these documents have now expired. A region of diverse conflicts, Africa is home to 34 NAPs, 16 of which are pending renewal. The NAPs are usually drafted for 2-5 years and sometimes their period of application is extended. While they are guided by UNSCR 1325 and the four pillars of the WPS agenda (discussed below), NAPs do not follow any clear standards, both in their content as well as in their implementation. In fact, the contextualisation of the WPS agenda has produced NAPs that vary in

scope, length, depth and purpose. As will be discussed in the first section of the report, some NAPs are foreign policy documents, while others address the internal context. Many fail to meaningfully discuss the role and participation of civil society, the qualitative participation of women beyond numbers, and lack budgetary considerations regarding NAP implementation activities. Across the continent the evaluation, assessment and reporting on NAPs is uneven and generally poor, which makes it difficult to track implementation and advances.

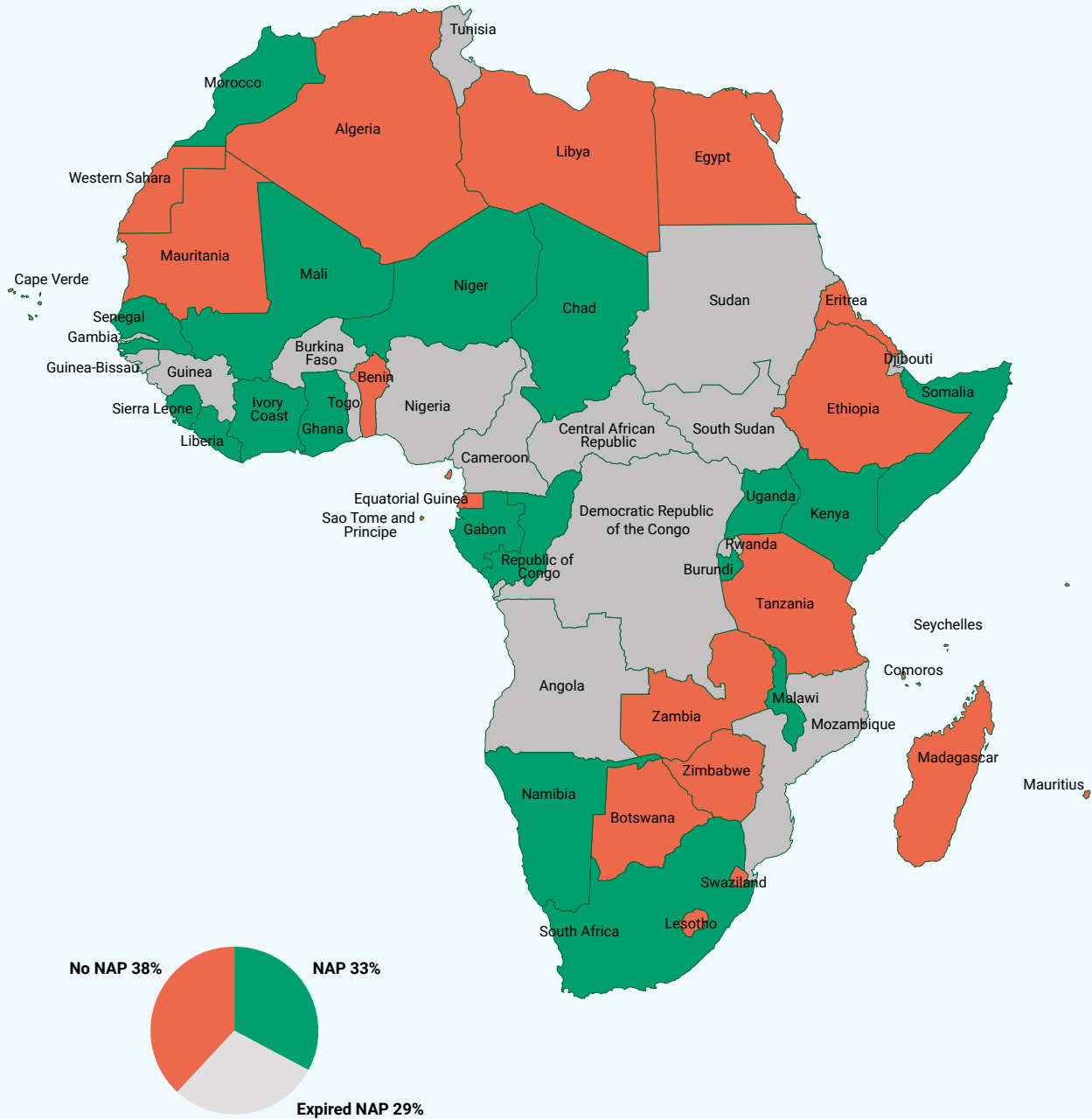


**NAPs do not follow any clear standards, both in their content as well as in their implementation. In fact, the contextualisation of the WPS agenda has produced NAPs that vary in scope, length, depth and purpose.**

Considering these inconsistencies and challenges, the report focuses on three different case countries on the continent. It analyses the uses and relevance of NAPs in Ethiopia, Kenya and Mali as part of the broader WPS work in these countries. Questions raised and discussed in the report include: What led the African countries in question to locate their NAPs at ministries of gender and a co-host? How do state and non-state actors reconcile the dependency on donor funding for implementation and the lack of national budget commitment by governments? What are the different strategies of NAP implementation? Can NAP development and implementation processes be inclusive in contexts of shrinking civic space? By providing a comprehensive review of the translation of WPS through NAPs, this report untangles questions of CSO participation and inclusion, the legal and policy effects of NAPs and WPS implementation in different countries. An extended review of WPS activities at the grassroots level was beyond the scope of this report. Engaging with the issues raised by the diverse case studies, the report considers the critiques in the literature on the WPS agenda and its operationalisation.

Broadly, the report is divided into four parts. Firstly, the background section provides an overview of the different pillars of the WPS agenda, the emergence of WPS NAPs as tools for implementation, and a discussion of WPS in the Africa region. Secondly, we discuss the methods used for data collection, including the country case selection and interviewees. Third, we examine how countries like Ethiopia, Kenya and Mali have used NAPs in their national contexts and the extent to which the process of drafting, adopting and implementing NAPs has led to increased national

Map 1. Status of WPS NAPs across Africa, compiled in May 2023



ownership of the WPS agenda. The case of Ethiopia provides a perspective on a conflict-affected country where the first WPS NAP is currently being drawn up. We examine the ways in which Ethiopia has engaged with WPS in previous years, and whether the ongoing WPS NAP processes have an impact on women in post-conflict Ethiopia. The case of Kenya looks at WPS NAP in the context of post-electoral violence, ethnic tensions and counter-terrorism work. We explore how Kenya has learnt from its first NAP and refocused the attention on localisation through engagement with existing devolved governance structures as well as local actors. The case of Mali is one of a country in conflict and insecurity, where a strong civil society finds itself in an increasingly shrinking political space. At the time of the third NAP implementation, civilians in Mali are increasingly subject to violence by security actors. In the fourth section of this report we bring the data and findings from the different case studies together in a discussion, and we focus on 'fostering ownership'. We analyse WPS ownership in the case studies by looking at UNSCR 1325 policy diffusion and policy implementation. The analysis shows that there are tensions between how inclusivity is imagined as opposed to how it is practiced, as well as around how we measure successful implementation.

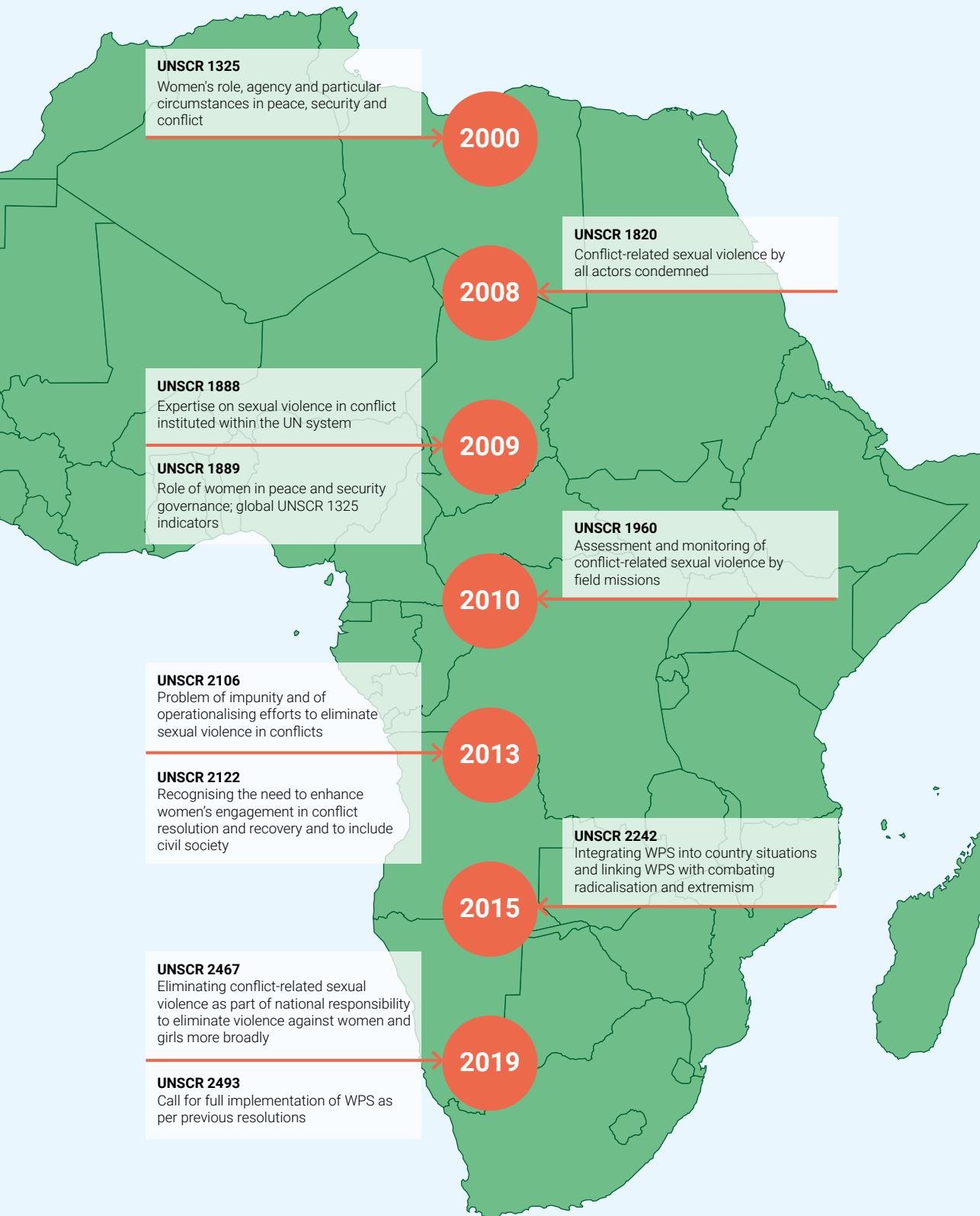


Female African Union soldiers, as part of the African Union Mission in Somalia, attend a meeting with the Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security. 26 November 2014  
Photo: AMISON Public Information, CCO, via Wikimedia Commons

## BACKGROUND: THE INSTITUTIONS OF WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

The WPS agenda is generally understood to build on the UN Security Council resolutions on the topic.<sup>1</sup> The adoption of UNSCR 1325 carved out a space for gender dimensions at the highest level of security governance. However, a coherent language around it, including technical concepts, has only developed over the past ten years or so through scholarly and policy work (Basu, Kirby and Shepherd 2020: 4). Since the adoption of Resolution 1325, another ten resolutions have been adopted.

**Figure 1. UN Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security**



Central to the WPS agenda are the four pillars: participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery (all descriptions of pillars are taken from Ananyan and Longhurst 2022: 5). On the ground, the pillars are contextualised by the WPS practitioners. One civil society actor explained:

‘ We use the four P’s of Resolution 1325, but we don’t confine ourselves to them. ’


(Interview, ACCORD, 26 April 2023)

Prevention is concerned with interventions to discourage acts of violence against women, including prosecution of abusers and violators. The participation pillar calls for including more women across the hierarchies within peace and security architecture. This encompasses peace operations; conflict management, resolution and prevention; peace negotiations; and defence and police forces. In recent years the participation pillar has been scrutinised as there are structural and intersecting constraints for people with different identity markers (age, sexual orientation, race etc.) to enter, participate and succeed in highly masculinised security institutions (Kirby and Shepherd 2016: 375-376; Baldwin 2022: 4-9). The protection pillar focuses on protecting women across conflict and post-conflict situations, such as in refugee settings, humanitarian aid, and from conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence. The major focus on conflict-related sexual violence is seen as a diversion from ensuring women’s participation in the peace and security architecture (Kirby and Shepherd 2016: 279-280). The relief and recovery pillar focuses on including a gender lens in international crisis management (Ananyan and Longhurst 2022:5). Relief and recovery can involve diverse interventions spanning from economic empowerment to disarmament, demobilisation and resettlement (True and Hewitt 2019).

## **THE RISE OF WPS NATIONAL ACTION PLANS**

In order to operationalise UNSCR 1325 and the global WPS agenda at country level, states are encouraged to adopt NAPs (Hamilton, Naam and Shepherd 2020: 1). Denmark was the first country to do so in 2004 (NAP 2005-2007) and is currently on its fourth NAP. The first African countries to adopt WPS NAPs were Ivory Coast and Uganda in 2008. NAPs are considered to be strategic documents that function as coordination tools, goal-setters or means for accountability. In this section the current trends in and prevalence of adopting NAPs are briefly discussed, including

the relative success of institutionalising the WPS agenda. After this, and before moving to a closer look at the WPS agenda in the African region, there is a short discussion on some of the challenges of using NAPs as a central WPS tool.



**The engagement with the WPS agenda through NAPs is therefore uneven and, as some of the interviewees also pointed out, perhaps not all countries need one.**

As mentioned above, most NAPs are active for a couple of years and each year, some NAPs 'expire'. It can therefore be difficult to keep tabs on the countries that are currently in the process of NAP implementation. Several countries have produced multiple generations of NAPs while others have not. Kenya, for instance, adopted its second-generation NAP in 2020 (2020-2024), a few years after its first NAP had expired. Namibia however, despite being considered instrumental for the adoption of UNSCR 1325 by the Security Council, only adopted a NAP in 2019. Beyond Africa, New Zealand is a country that is known for its commitment to international gender equality norms but has not renewed its NAP since it expired in 2019. The engagement with the WPS agenda through NAPs is therefore uneven and, as some of the interviewees also pointed out, perhaps not all countries need one. Notably, two of the Security Council's permanent members, Russia and China, have never adopted a WPS NAP. In a 2016 statement Russian representative Sergey Lavrov made the point that NAPs can be useful for countries in conflict, but that for the case of Russia a National Strategy of Action for Women would be the way forward.<sup>2</sup> This argument is also sometimes used by African actors.

Nevertheless, considering their voluntary nature and weak accountability mechanisms, the consistent increase in adoption of WPS NAPs is noteworthy. Jacqui True's (2016) study on which states develop NAPs and why offers interesting insights into the diffusion of the global WPS agenda. True shows that the number of NAPs increased around commemorative events or anniversaries (like 2010 or 2020, i.e. at 10 or 20 years of UNSCR 1325). Additionally, both conflict-affected countries and those that have not had recent conflicts within their borders have a similar likelihood of adopting a NAP. Looking at engagement with global gender equality norms, she suggests that countries that have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) without reservations are more likely to develop and adopt WPS NAPs. However, this correlation is not the most decisive, as 20% (5) of the 25 countries that entered

reservations have ratified NAPs as opposed to 38% (54) of 142 countries that did not enter reservations to CEDAW. Perhaps more telling is the fact that donors began funding WPS implementation, thereby making it more significant for countries to have a document that allows them to evidence their efforts. According to Davies and True (2022), the normative commitments countries are willing to make rarely meet all the conditions of donor support for WPS. However, it still makes a huge difference in policy implementation. Other evidence points to countries adopting WPS NAPs or making WPS commitments ahead of, or during, their seat on the UN Security Council (for instance South Africa, Australia and Kenya).

While the increasing engagement with WPS through NAPs is generally welcomed, there are some concerns regarding the legal status of WPS resolutions and the extent to which they can be reinforced by the Security Council. As it stands, the legal implications and incentives for member states to implement UNSCR 1325 in their countries are unclear. Calling for more NAPs is thus rather a suggestion than a requirement, and reporting on national-level implementation is entirely voluntary (Ananyan and Longhurst 2022: 5). Considered a 'soft law', UNSCR 1325 is more of a normative than a legal framework (Swaine 2009: 409-411; Jonjić-Beitter, Stadler and Tietgen 2020: 180). Some scholars argue that NAPs function as a way to confine the WPS agenda into a narrow frame and avoid cross-cutting transformation. The WPS work sometimes takes place in silos, by appointed actors and institutions, without broader awareness or reform of practices.

Another area of concern is the uneven weighting and attention given to the four pillars. While the Secretary-Generals' reports and NAPs tend to give equal amounts of space to the pillars, the WPS resolutions since UNSCR 1325 are biased towards prevention and protection over participation (Kirby and Shepherd 2016). The main object of critique is the policy approach to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), which presents such abuses as a discontinuity in usually harmonious gender relations and fails to account for the wider gendered inequalities that bleed into gendered and sexualised violence during periods of conflict. According to Kirby and Shepherd, a general recognition of gender-based discrimination in society as the root cause of absence of women in peace processes, and of conflict-related sexual violence, would integrate the different pillars more coherently. Recently, Hamilton, Naam and Shepherd (2020) have shown that in NAPs it is the prevention pillar which is most neglected, and that participation is the most influential pillar. In other words, even though UNSC WPS resolutions prioritise prevention and protection, the stakeholders at a national level prioritise participation, implying that priorities of the stakeholders in individual countries do not match those of the global WPS.

## WPS NAPS IN AFRICA


The WPS agenda in the African region is characterised by a tension: UNSCR 1325 represents a global policy and its implementation depends on donor funding. At the same time, African actors have advocated for women's inclusion in peace processes since the early 1990s and their contributions to the WPS agenda are well recorded (Basu 2016; Hendricks 2017; Haastrup and Hagen 2020). The African Women's Committee for Peace and Development (AWCPD) was the first transnational network of women's organisations with a formalised advisory role to the Organisation of African Unity in 1997 (Tornius 2023:11). Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS), a member of AWCPD, was also a founding member of the NGO working group on women, peace and security at the UN in 1998 (Basu 2016: 365). Furthermore, Namibia was a key actor in the UNSC organising of a workshop a few months ahead of the 1325 adoption and was the holder of the presidency of the UNSC at the time of the adoption (Weiss 2021). Over the years diverse African leaders and activists have taken the initiative to advance the participation of women in peace processes. What is less clear is the impact those efforts have had on conflict or post-conflict situations, and for women in Africa more broadly.

WPS NAPs have been adopted with considerable success on the continent. Arguably, the fact that more than half of African Union member states have adopted NAPs is one of the major successes of the African women's rights networks (Haastrup 2019). The founder of FAS, Mme Bineta Diop, was appointed Special Envoy on WPS at the Office of the Chairperson in 2014 and continues to serve in that role. On International Peace Day 2020 commemorative event Mme Diop said of her position:

I'm an advisor to the chairperson, who works across the AU. It is not just the Peace and Security Department. It must deal with the Political Department because Political Department is the one following elections; is the one looking at governance; is the one looking into participation. I also work with Social Affairs because they are the ones looking at the community level etc. So, there you can see that the Women Peace and Security agenda is cross-cutting.

(Online event, Women, the catalyst for a peaceful prosperous Africa, 21 September 2020)

Similarly to the UN Secretary-General, the African Union Commission (AUC) produces annual progress reports on the implementation of the WPS agenda in Africa. The report is prepared by the Office of the Special Envoy on WPS. At the AU Heads of State Summit 2015 it was agreed to further develop national and regional action plans on UNSCR 1325 to advance the WPS agenda.<sup>3</sup> The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) adopted the Gender, Peace, and Security Programme for 2015-2020. At the heart of APSA is the African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC), a decision-making body on conflict resolution on the continent which has adopted several resolutions on WPS (R223, R269, R342 and R407). The AUC 2016 annual report on WPS addressed UNSCR 1325 implementation efforts in countries without NAPs, particularly highlighting the success of a broad and mainstreamed approach by Namibia (p.13 in the Annual Report 2016. Namibia adopted a NAP in 2019). The report also highlighted the complexities of thinking via regional and national action plans, when in practice ‘coalitions of the willing’ were emerging elsewhere (for instance Rwanda, DRC and Burundi in the Great Lakes region, and Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea coming together in the Mano River Union, see p. 14). The AUC then showcased a commitment to highlighting the contextual particularities of WPS agenda implementation and acknowledged that imposed structures may not facilitate the dialogues needed and hoped for.



**The WPS agenda can be implemented by diverse actors in ways that do not directly speak to the language of UNSCR resolutions, but more to the underlying values of WPS.**

In 2019, the AUC launched the Continental Results Framework (CRF) for systemic reporting and monitoring of WPS implementation in member states.<sup>4</sup> The impetus came from the Office of the Special Envoy with the aim of creating an accountability mechanism to monitor the implementation of WPS NAPs on the continent (Interview, WPS specialist at AUC, 7 June 2023). The CRF development involved inputs from 16 African states who had NAPs at the time and was tested in pilot countries. In addition to the usual four pillars of WPS, CRF includes a fifth pillar on responding to emerging security threats such as extreme weather events, terrorism and health emergencies (such as Ebola or COVID-19). Countries are to report back annually, and their inputs are integrated into the AUC annual reports on WPS. For example, the 2020 report is based on submissions by the Economic Commission of West African States (ECOWAS), Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) and International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and 20 AU member states. In 2019

only nine countries (39% of the total with NAPs) submitted implementation reports as per the Continental Results Framework.<sup>5</sup> This went up to 20 countries in 2020, making it 80% of total countries with NAPs. According to the WPS expert compiling the annual reports, the countries submitting reports vary every year, but participation has stayed at around 80% for the past few years (Interview, 7 June 2023). The CRF explicitly focuses on countries with NAPs and not alternative WPS strategies.

Regardless of these developments, the progress on the formal inclusion of women in peace governance and processes has been underwhelming and most major peace negotiations still do not involve women mediators (Tripp 2020). At the same time, women in Africa mobilise informally and with much success (ibid: 4). The main feature of success has been the inclusion of relevant stakeholders across identity markers for a common cause. Many of the 21 interviewees for this study agreed that context-relevant implementation of the WPS agenda, and working in the spirit of WPS, is far more important than measurable outcomes. As a regional civil society peace expert of 20 years reflected:

“ We have to be constantly innovative, and constantly looking for very nuanced and context-specific responses, as opposed to a regional approach or a one size-fits-all approach. ”

(Interview, ACCORD, 26 April 2023)

She further emphasised that gender relations are produced and reproduced through histories, cultures, experiences of colonialism and shaped by ‘where the history gets told from’. Rather than importing models for practice from elsewhere, one needs to remain attentive to the issue of ownership (Interview, ACCORD, 26 April 2023). Many interviewees agreed that the WPS agenda can be implemented by diverse actors in ways that do not directly speak to the language of UNSCR resolutions, but more to the underlying values of WPS (Interview, REINVENT, 25 April 2023). When local actors associate their work with national and global policy frameworks, and engage with donors for support, they are required to speak the language of the policy space. The relationship with donors therefore transforms the discursive tools actors use and their relationship to national and global policy frameworks. Through this process they become recognised as the implementers of the WPS agenda.





Accra Street, downtown Nairobi, Kenya. 15 September 2014.  
Photo and description: Thomas Cockrem / Alamy Stock Photo.

# METHODOLOGY

This study explores how different African countries use NAPs to implement the WPS agenda, focusing on three case study countries and bringing these into conversation with existing research on NAP implementation on the continent and beyond. In order to better understand the impact NAPs have on the national and local levels, we identified three key questions:

- How is WPS NAP implementation institutionalised?
- How do civil society actors engage with WPS NAPs in the drafting and implementation processes?
- Through which practices and interventions are WPS NAPs implemented?

To this end, we reviewed diverse countries that have adopted a WPS NAP based on the information available online and expert interviews. For a better and context-specific understanding of how these dynamics play out in particular countries, we selected three country cases to examine more closely: Mali, Kenya and Ethiopia, as explained in the next section presenting the country cases.

The analysis builds on interviews with 21 experts and practitioners with extensive knowledge of either the implementation of the WPS agenda more generally, or of specific country cases (see a complete list in Annex 1). The average duration of the interviews was 45 minutes to an hour. The interviews were conducted between 3 March and 7 June 2023. Most interviews were conducted online and recorded with

the consent of the interviewees. Some interviews were conducted during a field trip to Nairobi. All interviewees were offered complete anonymity. All interviews have been transcribed and direct quotes have been edited for readability. In addition to the interviews, informal conversations and correspondence with key experts in the case countries were conducted. The analysis further builds on desk research of policy documents and a comprehensive review of academic literature on WPS to complement and triangulate the interview data.

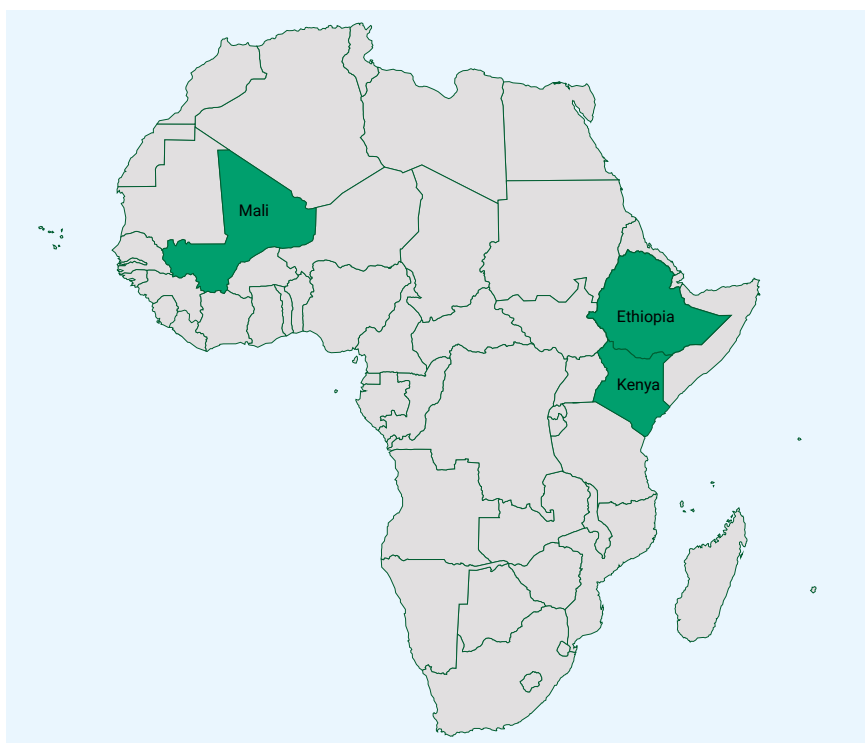


Women in Makueni County, Kenya. 1 February 2018.  
Photo and description: Jake Lyell / Alamy Stock Photo.

## CASE STUDIES: UNSCR 1325 NAPS IN ETHIOPIA, KENYA AND MALI

The country cases of Mali, Kenya and Ethiopia were selected to explore the ownership of WPS as fostered through NAPS in diverse political contexts that represent different stages of conflict/post-conflict recovery. The aims of the study are exploratory, focusing on the particularities of diverse country contexts rather than identifying larger patterns across Africa (see discussion in Seawright and Gerring 2008). The country cases may provide direction for further exploration of patterns. The countries selected exemplify the ‘most contrasting’ cases if the variables considered are a) political regime, b) conflict/post-conflict context, c) religion, d) geographical region, and e) number of NAPS.

## Map 2. Case studies in Africa



**Figure 2. Differences between case studies**

	Ethiopia	Kenya	Mali
<b>Political regime</b>	Semi-authoritarian	Democratic	Military transitional government
<b>Conflict context</b>	Post-conflict and bouts of violent clashes across the country, including violent demonstrations	History of post-electoral violence, terrorism threat, occasional violent clashes across the country	Ongoing conflict between the military and non-state armed groups, UN and previously also EU peacekeeping missions
<b>Religion</b>	43% Orthodox Christian 34% Muslim 19% Protestant Other religions and belief-systems	33% Protestant 20.6% Roman Catholic 20% Evangelical 10% Muslim Other religions and belief-systems	95% Muslim 2% Christian 2% Animist Other religions and belief systems
<b>Region</b>	Horn of Africa/ East Africa	East Africa	West Africa
<b>NAPs</b>	Drafting first NAP	2 <sup>nd</sup> NAP under implementation	3 <sup>rd</sup> NAP under implementation

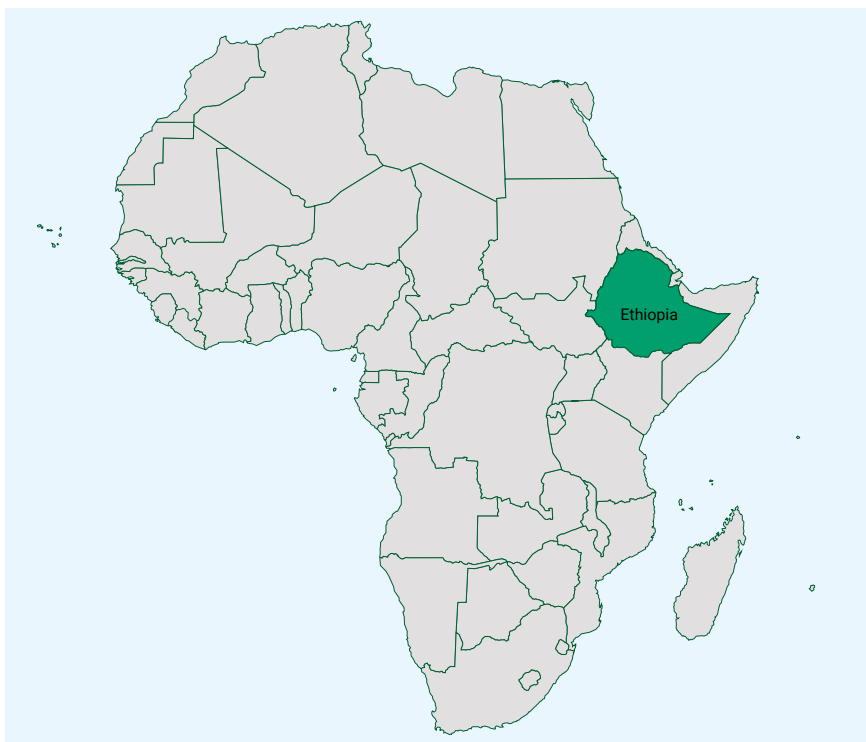
That said, there are some similarities between the countries, including their somewhat decentralised governance and regional or county governance authority structures. All three countries are multi-ethnic and multilingual, with ethnically driven tensions sometimes escalating. Notably, Ethiopia and Kenya represent Horn of Africa and East Africa giants respectively and are competing regional superpowers in many ways. Both are members of IGAD (Inter-Governmental Authority on Development), in which Ethiopia is known to be a dominant power. There has been talk of Ethiopia joining the EAC (East Africa Community) which Kenya is a member of, but no real progress has been made. Not least, all three countries are Danish development cooperation partners.

The following sections describe and analyse the impetus behind NAP drafting and adoption in these three countries. To delve into the question of ownership, the case studies discuss institutional strategies for NAP development and implementation and the relationships between state and civil society actors in these processes. To understand how NAPs are used for WPS implementation, the impact these documents have had is unpacked, acknowledging the fragile link between WPS interventions and intentional policy implementation. As the case studies show, translating policy into practice is challenging due to the top-down nature of NAP processes, as well as unsustainable funding. Not least, the case studies present some alternatives and visions for future developments expressed by the interviewees, who collectively agree that regardless of shortcomings, NAPs should remain part of the WPS future in their countries.

## **ETHIOPIA**

Women, peace and security (WPS) and UNSCR 1325 were not part of Ethiopia's policy landscape until a few years ago. The Ethiopian Government held the view that the existing institutional and legal structures were sufficient for women to benefit from peace processes and security sector (Kassahun 2015). According to Kassahun, while conflict-prone regions were encouraged to create women's peace committees alongside other capacity-building activities, there was no systematic oversight of these activities. A recent study by the Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA 2021) discusses diverse informal ways in which Ethiopian women engage with the WPS agenda such the appointment of a woman Minister of Peace,<sup>6</sup> the

**Map 3. Ethiopia's location in Africa**



Mothers for Peace initiative in 2018, Ethiopian women in the pan-African peace experts network FemWise and so on. The report also discusses the 'warrior culture' whereby women may encourage and reward conventional kinds of masculinity. The report suggests that the forthcoming NAP will be challenged by diverse language contexts as well as the variation in how peace and conflict are understood culturally across the country. Lack of women in decision-making processes and limited awareness of the WPS agenda are likely to affect NAP implementation, and monitoring and evaluation will be challenging. These comments were presented after the Ethiopian Government committed to drafting a UNSCR 1325 NAP in 2019. The process stalled due to the COVID-19 pandemic and outbreak of civil war.

In the following sections, the socio-political context of Ethiopia is briefly described. This is important for understanding the relevance of the WPS agenda for Ethiopian women, and the challenges of creating an impactful NAP. Thereafter, the country case study dives into details of the ongoing NAP process, the contestations and the institutional ownership of the NAP. Drawing on this empirical material and the

interviews, we argue that the Ethiopian Government may miss an opportunity to link the NAP with other transitional justice processes taking place in the country. Furthermore, rushing the process and not focusing on a broad and inclusive consultative process is likely to undermine the NAP's relevance to people across different regions and thus the use of the NAP beyond the policy circles in the capital city.

### **Country context**

Ethiopia is a landlocked country located in the Horn of Africa, and Eastern Africa more broadly. With more than 120 million people, Ethiopia is a federation of 11 strong and relatively autonomous regional governments and two city administrations. Ethiopia was never fully colonised but suffered Italian occupation between 1936 and 1941. After 1991, following a bloody civil conflict against the oppressive Dergue regime, Ethiopia became considered one of the more stable countries in the Horn of Africa, regardless of its longstanding border conflict with Eritrea (a war between 1998 and 2000, with continuing conflict until 2018), military engagements in Somalia (2006), and somewhat sporadic but at times lengthy violent clashes in different regions of the country. Ethiopia is home to many ethnicities, the largest of which is the Oromo ethnic group estimated at 34%, followed by Amhara at 30% and Tigrayan at nearly 8%. Each of the other ethnic groups make up less than 5% of the total population (e.g. Sidama at 4%, Welaita at 3%).

Following the post-electoral violence in 2005, the state became increasingly authoritarian and created regulations to prosecute opposition activists and journalists on the grounds of 'anti-peace activities' (Amnesty International 2012; Gebresenbet 2014). Furthermore, the 'Charities Proclamation' disallowed human rights organisations from mobilising international funding and thus restricted their work (Brechenmacher 2017). It was effectively the Oromo protests between 2014 and 2016 that led to the change of government in 2018 (Kelecha 2021). It is estimated that close to 500 people lost their lives in 2016, and more than 11,000 people were arrested. The new prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, was expected to bring change: he won a Nobel Peace Prize for ending the protracted conflict with Eritrea and appointed women into the cabinet, the first female president and the first female president of the federal supreme court. That said, no women were included in the Ethiopia–Eritrea peace negotiation (Venturini 2021). The tensions between the new government and the previously dominant Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) led to a full-blown conflict in 2020. Much of the fighting took place in the Tigray region, but spilt over from there to Amhara and Afar regions and beyond. Throughout the

conflict accounts of widespread and brutal sexual and gender-based violence emerged. A peace agreement was finally achieved on 2 November 2022 with no women representing the warring parties. The AU's high-level mediators included Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, a former director of UN Women. Beyond condemning violence against women and girls, the peace agreement does not address any gender considerations. The liberal gender equality rhetoric deployed by the new government remains impeded by harassment, patriarchal attitudes and lack of capacity for policy influence among women (Hadis, Tesfaye and Hailu 2021). These constraints intersect with structural and legal barriers to women's meaningful participation in the political sphere. According to UN Women, more than 40% of married women in Ethiopia were child brides, over 65% of women have gone through female genital mutilation (FGM) and 28% of women have faced physical, sexual or intimate partner violence. The average prevalence of domestic violence ranges radically from region to region, varying from as much as 60% to 20% (Semahegn and Mengistie 2015). Notably, there are particular conservative gender norms associated with most ethnic and religious identities across Ethiopia.

### **A journey towards NAP**

As will be elaborated in this section, the impetus for a NAP in Ethiopia came from diverse stakeholders and was negotiated over time. The gendered impacts of the conflict were subject to international scrutiny and the commitment to adopt a NAP drawn up by the government in 2019 took on different meanings for civil society and for development partners. Some large civil society networks had picked up the WPS agenda earlier, but generally, there was little knowledge, mobilisation and expertise around the WPS agenda in the country. Additionally, in the context of the conflict that broke out in 2020, the mood in the country changed and it appeared that the government was relapsing towards using authoritarian measures to maintain control. The tension between the international community and Ethiopia also caused some scepticism towards the WPS NAP.

Regardless of the existence of institutions focused on 'peace', the WPS agenda had been marginalised both by the government and civil society. 'Maybe because we think Ethiopia is relatively peaceful' a civil society actor said (Interview, NEWA, 3 March 2023). The restrictive regulations on human rights actors also impacted the scope of civil society activity. The 'Charities Proclamation' was only lifted in 2019 and civil society organisations were still regrouping when they were hit with the pandemic lockdowns and then war. A civil society consultation process facilitated by NEWA showcased a huge knowledge and awareness gap regarding UNSCR 1325.

When NEWA identified WPS as one of the gaps in Ethiopia's Ten-year Development Plan in the drafting process, its recommendation was not taken up by the government. Therefore, even if women's organisations had picked up the WPS agenda prior to the NAP processes, very little was happening.

The NAP coordinator at the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs notes that the NAP became part of the ministry's agenda already five years ago. While no NAP was introduced during this time, the government is now responding to pressure from civil society and development partners (Interview, Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, 4 April 2023). Until now, the coordinator argues, the WPS agenda has been mainstreamed into three different departments at the ministry to ensure that all four pillars receive adequate attention. As such, the ministry claims full ownership of the WPS NAP. At the same time, all actors are likely to agree that the NAP drafting process is enabled by the technical and financial support of UN Women. UN Women took up the pledge the government had made in 2019 and initiated a dialogue with the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (Interview, UN Women Ethiopia, 21 March 2023). These conversations were taking place in parallel with the review and updating of Ethiopia's national gender policy, which will also include WPS elements.

The first consultations and meetings with stakeholders regarding the relevance and need for a WPS NAP for Ethiopia began three years ago (Interview, Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, 4 April 2023). The second round of consultations involved federal and local administrations. Initially, some civil society actors raised concerns regarding the need to implement an international policy agenda and whether this was imposed by Western actors. The ongoing conflict had truly divided people in Ethiopia, and many questioned the way the conflict was portrayed by international media:

‘ Some thought it is a Western imposed agenda. Because of the situation between the UN Security Council and Ethiopia, there were lots of issues with the Western media and narrative. There were a lot of reservations.

(Interview, NEWA, 3 March 2023)

The reservations were not restricted to non-state actors. UN Women experts shared that while they have witnessed overwhelming openness and interest in the NAP development from the government side in the past few years, there have also been

critical questions raised within and outside the ministry. Some stakeholders raised concerns about the goodwill of the international community. In the words of a WPS focal point at UN Women Ethiopia:

‘ There was a fear that if we develop this NAP, it will take us to the International Criminal Court and these types of ideas were common at first. But later these voices were not there. ’

(Interview, UN Women Ethiopia, 21 March 2023)

Some were unclear on why UNSCR 1325 is necessary when Ethiopia already has a national gender policy. More broadly, it seems that the general aims of WPS were not subject to contestation, but rather the implications of adopting such a policy. As the following section illustrates, some challenges lie ahead regardless.

### **Institutional ownership**

The current state of the NAP process is that the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs deems the initial studies and assessment of the WPS situation in Ethiopia sufficient grounds for moving forward. From the perspective of UN Women, the baseline studies exemplified a change of perspective whereby gathering information on WPS was not held back for fear of ‘what might come out’. UN Women appreciated how senior officials in the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs took full ownership of the studies conducted, and the implications of these regarding WPS priorities (Interview, UN Women Ethiopia, 21 March 2023). Presently, the WPS NAP development and implementation process involves two institutionalised bodies: a national-level technical committee and a steering committee. The technical committee involves representatives across ministries and some CSO and UN agencies, while the steering committee is at a higher ministerial level and ensures ‘political oversight’ (Interview, UN Women Ethiopia, 21 March 2023).

The makeup of the technical committee is reflective of the view that WPS NAPs are more impactful when drafted across sectoral stakeholders (see Box 1). The WPS NAP in Ethiopia is co-chaired by the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Peace. However, the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs is the lead. In terms of civil society involvement, international partners applied pressure to include reputable women’s rights organisations like EWLA and NEWA (Interview, NEWA, 3 March 2023). Both organisations have broad networks and longstanding advocacy experience.

## Box 1. Members of the Technical Committee

<b>Chair</b>	Ministry of Women and Social Affairs	<b>Member</b>	Ethiopian International Peace keeping Training Centre
<b>Co-chair</b>	Ministry of Peace	<b>Member</b>	Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (national CSO)
<b>Member</b>	Ministry of National Defence	<b>Member</b>	Network of Ethiopian Women's Association (national CSO)
<b>Member</b>	Prime Minister's Office	<b>Member</b>	TIMRAN (national CSO)
<b>Member</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	<b>Member</b>	Ethiopian Mediation and Arbitration Center
<b>Member</b>	Ministry of Justice	<b>Member</b>	Norwegian Church Aid
<b>Member</b>	Ministry of Finance	<b>Invitee and Secretariat:</b>	UN Women
<b>Member</b>	Ministry of Education	<b>Invitee</b>	UNDP Regional Service Centre
<b>Member</b>	Ethiopian Human Rights Commission		
<b>Member</b>	Federal Police Commission		

Until now only two technical committee meetings have taken place, in February and August 2022. There were efforts to create a roadmap for the work of the technical committee. However, this has not materialised. UN Women has tried to keep the WPS NAP on the national agenda including capacity building of the members of the technical committee:

That created a lot of interest and enthusiasm among the technical committee, but the challenge was communicating this interest at a higher level.

(Interview, UN Women Ethiopia, 21 March 2023)

The slow pace of such work is not uncommon. For instance, it took Kenya and South Africa several years to develop their NAP and adopt it. A recent turn of events is that the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs aspires to have a NAP ready by September 2023. While picking up pace could be a positive sign, the concern is the ability to carry out an inclusive process in such a fast-tracked context.

## Challenges ahead


Ethiopian WPS stakeholders face multiple overlapping challenges that risk undermining the potentially transformative effects of the NAP. A post-conflict Ethiopia could benefit from the drafting process as a means for dialogue and trust-building between leaders and citizens, across different ethnic groups and across genders. Yet, the devastating effects of war often result in a focus on material reconstruction and rebuilding of things like infrastructure, health services and educational facilities, as well as on political settlements. Although Ethiopia's WPS NAP process is developing in parallel with the Transitional Justice process and National Dialogue, the NAP process is far less prominent, if visible at all, in the public discourse. Only 3 out of 11 commissioners on the National Dialogue Committee are women and 4 out of 25 consultative committee members. In response to this, in March 2022 Ethiopian women's rights organisations formed a 'Coalition for Women's Voice in the National Dialogue' which has grown from 22 members to 50 within a year. The secretariat of the coalition, TIMRAN, is also on the WPS NAP technical committee. According to interviewees, there is little to no evidence that the three ongoing processes are directly aligned.

Furthermore, while the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs has allocated a focal point for WPS NAP, people and departments work in silos and there is no overarching awareness of the NAP process in other offices of the ministry. Additionally, the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs should keep other ministries on track with the NAP process, but it is unclear whether the focal point setup facilitates this. This connects to the broader problem of high turnover of ministerial staff. Lastly, there seems to be a lack of WPS-specific capacity and of conceptual clarity on WPS principles across the ministries.

The restriction of civil society between 2009-2019 has contributed to the low levels of capacity regarding political dialogue and policy intervention in governance processes. Women's organisations are unfamiliar with UNSCR 1325 implementation and how to translate it into local interventions and development practices. Existing research indicates the existence of vernacular peace practices such as the Gilgil mediation courts of South Gonder and the establishment of resource sharing Kelo's in Oromia, to name a couple (IIRR 2009). These grassroots strategies do not involve explicit engagement with WPS and the four pillars.

All this considered, rushing to finalise a NAP by September 2023 is not necessarily good news. Speeding up the process is likely to jeopardise the inclusivity and depth of the document, as there will not be enough time for broad-ranging consultations,

circulation of drafts or negotiation. UN Women is trying to encourage delivery of the broadest possible consultations in a limited time. For instance, if there is a plan to hold consultations across all regions and city administrations, it will be possible to have 7 consultations instead of 15 by combining some. A worst-case scenario would be that the government ends up having experts draft the policy behind closed doors and adopting a NAP without regional and CSO inputs. The 1325 specialists at UN Women are reorienting their efforts to ensure there is a robust implementation plan instead.



**Speeding up the process is likely to jeopardise the inclusivity and depth of the document, as there will not be enough time for broad-ranging consultations, circulation of drafts or negotiation.**

Last but not least, funding mechanisms for implementation are another concern. The ministry staff are transparent about the difficulty Ethiopia, as a ‘developing country’, may have in funding the NAP activities. Therefore ‘huge financial support’ is expected from donors to deliver high-level capacity building programmes and to increase the number of women in the security sector (Interview, Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, 4 April 2023). Therefore, the ministry foresees costing each intervention in the NAP and defining the activities that are expected to be funded by the government, and what is expected from donors.

### **The way forward and expectations**

One might ask whether developing a NAP will truly bear any significance for women in peace and security sectors, or women in Ethiopia more broadly. Civil society has low expectations of it, and organisations like NEWA will remain focused on grassroots and community-based approaches to peacebuilding. Having a NAP will, regardless, be useful as a document that organisations can popularise and familiarise their constituencies with, and it will demonstrate the commitments the federal government has made (Interview, NEWA, 3 March 2023). UN Women echoes the sentiment that the NAP will be useful to hold the government to account on their commitment to WPS goals, with a tangible document recording the promises it has made. Doubts were raised about the possibility of implementing UNSCR 1325 or WPS more broadly without a NAP.

Ethiopia's situation is interesting because of the potential a WPS NAP holds for post-conflict reconciliation and peacebuilding. Additionally, the national women's organisations, the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, and UN Women all expressed a sense of ownership of the WPS agenda in Ethiopia. However, as it stands, it is a top-down process whereby organisations and institutions based in Addis Ababa reach out to different regions to raise awareness of UNSCR 1325 and consult them about its application in different regions. While organisations like NEWA express commitment to amplifying the voices of their member institutions across the country, there seems to be little space for dialogue and discussion with government actors regarding existing informal peace mechanisms and initiatives, as well as regarding the cultural references to peace and social cohesion that exist in different groups and languages in Ethiopia.

The pace of climate change effects, not least, is likely to impact peace and security in Ethiopia. Ethiopia has experienced extreme weather events in the past and is increasingly vulnerable to the negative effects of climate change. Climate change is projected to exacerbate existing conflicts or tensions over scarce land and water resources, and in turn destructive conflicts may create further vulnerabilities to climate change (NUPI, 2022; Nyberg Sørensen 2023). Lack of land rights and access to financial resources, alongside existing discriminatory gender norms, puts women at greater risk in contexts where climate change effects intersect with armed violence. In this context, inclusive and broad-based WPS policy processes could create an opportunity to engage and be attentive to the most vulnerable populations in the country.

## **KENYA**

The WPS and UNSCR 1325 became more prominent in Kenyan policy spaces following the post-electoral violence of 2007 as women began organising informally to prevent and address further escalation of violence (Wamai 2013). In 2009, due to the efforts of the Kenya Women's Consultation Group, the drafting of the first Kenyan national action plan (henceforth KNAP) on WPS began.<sup>7</sup> A debate about which government office should host the KNAP prolonged the process and the first KNAP was finally adopted for 2016-2018. Currently, the country is implementing its second KNAP (2019-2023). According to KNAP II, the assessment of KNAP I implementation showed an increase of women in both parliament and among cabinet secretaries. Mrs Omamo was appointed Cabinet Secretary for

**Map 4. Kenya's location in Africa**



Defence already in 2013 and she became part of the task force on the establishment of the Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission for Kenya. Mrs Omamo was succeeded by another woman. The first female major general of the Kenyan Defence Forces was appointed in 2018 following the Ministry of Defence's launch of their first gender policy in 2017. More than 19% of Kenyan deployed peacekeepers are women and women make up 28% of Supreme Court judges and 42% of judges in the High Court. Additionally, the government started enforcing a policy which requires that 30% of county peace committee members should be women. This set the stage for the localisation focus of KNAP II which is currently being implemented.

The following section first briefly describes the sociopolitical context of Kenya. Given the advances on WPS mentioned above, we then examine the institutional setup for implementing KNAP, such as the national coordinator and Resolution 1325 focal points. The section proceeds to an examination of the lessons learned from KNAP I. Embarking on localisation initiatives involves close collaboration with the peace committees at county level and the development of local action plans. Finally, we

discuss how Kenyan stakeholders use NAPs to engage the WPS agenda in the face of gaps in implementation and draw on the innovative initiatives emerging in the country.

### **Country context**

Kenya is a country of over 50 million people in Eastern African and the southern neighbour of Ethiopia. Since Kenya gained its independence in 1963 it has been able to avoid civil wars regardless of occasional violent conflicts, electoral violence and terrorist attacks. The 'divide and rule' approach of colonial powers has left a permanent mark on ethnic relations in the country which manifests in politicised mistrust and disagreement between different groups. The entanglement of ethnicity, security and access to resources in Kenyan politics sees climate change as an increasingly prominent factor for peace and security in the country (Ladekjær Gravesen and Muriu 2022).

Ethnic tensions are more prominent in Kenyan politics than ideology (Magu 2018: 2). Kenya's population is made up many, considerably large, ethnic groups, for instance Kikuyu at approximately 17%, Luhya at 14%, Kalenjin at 13%, Luo at 11%. Since independence, three presidents have been Kikuyu and one Kalenjin (but for 24 years), leading other ethnic groups to suspect political domination by those two groups. In the early 1990s ethnic politics led to the emergence of the 'Kalenjin Warriors' and an escalation of violence that displaced about 300,000 people and left 1,500 dead. In retaliation, many Kikuyu became recruited into a vigilante group called 'Mungiki'. These groups played a major role in the 2007 post-electoral violence in which not only were 1,300 killed and 650,000 displaced, but also many were injured, dispossessed, raped or sexually assaulted, widowed and so on (Mueller-Hirth 2019: 164).

After 42 days of negotiations facilitated by Kofi Annan and the African Union Panel of Eminent African Personalities, the two presidential candidates signed a power-sharing agreement. Each negotiating team was 25% made up of women. The Women's Consultative Group (WCG) memorandum was also integral to ensuring gendered perspectives were part of the negotiation. While the Kenyan National Dialogue and Reconciliation is sometimes considered as best practice on involving women, the weight given to 'gender issues' in the negotiation process is unclear. Furthermore, at the Women's Consultative Meeting on the Kenya crisis on 24 January 2008, ethnic and political tensions undermined meaningful discussion between

women leaders (McGhie and Wamai 2011: 19). This was resolved with a ‘spitting session’ where women could air their frustrations and anger, and then move on into finding common positions.

Kenya has also become a space for transnational counter-terrorism cooperation. The 1998 al-Qaeda attack on the US embassy where more than 200 people died is still talked about. Since then, there have been bombs almost every 2-3 years, leading to some deaths and many injuries (Mogire and Mkutu Agade 2011). In 2013 al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for a killing spree in Westgate Shopping centre where four gunmen killed 71 people and injured over 200. In 2015 al-Shabaab attacked Garissa University College, and in 2019 Dusit Hotel. The ways in which WPS intersects with countering extreme violence and terrorism is a topic of debate (Mesok 2022). While some question the integration of an anti-militarist project with the ‘war on terror’, Mesok argues that local actors and women instrumentalise this link for their own purposes and do so to counter police and military dominance of prevention work in their communities.

### **Creating the first KNAP**

The first KNAP was produced through a ‘twinning’ process between Kenya and Finland. According to the KNAP document itself, it involved knowledge exchange missions to Finland and Liberia and informal deliberations between the Kenyan stakeholders and officials from Finland and Liberia (KNAP I, p. 23). A first draft KNAP was already completed in 2012, but because of the change of government and transition to devolved governance the adoption and launch stalled (Hellsten 2016: 369). Hellsten notes that the initial stages of ‘twinning’ were very top-down and did not include relevant grassroots and civil stakeholders in the process (Hellsten 2016). Rather, UNIFEM (now UN Women) became the central organisation in UNSCR 1325 and KNAP activities. The NAP process has become relatively inclusive over time, but both drafting and implementation remain somewhat impeded by a fragmented civil society whereby women’s rights and WPS actors are not really in dialogue with each other (Interview, WPS scholar, Kenya, 10 March 2023).

In Kenya, civil society had started to take note of gendered effects of conflict before UNSCR 1325 was adopted. The land conflicts between Kalenjin and Kikuyu communities in 1992, which left 5,000 people dead and close to 75,000 displaced, were the catalyst for the creation of Rural Women Peace Link (Interview, Rural Women Peace Link, 1 May 2023). The founder discovered that rural women had endured significant violence during the clashes but were not vocal nor heard in the

peacebuilding processes that followed. Relief and recovery focused on essential goods but was not addressing the gender-based violence that had taken place. The ‘culture of silence’ was sustained by male domination and women’s fear of ostracization. To challenge that, women needed to work together and create a forum for discussion and a common voice. A grassroots organisation focused on women’s agency in ‘shaping peace narratives’, Rural Women Peace Link, was one of the few civil organisations that participated in the national steering committee for NAP I and took on its localisation (Interview, Rural Women Peace Link, 1 May 2023). Rural Women Peace Link had already developed regional networks, particularly with organisations in Uganda, and it organised four of the consultations ahead of NAP drafting through its network structure.

### **Institutional strategies for implementing KNAP**

The WPS NAP in Kenya is co-hosted by the Ministry of Public Service, Gender and Affirmative Action and the Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government, with support from UN Women Kenya. The national coordinator of KNAP, Catherine Chegero, is employed by UN Women and seconded to the State Department for Gender and Affirmative Action to head the KNAP secretariat. She collaborates with the WPS 1325 focal points from both hosting ministries. However, the government counterparts also have other responsibilities beyond WPS NAP (Interview, national coordinator of KNAP, 26 April 2023). The secretariat was created in September 2016, a few months after the adoption of Kenya’s first NAP. According to Chegero, other countries in the region have picked up the idea of creating a national coordinator and a secretariat as the instituted driving force for implementation.

Reflecting on the ‘institutional home’ of NAP, the 1325 focal point from the State Department for Gender says that while her department is sometimes marginalised and certainly underfunded, one has to consider the downsides of placing the NAP with a ministry that has a broader mandate, such as the Ministry of Interior, and the feasibility of gender issues getting enough consideration in that context. In other words:

‘ Sometimes, when something gets mainstreamed... you have no location. And you also get lost. ’

(Interview, 1325 focal point, Kenya, 24 April 2023)

There is also a national working group on WPS which essentially oversees the development of the KNAPs and coordinates their implementation. Within the working group, there is a national steering committee (Interview, REINVENT, 25 April 2023). While the working group is open to essentially all interested organisations and persons, the steering committee is made up of specialised actors directly involved in NAP implementation. These include representatives of UN agencies, government focal points, representatives of government ministries and specific civil society actors. The committee is co-chaired by three persons.

Ahead of KNAP II, the secretariat mapped the regional stakeholders and consulted them regarding their strategic areas of concern. Therefore, when invited to create their own local action plans (LAPs) there was no real resistance to the idea. However, the national coordinator of KNAP notes that it was not possible to bring all 47 counties into the drafting process as only 20 counties were engaged (Interview, 26 April 2023). The interaction and dialogue with county levels is further facilitated by Kenya's devolved governance structures.<sup>8</sup> According to the Intergovernmental Consultation Framework for the Gender Sector,<sup>9</sup> the intergovernmental county gender sector working groups involve diverse regional actors such as:

- (Co-chaired by) county commissioners and county CECs responsible for gender
- (Secretary) government county directors for gender
- County directors for gender from the national and county government
- County police commanders and judiciary representatives of the ODPP
- National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC)
- County National Councils for Persons with Disability

And ex-officio:

- Development partners
- CSOs
- Private sector
- Faith-based organisations

The gender sectoral working group, therefore, provides a forum for county and national government to dialogue on women's issues, including WPS. Of course, these working groups are not equally operational in every county and the relationship with the national level varies too. Another platform is the Council of Governors, which functions somewhat as a secretariat for the 47 county governments. Since each county has a gender director, the national 1325 Secretariat in Nairobi can engage and convene them, and advocate for including the NAP in their annual work plans.

## **KNAP II – learning from KNAP I and embracing localisation**

According to Mrs Muema, KNAP I was a government and UN Women-led process that focused on women in the security sector and was unable to meaningfully engage with grassroots peacebuilding efforts (Interview, Kenya Community Support Centre, 27 April 2023). Many organisations only came to know about KNAP I after it had already been formulated and did not perceive it as relevant to them. This shifted during the drafting of the KNAP II which was more inclusive of women's voices across Kenya. KNAP II lists the recommendations that came out of the assessment process, the first of which is to:

Broaden the scope of inclusion, particularly to actors at national, county, and community levels that appear to have been left out during the KNAP I (2016-2018) design and implementation, specifically county institutions and women's organisations at the community level (KNAP II, p. 6).

There was a small gap between KNAP I and KNAP II, during which the stakeholders reviewed the progress made and began drafting the new updated NAP. According to some interviewees, Kenya's participation in IGAD and AU WPS platforms has been very useful for sharing experiences and learning from others. The assessment of NAP I became the baseline for the drafting of NAP II (Interview, REINVENT, 25 April 2023). These processes led to some changes, for instance extending the implementation time frame from three to five years. Additionally, it became clear that KNAP I generated indicators that were too diverse and complex. These were streamlined and reduced for KNAP II and also aligned with the African Union's Continental Results Framework (Interview, 1325 focal point, Kenya, 24 April 2023).

The main difference between the two generations of NAPs is the shift of focus to localisation. According to the national coordinator of KNAP, this was an approach picked up by learning from the experience of Uganda (Interview, 26 April 2023) but also from the assessment, which showed very little awareness among the duty-bearers at county level (Rural Women Peace Link, 1 May 2023). A lot was done during the KNAP I to ensure WPS is incorporated into the structures of the Ministry of Defence, the national police service and other key ministries. However, implementation activities only took place in 12 out of 47 counties and awareness at the local governance and grassroots level was limited.

Kenya's localisation efforts focus on bringing community, CSOs and county administrations into a conversation about WPS. So far ten counties have adopted local action plans (LAPs) and five counties are in the process of doing so. According to a UN Women survey, there are 22 hotspot counties with fragile peace and security situations (Interview, 1325 focal point, Kenya, 24 April 2023). Counties can have very different security concerns; some are facing cross-border conflict, others drought or high levels of FGM, and LAPs are a tool through which local concerns can be translated into the WPS agenda, and vice versa (Interview, national coordinator of KNAP, 26 April 2023). The crucial objective of localisation is to foster ownership of the WPS agenda and UNSCR 1325 in a way that is contextually meaningful. Rural Women Peace Link is also working with county governments to ensure WPS will be included in the county integrated development plans (CIDP) and supporting counties in identifying which indicators from NAP are relevant for their county to implement (Interview, Rural Women Peace Link, 1 May 2023).

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(Interview, national coordinator of KNAP, 26 April 2023)

Additionally, there are seven community action plans (CAP) which have the potential to be expanded to the county level. The national coordinator of KNAP offered her reflections on the fact that by 2025, realistically 22 out of 47 counties will have LAPs:

We can't say 'just catch up'. They will start drafting when they are ready to start drafting. And of course, we will end the second NAP with some counties never even drafting – is that a failure? No, of course not.

Here, what emerges is a perspective sensitive to local particularities and diverse local contexts. Rather than insisting on blanket implementation of the NAP, or its localisation via LAPs, the actors responsible for 1325 implementation take a more flexible approach which is facilitated by existing institutional structures. As one of the civil society representatives put it, the effectiveness of using these structures depends on the county's relationship with the national government (Interview, Kenya Community Support Centre, 27 April 2023). The fact that some county governments

have a strained relationship with the central government is also noted at the State Department. While there is an intergovernmental framework in place to address more significant disputes, some disagreement is considered part of the process (Interview, 1325 focal point, Kenya 24 April 2023).


Another avenue for fostering local ownership is through county peace committees. These committees serve as early warning and response mechanisms and are voluntary (Interview, national coordinator of KNAP, 26 April 2023). Peace committees were set up following the post-electoral violence and have become an alternative space for mediation and conflict resolution beyond structures like the councils of elders. Peace committees hold a promise of more inclusive peacebuilding, which UN Women and WPS actors try to encourage by pushing for 30% women's participation. They have also invited women from peace committees to training courses to make better use of their platform. In 2021 the National Network of Women in Peace Committees was formed, and at present 29 women are chairpersons of peace committees.

### **Tracing the advances and impact of KNAP**

While Kenya has advanced substantially in implementing WPS, tracing these advances and the impact of NAPs in this process can be difficult because many WPS interventions and initiatives are carried out without reference to the NAP. Moreover, it was unclear whether appointing women as cabinet secretary for defence and major general in the Kenyan Defence Forces were intentional advances in NAP implementation or simply happened to align with it (Interview, WPS scholar, Kenya, 10 March 2023). From the perspective of legislative change, activists will tend to want more specific legislation and political elites will, rather, come forward with the bare minimum – unless they can benefit directly (Interview, WPS scholar, Kenya, 10 March 2023). Nevertheless, others welcome the constitutional requirement to include women across different levels of decision-making and the different acts that are there to support that, and see it as part of implementing the participation pillar of UNSCR 1325 (Interview, Rural Women Peace Link, 1 May 2023).

At a county level some of the women who are part of the peace committees have become vocal advocates and builders of peace, and have risen in the ranks over time (Interview, national coordinator of KNAP, 26 April 2023). Participating in training and networking with other women has allowed the women to increase their confidence and to mobilise the skills to hold their local governments accountable. Furthermore, UN Women has developed a popular version of WPS NAP for the national police that explains what exactly the expectations of the police services are.

Gaining an overview of the many initiatives at the local level is difficult because of the reporting challenges. The co-chair of the national steering committee notes that communication between organisations that implement at the local level and the national structures is sometimes dire, and is further complicated by the diverse reporting duties many organisations have to donors (Interview, REINVENT 25 April 2023). That said, reporting template was developed at the national level and circulated among stakeholders. The template draws on the African Continental Framework, which Kenya prioritises as an international reporting mechanism. The reporting template has been simplified at the national level to facilitate reporting from grassroots implementers (Interview, 1325 focal point, Kenya, 24 April 2023). Organisations are encouraged to report by inviting them to highlight their achievements and share these moments of recognition with other organisations. Importantly, much of the reporting is organised informally with civil society actors reaching out to their networks and passing on the information to the national coordinator of K NAP.



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The fact that the national 1325 coordinator, is based at the ministry and engages directly with colleagues from the government also means that she is able to compel county administrations to submit reports of WPS-related activities. The government reports can then be triangulated with civil society for a better overview. According to the government official, IGAD is now adopting the Continental Results Framework as well, and the AU also shares country reports at the UN level in New York. Not least, Kenyan actors have highlighted the importance of the African Continental Framework as something the WPS group has really prioritised. This may be country-specific and indeed, it is quite challenging. In her experience, the AU does little to engage with member states and the framework's success will finally depend on AU's ability to build relationships with WPS national actors.

### **Challenges encountered**

For some actors NAP is important for taking the gender and women's perspectives to those that are 'not converted'. This means that peace and security spaces tend to be masculine and uphold masculine values. Therefore, according to Wamai, a top-down approach is, perhaps, not always bad. She posits that without the push from

the top, civil society groups and women within them are highly unlikely to break through the normative patriarchal environment upheld by men in positions of power (Interview, 10 March 2023). She concludes that it is not only development and human rights issues that women need to be involved in, but also peace and security. Others are more concerned with the top-down nature of the WPS NAP processes in Kenya, arguing that in rural parts of the country, knowledge and ownership of the NAP are non-existent, creating friction between regional governance structures' responsibility to serve their constituencies and what is expected from them by the national government (Interview, Kenya Community Support Centre, 27 April 2023).

When probing for perceptions regarding the 'donor-driven' nature of WPS, one of the interviewees perceived some of the academic, and particularly feminist critique, as belittling the capacities and strategies of practitioners on the ground (Interview, REINVENT, 25 April 2023). While this WPS practitioner appreciated that the WPS agenda in Africa is vulnerable, or indeed 'hostage' to external influence, she stressed that there will not be a fully locally owned or locally driven WPS agenda until African governments direct funds into this and begin to prioritise women's concerns.

Others see the existence of a government-owned NAP as a precursor to being noticed and respected for the work done on WPS, but also as ensuring government itself will put forth something to match the work going on, in particular when it comes to getting the government to commit a budget for WPS activities (Interview, national coordinator of KNAP, 26 April 2023). An action plan allows for clear indication of the areas that need resources. The NAP also legitimises WPS activities at the local level, demonstrating that the government has endorsed the agenda.

Not least, some actors are still concerned about the location of the WPS NAP, as they believe that placing it at the Gender Ministry ultimately undermines how it is engaged with and perceived. One interviewee expressed that the NAP would be considerably more impactful if co-hosted by the Ministry of Interior and National Administration and the Ministry of Defence (Interview, Kenya Community Support Centre, 27 April 2023). She argued that this relocation is necessary to give the NAP real prominence and turn it into something more than a 'diplomatic tool'. Others suggested that the institutional home of the NAP should be dictated by individual country priorities while, however, the reporting and monitoring should be elevated to the executive level (Interview, African Leadership Centre, 21 March 2023).

## The way forward and alternative paths

Women mobilise for peace in diverse ways, not all of which are encapsulated in the formal WPS agenda. Rural Women Peace Link operates as a network of local women's self-help groups which have a long history in Kenya. It is estimated that there were 15,000 such groups in 1986 (Wamai 2013). The leaders of these groups would meet every three months and benefit from networking, exchanging experiences, but also from mixing with women from communities they may have been in conflict with. Exchanges between groups from different districts were also arranged. According to Rural Women Peace Link, the push to use existing peace committees for NAP engagement was another lesson learnt from their ongoing work.

A further example of this was offered by the KNAP national coordinator regarding POTUMA<sup>10</sup> where women who were witnessing and also affected by cycles of violence in West Poko, Turkana and Elgeyo Marakwet decided to take action. Part of the problem has been the tradition of young men having to steal cattle from neighbouring communities as proof of manhood and masculinity. This regularly leads to retaliation and further conflict. Women offered a solution:

‘ Why don’t we change our culture then? Because when we give our girls without making such demands, our young men will not have to go and steal cattle. And then we will have peace. ’

(Interview, national coordinator of KNAP, 26 April 2023)

Women also mobilise: sometimes as informants by informing authorities of upcoming attacks or sometimes by returning stolen animals and goods.

A third example comes from Wajir County, in Wajir East, where women realised that councils of elders were excluding them from discussion and decided to create an alternative Wajir women's council. Islam plays a major role for most of the Wajir County population and the social and religious norms practised are not always supportive of women's leadership. The success of the Wajir women's council has become known beyond the region and UN Women is attempting to encourage the Wajir women to exchange their experiences with women from neighbouring sub-regions. Local organisations, such as Rural Women Peace Link, have also been recognised by the African Union in Ethiopia as a notable African civil society in their field. Stakeholders in the national steering committee see such recognition as

important for localisation. The recognition of local initiatives and organisations also serves as an acknowledgement that the transformation is not led by the NAP itself but by local actors who address issues that matter to them.

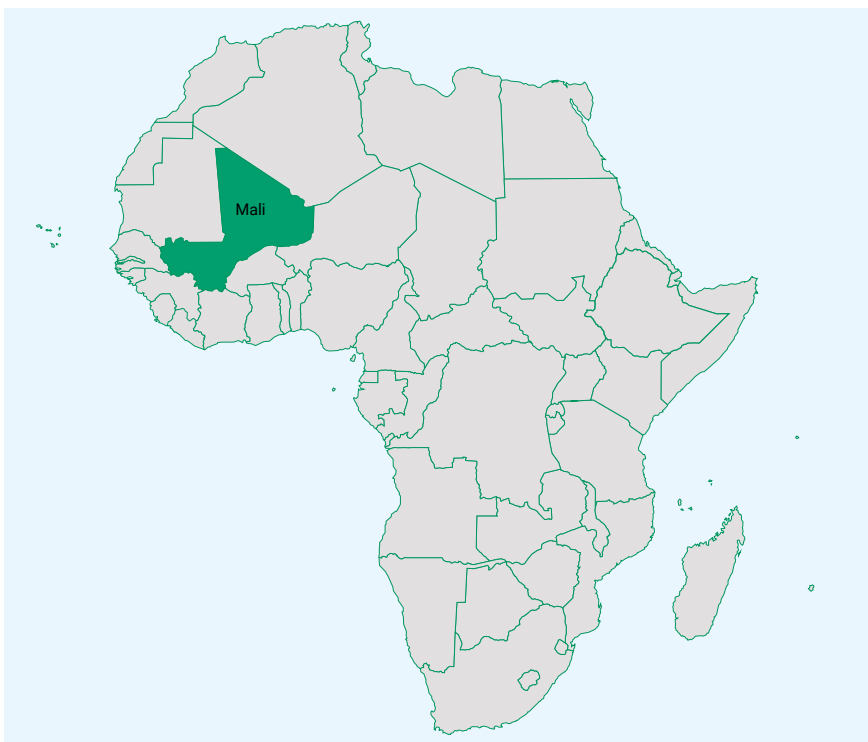
There are also ideas about innovative reporting, for instance using social media platforms or online hubs, to allow for more dynamic and flexible reporting on WPS-related activities and initiatives in all their diversity. Additionally, one civil society actor has argued that for local relevance, meaningful efforts should be directed at allowing local women to translate the four pillars into their experiences with peace and security, rather than simply into local languages (Interview, Kenya Community Support Centre, 27 April 2023). This kind of localisation would provide a bottom-up alternative to the LAP work that is currently ongoing and would perhaps generate new notions of participation, representation, protection and recovery.

## **MALI**

In 2012, coinciding with the explosion of crises, Mali adopted its first NAP on UNSCR 1325. According to Lorentzen et al. the timing of this NAP led to it being sidelined and not implemented (2019: 10). Lorentzen's research suggests that the WPS was not part of the women's movement before 2012. It was largely the outcome of efforts by UN Women and the Ministry of Promoting Women, Children and Family (Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme, de l'Enfant et de la Famille). Over the years, all ministries have become involved to a limited extent (Interview, Think Peace, 26 April 2023). The Ministry of Women, Children and Family Affairs includes several former activists and the ministry has a strong relationship with the Coordination of Women's Associations and Organisations (CAFO) (Interview, WPS scholar, Sweden, 13 March 2023). Regardless of the limited impact of NAP I, a second NAP was adopted for 2015-2017 and focused on including women in the implementation of the Algiers Agreement. A third NAP was adopted for 2019-2023. While the number of women's organisations and CSOs involved in WPS implementation has been increasing since the first NAP, there is still room for improvement of engagement.

The following sections explore why regardless of multiple NAPs, the WPS agenda remains largely confined to the capital and has little impact on the lives of women at the community level. Mali showcases the challenges of fostering a policy agenda in a conflict context, but also how the top-down NAP process can tick all the procedural boxes of inclusive drafting and the 'whole of government' approach, but still be

**Map 5. Mali's location in Africa**



sidelined in peace processes. The interviews suggest that while there have been some welcome changes in women's representation in decision-making and peacebuilding, the causal relationship between these developments and the WPS NAP is near impossible to trace. The chapter proceeds by first describing the Mali country context, moving on to the institutional strategies for NAP III development, the challenges to impactful implementation and ends with some reflections on the future of NAP in Mali.

### **Country Context**

Located in West Africa, Mali is a country of 21.9 million people. Islam is the dominant religion, with nearly 95% of the population considering themselves Muslim. Mandé peoples make up nearly half of the population, Fulani nearly 15% and there are multiple other minorities ranging from 1% to 11% of the population. France incorporated most of today's Mali territory into their colonies by 1905 and independence was won in 1960. In the early 1990s, the country saw waves of pro-democracy mobilisations, leading to democratic multi-party elections in 1992. A

period of peace and stability lasted until the 'Tuareg rebellion' in 2012 by the Azawad National Liberation Movement. Since then, successive Malian governments have been unable to ensure peace.

French military forces were invited to support the Malian Government in 2013. Regardless of multiple peace accords since then, the conflict has not ended. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (known as MINUSMA) was established by the UN Security Council in 2013 and the mission is still operating. There are also two active EU missions: EUTM Mali (European Union Training Mission in Mali) and the EU Capacity Building Mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali). In 2017 the Malian authorities turned to the Russian paramilitary Wagner Group and a few years later essentially kicked out the French and EU military missions.<sup>11</sup> The increasing number of external security actors in the region has been dubbed a security 'traffic jam' and it is creating tensions in international relationships with Malian authorities.

Women's rights have been difficult to enforce due to instability, but also diverse sociocultural and religious norms on gender relations. Mali ranks very low on gender equality indexes, has high levels of domestic violence and lacks legislation to protect women from intimate partner violence (Hayes and van Baak 2017; 2023). According to UNICEF (2022) 89% of Malian women between 15-49 years have undergone female genital mutilation. However, this varies by ethnicity. More than 50% of girls are married before the legal age of 18, with some regional hotspots seeing 70% of girls becoming wives before then (UN Women 2023). There have been attempts to introduce legal reforms, particularly with regard to the Family Code. However, this led to major demonstrations driven by the Islamic High Council in 2009 (Lorentzen, Toure and Gaye 2019: 9). In 2018, following the mobilisation of Malian women's organisations, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights ruled that the Malian Family Code violates the Maputo Protocol (The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa). Beyond women's rights, Mali has been recently highlighted as one of the countries in which 'hereditary' or 'descent-based' slavery is still practised. Those contesting the arrangement have suffered physical attacks.<sup>12</sup>

### **Institutional strategies for implementation**

Mali's second WPS NAP was extended in 2017 to continue for another year in order to evaluate achievements and identify challenges. According to an interview with UN Women Mali (27 April 2023) the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children and Family then oversaw multilevel consultations to share the outcomes and challenges

of the NAP II assessment. First consultations took place at the community-level, followed by regional consultations with stakeholders from the north and south of the country. Thereafter, a technical unit was created which in turn coordinated three validation workshops with civil society and media actors (Interview, UN Women Mali, 27 April 2023). The technical unit encompasses various cross-sectoral stakeholders. Additionally, the drafting of NAP III involved consultations with representatives of 15 government ministries that were tasked with implementation and monitoring, called the National Monitoring Committee. This process resulted in some adjustments of indicators and the results framework.

The assessment and technical work done by the technical unit and monitoring committee was then handed over to the Office of the Gender Policy of Mali (l'Equipe du Politique Nationale Genre du Mali) who then drafted NAP III.<sup>13</sup> The technical unit and the Ministry of Women, Children and Family engaged in advocacy to ensure that the NAP would be implemented across ministries and that each ministry would know what their responsibility is (Interview, UN Women Mali, 27 April 2023). As a result, the NAP III was co-signed by the prime minister of Mali. The reason for these efforts was the previous disregard by other ministries. The 15 members of the National Monitoring Committee serve as the WPS NAP focal points across the different ministries. COVID-19 and extensive security challenges have put many intended interventions in NAP III on hold, and therefore UN Women would like to see NAP III extended for at least another year (Interview, UN Women Mali, 27 April 2023).


Considering the complex security, religious and cultural context, the continued attention to and adoption of the WPS NAPs can be attributed to women's organisations who learnt effective advocacy and lobbying from the international women's movement (Interview, Think Peace, 26 April 2023). Others suggest that the failures of the peace process have perhaps presented the WPS agenda as one of the few 'low-hanging fruits', providing openings for activists (Interview, WPS researcher, Sweden, 13 March 2023). From the perspective of civil society actors, the existence of multiple NAPs does not reflect the position nor interests of the Malian Government, be they civil or military, nor those of the parliament (Interview, Coalition of Women Leaders, Mali, 27 April 2023). At the same time, the international community's appetite for working on WPS in Mali has increased considerably over the past five years. An example of this is Norway having put Mali on their list of 1325 priority countries ahead of establishing a Norwegian embassy in Bamako in 2017 (Interview, WPS researcher, Sweden, 13 March 2023). Both civil society and government actors have learnt to mobilise national policies to attract donor funding and WPS NAP is no different.

## Impact and challenges

A notable advance in women's participation in decision-making was the presidential decree of 2015 establishing a 30% quota for women in national institutions and legislative bodies (Lorentzen, Toure and Gaye 2019). However, according to the interviewees for this study, this requirement is regularly and consistently ignored. From the perspective of a women's rights organiser, one can distinguish between the women's homegrown quota law as an outcome of women's mobilising, in opposition to NAP, which has been 'imposed by the international society' (Interview, Coalition of Women Leaders, Mali, 27 April 2023). The implementation of the quota law concerning peace processes has been underwhelming as well. The Platform of Women Leaders was established in 2014 as a forum for the interaction of civil society groups in the national women's movement regarding the demands and concerns of women in the peace processes. Regardless, when Comité de Suivi de l'Accord (CSA) was created to monitor the Algiers peace agreement in 2015, no women were included as members.

In 2018 a consultative women's forum for monitoring the implementation of peace agreements was created. Supported by MINUSMA, the women involved met with relevant ministries and armed groups.<sup>14</sup> Since then the committee (CSA) has expanded from 9 to 12 and presently three seats in CSA are allocated to women and 12 across the four sub-committees. Some discussions have taken place regarding establishing local representations of CSA, but there has been no movement on that front either (Interview, Think Peace, 26 April 2023). That said, UN Women argues that women's participation in CSA has gone from 0% in 2019 to 38% in 2023. However, since the CSA meetings have become inconsistent since the coup d'état in 2021 it is difficult to assess the impact of women's participation (Interview, WPS researcher, Sweden, 13 March 2023). The work on mainstreaming women's rights into the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission has also been ongoing (Commission Vérité, Justice et Réconciliation). According to NAP III, 20% of its members are women, making it the most inclusive peacebuilding mechanism in Mali (p. 13 in NAP III). The purpose of the commission is to facilitate transitional justice processes, including 'dialogue, forgiveness, conviviality and reparations'. The commission has adopted the National Reparations Policy and Action Plan 2021-25 through which the government is expected to mobilise administrative channels to restore conflict victims' dignity. The extent to which these different initiatives have enhanced women's influence on the peace process is unclear. It is also questionable whether these developments can be attributed to the existence of the NAP.

UN Women sees the endorsement by the prime minister and the involvement of 15 ministries as a clear sign of political commitment and the result of longstanding advocacy work (Interview, UN Women Mali, 27 April 2023). For them, Mali's 'whole government' approach seems meaningful and an achievement in itself. In their experience, all ministries are involved and aware of the WPS agenda because the focal points attend relevant meetings and coordinate implementation. However, a document initiated by international partners and paid for by donors, in a country that is highly unstable, is unlikely to effectively hold the state institutions accountable. From this perspective the main outcome of the NAP is that it structures dialogue about 1325.



**The NAP processes may include local actors who are invited to participate in consultations and workshops, but those discussions do not organically evolve into more awareness, inclusion or ownership.**

In the current political climate, the security sector is heavily prioritised over more inclusive approaches to peacebuilding. This has led to the disregarding of local peacebuilders and peace actors, as well as of the 30% quota of women's participation (Interview, Think Peace, 26 April 2023). The Ministry of Defence seems to be unaware of the NAP and WPS, and the women's rights agenda has not been significantly appropriated by either the judiciary or the military (Interview, Coalition of Women Leaders, Mali, 27 April 2023). According to Mme Maiga, the founder of the Coalition of Women Leaders in Mali, UNSCR 1325 and NAP process may have served a purpose during 2010-2012, but the conflict and coups have rendered the WPS agenda nearly irrelevant for communities and civil actors on the ground. The lack of political will to advance work on the WPS agenda is seen as a regional problem (Interview, GNWP West Africa, 14 March 2023). While it is exactly at times of conflict and instability that the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and a relevant NAP would be most required, it is also the time when 'soft issues' get the least attention.

Regardless of whether WPS stakeholders in Mali experience a political commitment or not, one of the major critiques of the NAPs that came up in the interviews was that they do not trickle down to the local level. After ten years of meetings, workshops and discussions, the NAP process remains lodged in the policy circles in Bamako. The NAP processes may include local actors who are invited to participate in

consultations and workshops, but those discussions do not organically evolve into more awareness, inclusion or ownership. Reflecting on a study conducted with diverse focus groups, Lorentzen, a researcher on Mali and WPS, notes that when local women were asked if: 'they knew anything about the peace agreement and if they knew about the women, peace and security agenda they didn't really'. She explains that her Malian colleague was surprised to hear this, because she had been travelling all over the country giving training sessions (Interview, WPS researcher, Sweden 13 March 2023). Apparently, either these training sessions had not had a lasting impact, or the knowledge and understanding of the WPS agenda was not shared beyond those NGO and women's rights actors on the receiving end of the training.

In terms of legislation, Mali is one of the countries that has been unable to create adequate legal provisions to address domestic violence, as pointed out above. This is something that NAPs call for. However, cultural, religious and political reasons have resulted in the sidelining of the domestic violence bill for 2-3 terms (Interview, Think Peace, 26 April 2023). These normative tensions can also be observed in the local reception of the EU's WPS and gender mainstreaming of their counter-terrorism activities (Berlingozzi 2022). On the ground there is resistance to gender training due to existing social sensitivities. Women's access to positions in defence forces is impeded by issues such as a requirement to be unmarried and childless; as well as the lack of gendered facilities. While gender mainstreaming is an EU conditionality, there is uneven interest in the gender agenda among the EU countries, with the Nordic countries taking a leadership role in those efforts. Highlighting the diverse local contexts in Mali, Berlingozzi points out the rural-urban divide in women's realities. The existing EU practices and strategies to include women in peace processes are disconnected from the reality of a large majority of women in Mali and their concerns around (in)security.

### **The way forward**

In the current context of violence against civilians in Mali it is clear that holding the government accountable for their peace and security duties is more than challenging. However, frameworks like NAPs can serve as anchors for dialogue between different WPS stakeholders and be strategically mobilised when the political opportunity arises. Regardless of the gaps and weak political will for implementation, the interviewees expressed that there is a future for WPS NAP in Mali

By spring 2023 Mali's relationship with the international community, particularly the UN Security Council, had increasingly soured. Aminata Cheick Dicko from the CSO called 'Kisal' briefed the UN Security Council on the situation in Mali, highlighting the crimes of the Malian Armed Forces (FAMA) and Russian mercenaries.<sup>15</sup> A Malian diplomat has said that Dicko is an unknown actor whose representativeness should be questioned, and pointed towards 'hidden agendas' in outside engagement with civil society actors without any collaboration with the government. Dicko was subjected to intense harassment upon her return and has since left her home to seek safety.<sup>16</sup> Since the briefing on the 27 January, the situation has been further escalating with the human rights director at MINUSMA announced a persona non grata by the government.<sup>17</sup> The WPS agenda in Mali faces a volatile political context where policy implementation of any kind is challenging and sensitive.

Regardless of the instability, Mali too is embarking on the localisation process. Currently, there are nine local action plans in Mali at the regional level (Interview, UN Women Mali, 27 April 2023). This is a step towards decentralised implementing structures that would be commensurable with Mali's context of cultural diversity as well as rural–urban differences. On the other hand, a number of donors are pulling out due to the sensitive political and security situation, and therefore the funding outlook for further localisation is dire. An appeal from UN Women that was conveyed in the interview is that: 'The UN member states who support 1325 should not run away from Mali, they should support the NAP' (Interview, UN Women, 27 April 2023). This speaks to two common issues: firstly, an overwhelming lack of funding for NAP implementation and no allocated budget from the state; and the fact that as security situation in Mali deteriorates, the urgency to mobilise around the four pillars of WPS becomes greater. However, in the current situation the political commitment to NAP appears at best discursive and the future of WPS in Mali uncertain.





Women Peace and Security in Mali. 21 October 2015.  
Photo and description: Ryan Brown / UN Women.

## DISCUSSION: INTERROGATING OWNERSHIP OF THE WPS AGENDA

Building on the three country case studies and existing literature, this section discusses the notion of ownership of a policy agenda. In an ideal world, taking ownership of a policy agenda would include translating it into relevant national and local governance structures, creating guidelines and accountability mechanisms for ensuring compliance, setting up monitoring mechanisms and, of course, allocating sufficient funding to ensure the above adjustments take place in a timely and efficient manner. Not least, appropriate allies and partners would be identified, and collaborative projects and interventions set up. However, this is rarely the reality faced by civil servants in understaffed and underfunded government offices, and that applies far beyond Africa. For example, a briefing note on the integration of the

WPS agenda into the EU's Gender Action Plan III (GAP III) highlights that among the reasons for the current lack of implementation by the EU delegations is the limited in-house expertise on gender equality and WPS. The gender focal points have limited time and resources, lack expertise as well as the seniority to liaise with the EU delegation leadership (Salzinger and Desmidt 2023).

The report at hand understands fostering ownership in terms of translation, adaptation and localisation of internationally-agreed norms in a way that is informed by the policy interests of people in particular localities whereby normative structures and language are adjusted to serve the people in need (informed by Levitt and Merry 2009; Madsen 2019; Singh 2020). Much of the literature on policy ownership comes from the research on aid conditionality and aid effectiveness (OECD 2009; Dornan 2017). According to a study done for the IMF, the relevance of ownership is difficult to evidence empirically as it 'cannot be directly observed or measured and because it is dynamic and often fragile' (Boughton and Mourmouras 2002: 14). At the same time, Boughton and Mourmouras argue that ownership must be enhanced. The most effective way of doing so is through building relationships and offering flexibility for local authorities to take control of the agenda – as long as it aligns with the core objectives (of IMF in their case). The following sections question whether and to what extent different WPS NAP processes in Ethiopia, Kenya and Mali have fostered ownership of the WPS agenda. The diverse and at times conflicting perspectives on the impact of NAPs elaborated in this report allow for a comprehensive analysis of the nuances of 'ownership'.

The discussion of findings will broadly follow the logic of a NAP process. We start by discussing how ownership might be fostered at different stages of the policy diffusion process, including creating a NAP and processes of localisation. Policy diffusion is broadly understood as how policy agendas move across different levels of governance, often focusing on the movement from international to local. We proceed by discussing how implementing NAPs may be considered indicative of ownership. We argue, however, that NAPs are rarely used as tools for implementation outside the walls of government institutions and that non-state actors tend to work in parallel with the formal processes. Not least, the way ownership is expressed through implementation could be understood in relation to funds committed and the desire to monitor and report on progress made. We nuance both of these discussions by highlighting the complexities of funding social affairs work in Africa, and the overwhelming reporting and data gap. We conclude by underscoring that while WPS NAPs are rarely directly implemented, the practitioners and scholars interviewed for this report consider NAPs as contributing to a broader WPS toolkit.


## WHAT KIND OF OWNERSHIP IS FOSTERED BY POLICY DIFFUSION?

NAPs explicitly translate UNSCR 1325 to diverse peace and security circumstances. State and non-state institutions can indicate their commitment to a policy agenda by adjusting the UNSCR 1325 to a national or localised context. The link between UNSCR 1325 and WPS NAPs is usually articulated through the four Ps. The process of policy diffusion, however, reveals tensions within the notion of taking 'ownership'. In the following sections these tensions are discussed as they come up in negotiating a) the institutional home of the WPS agenda; b) inclusive drafting; and c) processes of localisation. Because WPS NAPs are operating primarily at the policy and governance level, the report pays particular attention to the formal and institutional properties of NAPs and how these relate to peace actors more broadly.

### **Institutionalising the WPS agenda**

What does the institutional setup tell us about the ownership of the WPS agenda? Looking at NAPs in their institutional contexts allows us to analyse how the relevance of the WPS agenda is interpreted domestically, and the importance it is given. In Northern and Western countries WPS NAPs are usually led by ministries of foreign affairs, focusing on military interventions and conflict-related missions abroad. Meanwhile, African countries are more likely to have NAPs led by ministries of gender and social affairs and to focus on internal issues of gender inequality across sectors (Madsen 2019; Hastrup and Hagen 2020; Baldwin 2022; Myrttinen 2022). Many NAPs on the continent focus on participation and consider WPS implementation part of a wider gender equality agenda. While NAPs that address gender relations beyond conflict contexts can provide for a more holistic approach to WPS, some interviewees expressed concerns about the general weakness of ministries of social and gender affairs. They tend to lack capacity in terms of size, funding and expertise, as well as in their ability to ensure WPS implementation across all relevant state institutions. One proposed that: 'There needs to be involvement of other, more powerful ministries than these gender machineries', preferably the likes of the Ministry of Defence or Ministry of Finance (Interview, NAI, Sweden, 13 March 2023). Another Scandinavian researcher points out that WPS should be understood as a matter of international security, and therefore having a NAP in the gender ministry undermines its purpose (Interview, PRIO, 20 March 2023). However, most interviewees on the continent did not find it curious or surprising that WPS NAPs were largely hosted by gender ministries. There seemed to be a consensus that the WPS agenda is relevant domestically, that WPS speaks to unequal power relations more broadly, and that it should not be confined to the security sector or issues abroad.

The institutional home of a NAP is likely to have an impact on its content. For example, in contrast to African countries' inclusion of domestic issues in their NAPs, Australia's NAP has been criticised because of its clear outward focus, and its failure to consider indigenous-settler conflicts (Dunn 2014) or the violence experienced by refugee women (Lee-Koo 2016). The Australian WPS NAP is not used to interrogate peace and life free of violence internally, and as Dunn argues, lacks local relevance. Dunn (ibid: 288) points out that Australia's NAP is framed through a UN mandate to ensure international peace and security and the NAP will therefore inform Australia's approach to internationally recognised conflict situations. Canada's WPS NAPs have been criticised for the same reason.



**There seemed to be a consensus that the WPS agenda is relevant domestically, that WPS speaks to unequal power relations more broadly, and that it should not be confined to the security sector.**

One might ask what the NAPs in African countries would look like if they were to follow the same logic? Indeed, NAPs being adopted in Latin America provide an excellent proxy example of that. Latin American countries have been rather slow to adopt WPS NAPs in spite of the high levels of insecurity that characterise the region due to organised crime, violent crime and conflict-related violence. The emerging WPS NAPs in the region tend to be outward-looking and mimic the approach of high-income countries. In so doing they fail to address the security threats Brazilian women face, such as high levels of homicide, human trafficking, and sexual exploitation. In Brazil, civil society and UN Women were excluded from the final part of the NAP drafting process, which only involved the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence. Because gender-based violence and issues of gender equality were not a priority for either the conservative government at the time or the military, the NAP ended up focusing on women abroad and international peacekeeping efforts (Giannini and Pereira 2020). The adoption of a NAP hereby served Brazil's international image well, while it failed to promote the WPS agenda and women's rights at home (Kolling 2021).

The trends coming from Latin America also raise questions about why African countries have gone in the opposite direction and not simply copied the approach of the so-called 'powerful actors'. Or perhaps we should flip the question on its head, like one of our interviewees:

I would be interested to know why, in Europe, it is mostly in the ministries of foreign affairs. I wonder if it's because it's less about the internal implementation and more about the support to the outside?

(Interview, African Leadership Centre, 21 March 2023)

Indeed, it is not strategic for countries to adopt policies that would require transformation internally when there's an option to legitimately limit the relevance of WPS to the military and defence in international missions. Choosing to look inward on WPS may make sense if there is no intention to take on implementation in the first place, or a hope that the policy will direct money into areas of governance and services that the state does not prioritise (related arguments by Wotipka and Tsutsui 2008; Tripp 2019). From a different perspective, advocacy networks and coalitions can take up a policy agenda and pressure states to adopt it (Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999). They can do so in a way which benefits their goals the most. For actors like UN Women, women's organisations and donors, an internally-focused WPS NAP legitimises broad avenues of gender equality work.

**The technocratic frame for NAP processes leaves little to no space for national actors and experts to consider and debate what an inclusive and productive NAP process might look like in their country context.**

In countries like Kenya, and for instance South Africa, we know that the NAP drafting process became extended largely due to disagreement regarding the location of the NAP – or which ministry(ies) should act as hosts. We are now seeing a shift towards a 'whole of government' approach whereby all ministries have 1325 focal points and cross-sectoral steering committees. Additionally, in all the case study countries the ministry of women co-hosts the NAP with another ministry. In Ethiopia it is the Ministry of Peace, in Kenya it is the Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government and in Mali the Office of the Prime Minister. As UN Women Mali put it, 'it took a lot of advocacy to reach that agreement'. Perhaps introducing the WPS agenda through the ministries of women has been a strategic move by WPS networks to have the agenda situated somewhere where they can have influence. The other aspect of the institutional setup is that the pattern of UN Women is very obvious: the setting up of technical committees and steering committees that


involve ministerial staff from different levels. The weakness of this approach is that WPS work – participating in meetings, workshops, etc. – becomes the job of a WPS or gender focal point in a ministry and is therefore individualised. Anecdotal evidence emerged from interviews regarding the impact a focal point changing careers can have on the WPS work, and the need it causes to build relationships and capacity with the new people. Again, these issues are not unique to WPS and African ministries, but they do challenge the chosen approach.

The assumption behind this approach appears to be that this WPS policy diffusion model works the same way across a very diverse range of African state structures. At the end of the day, the NAP is often drafted by a hired consultant and not collectively by experts in the field (example of Senegal, interview with GNWP West Africa, 14 March 2023). Looking at the job descriptions of UN Women consultants, a pattern of practice emerges.<sup>18</sup> The consultant is to establish a national steering committee, organise training, create a consultation plan and then report back, and finally to draft the actual NAP for the steering committee's consideration. This pattern, with minor adjustments, can be observed in all case study countries. The technocratic frame for NAP processes leaves little to no space for national actors and experts to consider and debate what an inclusive and productive NAP process might look like in their country context. It therefore provides limited space for bottom-up learning and mobilising existing expertise in-country. Genuine ownership of the WPS policy processes would likely produce more diverse approaches to NAP development and oversight.

### **Inclusive NAP processes**

There is variation in what is considered to be an 'inclusive' process of NAP drafting. As said, NAP development in African countries visibly follows a trend towards steering committees and cross-sectoral technical committees. Even though the cross-ministerial drafting process is a welcome development, the relationship between the state and civil society groups remains tense in many contexts. The voices and role of civil society organisations in developing and implementing NAPs are worthy of discussion as their inclusion in NAPs is unclear or open-ended (Jonjić-Beitter, Stadler and Tietgen 2020). It is widely agreed across the UN system that civil society engagement is a prerequisite for any hope of local ownership, implementation and monitoring of NAPs. However, this perspective does not always translate into practice and the overall involvement of civil groups is very uneven. This problem appears to be addressed somewhat in more recent NAPs, like Mali's NAP III in which the different stages at which CSOs have been involved are indicated.

That said, Basini and Ryan (2016) argue that the participation of local and civil society actors in NAP development does not necessarily suggest ownership. Indeed, returning to Mali's NAP III, the cited consultations involved 25 individual civil society participants, of whom 16 were women. This is not a very large number in a country like Mali and suggests that the NAP consultations were rather restricted. Moreover, the fact that actors have participated in consultation meetings is not evidence of their commitment to or ownership of the NAP itself. As Lorentzen's research has shown, WPS practitioners have noted the emergence of a 'workshop industry' in the Malian capital Bamako (Lorentzen 2021: 475-476). This manifests in waves of multi-day workshops where the same actors come together, often incentivised by per diems,<sup>19</sup> and discuss WPS pillars without tangible outcomes.




**One of the major discrepancies from our study is that regardless of UN Women and their ministerial colleagues' attempts at inclusive policymaking and implementation, the civil society actors have consistently been at the fringes of these processes.**

One of the major discrepancies from our study is that regardless of UN Women and their ministerial colleagues' attempts at inclusive policymaking and implementation, the civil society actors have consistently been at the fringes of these processes. The case of Ethiopia suggests that CSO inclusion was an afterthought and with the speeding up of the drafting process it is not granted that their voices will be heard. Similarly, in Mali only four civil society organisations participate in the National Monitoring Committee. In the case of Kenya, it seems like the lessons learned from the first NAP and the lack of ownership by relevant stakeholders led to a much more inclusive drafting process the second time around. Although the interviews did not indicate it, there will most certainly be those who still feel excluded or that their participation was not meaningful. Similarly, it was observed that civil society organisations sometimes take advantage of the NAP processes to improve and strengthen relationships with the government (Interview with GNWP West Africa, 14 March 2023). In Chad, for instance, this resulted in a WhatsApp group including both state and non-state stakeholders, which the civil society actors much appreciated. The level of engagement around NAP is however not always this intimate.

While the whole of government approach broadens the inclusion of ministerial representatives and institutional ownership, this can take place at the expense of non-state actors. The relationship between civil society groups and the government

is often tense, and there may be struggles over ownership of the WPS agenda (Basini and Ryan 2016). A shrinking civil society space in the wake of armed conflict in countries like Mali and Ethiopia, and a deteriorating security situation complicate the involvement of civil society actors and organisations. Madsen's (2019) research on WPS in Rwanda echoes a similar pattern whereby the closing of civil society space and the government infiltration of civil society are taking place in parallel.



**While the whole of government approach broadens the inclusion of ministerial representatives and institutional ownership, this can take place at the expense of non-state actors.**

Rwanda has been of interest to WPS researchers due to the genocide in 1994 and the role of women in post-conflict recovery (Issifu 2015; Madsen 2019). According to Issifu (2015) women were not only affected by ethnic violence directly but also by a major loss of the male population and the weaponisation of inter-ethnic marriages against Tutsi women. Women took on different and new roles post-conflict, entering the workforce in male-dominated sectors, entering high-level politics and becoming judges in previously male-only Gacaca courts. Madsen (2019), on the other hand, points more directly to the friction between WPS implementation by organised women and through a centrally-governed NAP in Rwanda. The adoption of a NAP marked increasing top-down gender mainstreaming by Kagame's government and a shrinking space for civil society groups to engage with WPS in locally-meaningful ways. Madsen paints an image of overlapping ownership of the WPS agenda by international (UN Women), state (ministry), CS (women's organisations) and local actors (the latter nearly absent from the NAP language) while WPS NAP is used for diverse objectives. In case of Rwanda, these were the centralisation of WPS work, new ways of attracting funding and actors' legitimising their own work. Evidence from elsewhere affirms that regardless of mutual interests, it may be difficult for WPS actors to coordinate and be transparent about the existing partnerships (Interview, Danish Refugee Council, 28 March 2023). Rather than uniting around shared goals, as is often imagined, the actors can promote contrasting and competing objectives.

### **Localisation for ownership?**

The literature that looks at the localisation of UNSCR 1325 problematises the top-down approach and state-centrism of NAPs, arguing that this undermines their local relevance. Yet, it appears that the localisation or 'local relevance' of NAPs is only expected of countries in the Global South or perhaps more precisely – the non-West. The NAPs can represent a model of practice, as well as discourse, that largely draws from global policy spaces, whereas locally active organisations may struggle to see the relevance or use for their particular contexts (Yadav 2020; Kunz 2021; Luna and Whetstone 2022). In the cases of Nepal and Sri Lanka a gap between 'elite' national NGOs and grassroots, localised civil society has been observed, leading to a 'dialogue of the deaf' (Luna and Whetstone 2022). Translating policy through a small group of policy-savvy actors was vulnerable to missing locally-relevant factors; for instance, understanding intersecting identity markers that can put people at risk (gender–caste–Maoist or ex-combatant–disabled–poor). Similarly, research in Afghanistan shows that the formal 'norm diffusion' by the adoption of a WPS NAP fails to account for the socially accepted norms and dogmas through which women feel unsafe to participate meaningfully in peace processes (Singh 2020). In contrast to these experiences, in Colombia, which does not have a NAP, municipal action plans for UNSCR 1325 implementation were drafted by local state and non-state organisations and the civil society groups took the localisation of the resolution into their own hands (Lynch 2019: 88-89).

Localisation is commonly understood as a process of bringing international laws to the local level and is recognised by the UN Secretary-General as a best practice (Interview, GNWP, West Africa, 14 March 2023). Kenya is a case in point whereby the stakeholders involved in the 1325 working group and technical committee noted the assessment of NAP I implementation and responded to the lack of local ownership by introducing local action plans. While some civil society actors do not think there has been much trickling down from WPS NAPs to the county level, all interviewees acknowledged that emphasis on localisation is a step in the right direction. What is perhaps more debatable is how this localisation takes place on the ground. There is a tension between working with local leaders and collaborating with them for a locally-relevant action plans vis-à-vis investing more power into the hands of local elites and powerholders and creating local gatekeepers for the WPS agenda (discussed in the classic literature on development brokers by Bierschenk, Chauveau and de Sardan 2002; Mosse and Lewis 2006). Additionally, the impetus for creating these documents still comes predominantly from the national level. In the case of

Mali, the existence of WPS local action plans was not reflected in the interviews or the literature review, and we only became aware of these through UN Women Mali. Which is to say that even when engaging with local actors, localisation efforts are still representative of a top-down process, rather than grassroots ownership.

The localisation of the WPS agenda through local, state or county action plans is on an upward trend, and indeed is also taking place in countries like Nigeria (Interview, Danish Refugee Council, 28.03.2023). While welcome, the Danish Refugee Council experience in Adamawa state in Nigeria was that the process was heavily donor-dependent and when the funding runs out, there is no movement. The experience from Nigeria affirms that the localisation process is shaped by the relationships between regional government, CSOs and federal government. For instance, the state of Borno had seen active civil society engagement and a bottom-up push for a regional WPS action plan, but lack of interest from state government led to roadblocks. As pointed out by the interviewee, regardless of the work done, the LAP documents itself is not currently available.

That said, the KNAP national coordinator's take on local action plans was refreshing. She expressed that different counties in Kenya have different concerns and needs when it comes to WPS, and localisation of the NAP does not necessarily need to result in a local action plan. Similarly to her, numerous interviewees pointed to Uganda as an example of a people-focused and bottom-up engagement with NAP. Uganda has the reputation of 'having one of the strongest and best organised peace movements in the region, one that builds on largely self-funded local activists' (M'Cormack-Hale 2012: 20). Currently the Coalition for Action on 1325 brings together civil and community-based organisations across the country to implement and monitor the NAP. Funded by UN Women, the coalition also compiles implementation reports. In addition to local action plans, Uganda also uses community-level 'Barrazas' (peace huts) to foster community dialogue for land conflict resolution and ensures that these are included in local action plans. Four districts have allocated 1% of their overall budget for local action plan implementation (UN Women 2022: 15 ). Uganda's NAP is also praised for clear budgeting and its detailed monitoring and evaluation framework.

## IMPLEMENTATION AS A SIGN OF OWNERSHIP?

The next sections will interrogate the intersections between implementation and ownership by considering a) what counts as implementation b) the funding for NAPs and c) how to measure success. Implementation and compliance can indicate policy ownership, and a prominent sentiment in our study was that if a country has a NAP but makes little effort to implement it on the ground, what kind of ownership can we talk about?

Rather than a tool for day-to-day implementation, a NAP is largely a normative document that informs efforts to increase women's participation in peacebuilding. It does not appear to be used as an instructive document for practical action. Outside government offices, NAPs have a utility for legitimating, monitoring, debating and funding WPS-related activities.

‘ In some of the regions, it's been heavily led by the state as a tick box exercise and that is okay because we then have a national action plan. But implementation then has to make sure that it is through a multi-stakeholder forum. ’

(Interview, ACCORD, 26 April 2023)

Our analytical approach is not novel, in the sense that much of the literature identifies funding and reporting as the main challenges to WPS implementation. For Baldwin (2022) these are operational and accountability problems. She highlights general lack of resources, be they finance, expertise, capacity or political commitment, as operational challenges and ‘creative’ reporting as undermining meaningful accountability. In what follows, our analysis points to an intersection of these challenges whereby NAP goals are implemented ad hoc and there is a lack of reporting capacity in responsible ministries.

### Implementation beyond NAP

Interventions and initiatives to implement the WPS agenda do not always refer to NAPs and may not be a direct result of an existing NAP. Is this a failure to translate local WPS agendas into the international discourse or other way around? In other instances, positive changes in relation to gender equality (i.e. women's participation in politics) are reported as inherently part of NAP implementation without establishing

a clear causal link. Indeed, even state actors can enforce and implement policies that contribute to the NAP implementation, and may as well be reported as such, without referring to a NAP or noting its relevance to their work (Interview, African Leadership Centre, 21 March 2023). Some of the Danish actors active in African contexts also noted during interviews that in their work with partners, or on the ground, the NAPs do not necessarily come up nor guide their WPS activities. Therefore, implementation of WPS takes place across different levels of action without consistent interconnection with NAPs.

From the civil society perspective, women's organisations have done this work for decades, and women have organised for peace in African countries long before UNSCR 1325 (Interviews with ACCORD and KECOSCE). The founder of Rural Women Peace Link, Selline Korir, described how her organisation would reach out to district commissioners in writing years before NAP. They would address the commissioners referring to UNSCR 1325 and call for inclusion of women in peace processes:

‘ Kenya is a signatory to UN resolution 1325 and it demands the inclusion of women in peace and security matters. So, we recommend that women will be trained, and women will be included in peace committees and so on... ’

(Interview, 1 May 2023)

The NAP in Kenya was then welcomed as ‘change is finally coming’ because now WPS was becoming part of government mechanisms and not only something the NGOs and CSOs were preoccupied with. It is clear that CSO stakeholders have a sense of ownership of the WPS agenda without having to relate it to NAP or UNSCR 1325.

Furthermore, what counts as NAP implementation is defined by the language of the NAP and where its focus lies. It can be more security vs. gender equality-oriented, or it may be external vs. internal-looking. Whether different WPS work is related to the NAP becomes the prerogative of those who do the assessment. One interviewee reflected:

‘ We must start looking at innovative practices that are coming from different countries. How are you doing (going about) your national action plan? That's the question to be asked now, not whether you have a national action plan and assuming that having a national action plan means that the agenda is being implemented. ’

(Interview, ACCORD, 26 April 2023)


Across this study, flexibility and dynamism in understanding WPS implementation has been highlighted by numerous interviewees. One questioned whether the notion of peace mediator should be only understood as someone who sits ‘at the table’ and argued that this does not do justice to the diverse skills and knowledge women in Africa can and have used to aid conflict resolution (Interview, African Leadership Centre, 21 March 2023). While it is important to have women at the table, it is also important to ensure women’s expertise is mobilised in the support roles of peace negotiation. Conflict resolution and maintenance of peace often takes place quietly or ad hoc and can happen without an institutional frame. With men gatekeeping most formal spheres, and women lacking formal education, this is sometimes the only way women can contribute to maintaining peace and security in their communities.

**It is evident that the ownership of the women, peace and security agenda by local and grassroots actors in principle is not contingent on its formal institutionalisation and implementation.**

Considering these realities it is evident that the ownership of the women, peace and security agenda by local and grassroots actors in principle is not contingent on its formal institutionalisation and implementation. Interviews pointed to a pragmatic approach to WPS whereby mobilisation happens in response to a particular event or situation. That said, civil society actors often use UNSCR 1325 as a reference to address broader experiences of violence and conflict, i.e. gender-based violence and exclusion of women from decision-making. For example, Mali’s lack of legislation to eliminate violence against women is referred to by both academics and practitioners as a failure to implement UNSCR 1325. Certainly, if women are subject to violence and abuse without repercussions during peacetime, what can we expect during armed conflict?

The above issues relate to academic debates around WPS as a feminist agenda for peace and security or as a tool of global security governance. Making sense of the application and implementation of the WPS agenda as it takes place in different localities also makes it very difficult to assess and measure. As one interviewee put it, the practices of people who are actually embodying the purposes of NAPs, the policy decisions, and the knowledge production are not quite coming together: 'There's need for more interaction outside the hotel conference rooms' (Interview, African Leadership Centre, 21 March 2023). Flexibility and contextualisation of the WPS agenda then has to be firmly integrated into how success is thought of. In some contexts it may involve state-led reforms in the security sector but in others, success may manifest as civil society actors having the space, resources and skills to mobilise for a specific goal.

Our study revealed that stakeholders in a country could assess progress rather differently. The degree of criticism or appreciation was to some extent coloured by actors' sense of involvement and ownership in the NAP process in question. Generally, civil society actors tend to be more critical towards both the NAP development process and implementation efforts. Considering the tensions between civil society WPS ambitions and government responses, one has to question whether there is a satisfactory NAP development process for civil society organisations in all their diversity. That said, state actors also distrust the civil society or sometimes see them as undermining their efforts with unfair criticism.



**Not least, UN Women actors, often the drivers behind the NAP process, are more inclined to highlight successes and achievements.**

In the case of Kenya, the civil organisations we interviewed had less critique of the processes that they have been part of, but they still pointed out that the awareness of the NAP among duty-bearers at the administrative level was not up to standard, and that grassroots practitioners were left behind. The opportunity to address those gaps in NAP II was considered a learning curve. In Ethiopia on the other hand, the civil society and the state have a history of disputes, with the state accusing civil society of being the 'puppets of external actors'. While some of the CSOs were unhappy with the slow pace of the NAP, we can speculate that they will not appreciate speeding up the process if this means downplaying the consultation and inclusion process.

Not least, UN Women actors, often the drivers behind the NAP process, are more inclined to highlight successes and achievements. This could be for various reasons. It is their job to report back on progress made, they have invested their time and energy in this work and, additionally, they have complex relationships with government actors which are characterised by cooperation and common goals as well as by dependency on government actor buy-in.

### **Funding gaps and donor dependency**

One of the major obstacles to implementation is lack of funding. The practitioners want to see the governments allocating budget for WPS as a sign of political commitment and ownership. Many NAPs do not involve budget allocations, which depending on a country's context may or may not impede implementation. As one interviewee noted, Norway has been rather successful at implementing WPS as part of their foreign policy without a specific budget (Online Interview, PRIO, 20 March 2023). However, the interviewee acknowledged that this is unlikely to be feasible for many countries in the Global South and it also makes it difficult to estimate how much funding has been actually committed to the WPS agenda in Norway. In African countries many WPS budgets outline the government's responsibilities and what is expected from the donors (Interview, GNWP West Africa, 14 March 2023). Niger was brought up as one of the countries which has an excellent NAP but no budget allocation. The permanent secretary tasked with the NAP implementation then had to go and approach different embassies to find partners for at least a couple of activities planned. In the case of Ethiopia, we learnt that the government has strong expectations of the donor community to fund the implementation. Elsewhere, actors continue to highlight funding gaps but rarely refer to specific activities that have been not possible because of it.

Government failure to commit budgets to WPS and NAP implementation is largely interpreted in the conducted interviews as a sign of lack of political will. Yet, it might be useful to put this into a context. Much of the gender equality and social inclusion work in African countries is donor-funded and located in relevant ministries. As long as WPS is considered to be part of a social equity agenda, rather than internal and international security, it is likely to remain heavily donor-funded. Many countries seem to struggle with understanding the entanglements between social affairs and (in)security and not address them as interlinked. It is widely acknowledged among experts that conflict-related gender-based violence has its roots in more widely normalised gender inequalities, and similarly, that issues such as trafficking is both a social and a security issue (Davies and True 2015). Recognition that the WPS agenda can foster peace and security beyond women's experience would require the

agenda to be addressed collaboratively by both the security and social sectors. One can debate whether lack of budget allocations is indeed reflective of a lack of political will or if it is a more structural problem. Secondly, it could be asked whether donors funding WPS implementation in the international context, but not at home, indicates genuine and meaningful WPS ownership. Surely ownership of the WPS agenda would warrant introspection and strategies to ensure women's perspectives are integrated into local security sectors such as the police and beyond.

Interestingly, the idea that the WPS agenda itself is donor-driven in African countries certainly caused some pushback from civil society actors interviewed as part of this study. The centrality of donor funding over the financial contributions of the state and local actors was clear to the interviewees, but the role and efforts of WPS advocates was always highlighted. After all, the UNSCR 1325 was 'hard won territory' for civil society and women's organisations on the continent (Interview, African Leadership Centre, 21 March 2023). This tension speaks to a wider conflict of interest around global norms whereby groups that seek social change, especially on culturally and religiously sensitive issues such as gender norms, encounter conservative pushback and being labelled as 'outsiders' or their ideas as 'foreign' (see Okech and Musindarwezo 2019: 257). Both ownership and contestation, therefore, are fostered strategically on the continent.


### **Reporting back and measuring success**

Considering the informal implementation and the limited to zero funding for reporting and monitoring, how do we go about measuring progress or the lack of thereof? The work done on the WPS agenda is not always reported as such and other times a mixed bag of gender equality and women's participation interventions are cited as NAP implementation. As the WPS expert at the African Union notes:

‘ If you look at country cases, you will see that the midterm report brings together all the work that is being done on the women, peace and security agenda, but it is really not focusing on what they said they would do in the national action plan. Which means there is this gap. ’

(Interview, 7 June 2023)

Even tracing the broad engagement with WPS has required some interpretation of facts. In light of this, we asked numerous interviewees whether some degree of standardisation might be in order. As the above sections have hopefully made clear, the proposition of standardisation was strongly rejected. Therefore, below we discuss the current monitoring and reporting strategies in the context of highly diverse WPS agenda application and emerging best practices.




**The work done on the WPS agenda is not always reported as such and other times a mixed bag of gender equality and women's participation interventions are cited as NAP implementation.**

The monitoring and evaluation frameworks embedded in NAPs are framed through indicators which usually follow the four pillars of WPS. Since the pillars are broad, diverse activities can be attributed to their implementation. For instance, Kenya and Mali decided to adjust the indicators after their first NAPs to facilitate a more effective and meaningful monitoring and evaluation process. Similarly, the Office of the Special Envoy on WPS at the African Union continued tweaking the indicators after the Continental Results Framework was adopted by the Peace and Security Council. They asked states to share which indicators they did find challenging: 'because we wanted to have as practical and relevant indicators as possible' (Interview, WPS specialist in the AUC, 7 June 2023). It was noted that having too many, excessively specific, indicators led to less comprehensive information. Redrafting the NAP enables reflection on issues like this and allows stakeholders to continuously redefine what WPS implementation looks like. It also allows for reconsideration of which aspects of WPS implementation are quantifiable and which are not.

Regionally, the gender ministers also meet once a year at the margins of the AU summit to discuss WPS progress reports in the frame of the African Continental Results Framework (Interview, African Leadership Centre, 21 March 2023). Ahead of this, the draft annual report on WPS is validated by the contributing member states, creating opportunities to discuss challenges and successes (Interview, WPS specialist in the AUC, 7 June 2023). Niger, for instance, is reported to take the Continental Results Framework very seriously and is committed to showing that they are doing their best, even without adequate funding (Interview, GNWP West Africa, 14 March 2023). Beyond individual commitment by states, AU also takes on

missions to observe WPS implementation. In the case of Senegal, the ministry was then required to mobilise civil society to generate data about the implementing activities taking place (Interview, GNWP West Africa, 14 March 2023).



**Comprehensive cross-ministerial data management support would be an appropriate solution that could address a whole host of monitoring and information gaps.**

Countries may struggle with reporting in the Continental Results Framework because they are unable to access 'sensitive data', as we learned during interviews in Kenya. The compiling of reports lies with the co-ordinating ministry and the indicators require inputs from across sectors. Often located in gender ministries, lack of capacity, staff shortage, diverse mandates as well as reliance on focal points who have competing responsibilities, are some of the major challenges to timely reporting (Interview, WPS specialist in AUC, 7 June 2023). Additionally, data and information are spread across ministries and produced for other purposes than NAP. The ministry(ies) responsible for the NAP may not have the access nor the expertise to interpret the existing data from other parts of the government (Interview, African Leadership Centre, 21 March 2023). Further formalisation of reporting could include a) taking resources from one issue at the ministries of gender, anything from maternal mortality to domestic violence, and putting them into WPS reporting, and b) disabling countries from evaluating their WPS progress within specific contexts and focusing instead on general indicators. As both the director of the African Leadership Centre and the WPS specialist at the African Union Commission suggest, comprehensive cross-ministerial data management support would be an appropriate solution that could address a whole host of monitoring and information gaps.

Beyond regional structures, African countries also participate in the global WPS Focal Points Network. Here, government representatives come together and share their progress, challenges and efforts with implementing the WPS agenda. It was brought up in an interview, that the minister of gender of the Central African Republic raised the alarm upon returning from the focal points meeting and told everyone that they were lagging behind other countries when it comes to WPS (Interview, GNWP West Africa, 14 March 2023). This is an example of how a healthy level of peer pressure can incite action.

Peer learning was highlighted as an important tool in advancing WPS work. Interviewees mentioned and referred to regional conferences in Pretoria (South Africa), Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) and recently in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), where discussions about practicalities and exchange of experiences took place. Being able to learn from each other and find out how colleagues from neighbouring countries are dealing with similar issues was found to be encouraging and inspirational. All the above indicates that regional peer review and exchange can catalyse action and provide motivation to find solutions in challenging circumstances.



The Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Bineta Diop, on a two day visit in Somalia. 25 November 2014.  
Photo and description: AMISOM Photo/Tobin Jones / Alamy Stock Photo.

## CONCLUSION: THE LIMITATIONS AND PROMISES OF WPS NAPs

The findings of this report show that the future work with NAPs requires rethinking the expectations around them. In the African countries investigated as part of this study, NAPs are not followed to the letter in order to implement the prescribed plans on the ground. It is a guiding document for goal setting and for identifying priorities. However, it can also function as a tool to limit and narrow the WPS agenda and the adoption of a NAP can be ‘window dressing’ that masks the lack of political will to make meaningful changes. While NAP goals and priorities might be principally ‘cheap talk’ by the state actors in the capital, it remains true that the political work done by the engaged ministerial staff, by UN Women and by civil society groups is important for increasing knowledge and understanding of WPS among decision-makers. While NAPs may impact policy decisions around WPS, they rarely yield explicit changes in how women participate in peace and security sectors. Often, other activities promote the WPS agenda more tangibly than the top-down elaboration and implementation of NAPs.

The insights from Ethiopia, Kenya and Mali indicate that implementing the WPS agenda through NAPs is an inherently top-down approach to policy diffusion. The actors, particularly civil society actors, that are left outside the small circle of WPS stakeholders perceive and interpret the technocratic approach to WPS as a lack of political commitment and performative for development partners. The technocratic policy work done by government offices and their partners increases the bureaucratisation of an activist agenda and fails to incorporate the knowledge, skills and experiences of informal peacebuilders and security actors. The consultative processes can replace meaningful dialogue and debate and rather become a means

to suppress local perspectives within prescribed policy frames, including local action plans. In the context of limited political will at the governmental level, it is hard to generate participatory, constructive and open processes around UNSCR 1325 implementation that foster a shared sense of ownership across stakeholders.

As the report has shown, Ethiopia, Kenya and Mali are in very different circumstances for engaging with the WPS agenda and for doing it through NAPs. Ethiopia is recovering from war and actors within the country are trying to rebuild spaces of dialogue and debate which were shaken by the tensions across the country. Kenya grapples with violent clashes across the country and the efforts to prevent the repetition of the post-election horrors in 2007 are ongoing. With many challenges to overcome, WPS actors see and take advantage of openings for action. Mali, on the other hand, is contending with a deteriorating security situation as well as souring of relations between the state, civil society and international partners. The WPS agenda remains largely at the discussion level. Informed by their current states of affairs, the countries exhibit varying degrees of political will, trust in civil society, and motivation to learn from the grassroots practitioners. Thus, the case studies demonstrate that the pertinence of NAPs is very dependent on the political context.

To understand actors' views of NAPs in the context of implementation gaps and limitations of NAP processes, we asked our interviewees directly: 'Do we need NAPs, or should we be looking at alternatives instead?' Those involved found that NAPs should remain part of the WPS implementation strategy. Among the international, regional and local experts, the consensus was that NAPs will not be the silver bullet which we have to 'get right' in order to implement the WPS agenda in the most transformative way. However that, in their view, does not mean that NAPs are not necessary. NAPs were understood as having a particular function as a WPS tool; namely linking the work people do on the ground to official government policy. NAPs are used to legitimise the WPS work of different stakeholders, monitor governments' engagement with the agenda, debate and discuss the gendered aspects of new and old security challenges, and to mobilise funds. Perhaps the most hopeful case study, Kenya, shows a certain openness among the 1325 coordinators and the civil society to embrace the ups and downs of working with the WPS NAP. While using NAPs as a structure to lean on, all interviewees in Kenya (and beyond) expressed awareness of the shortcomings of NAP processes and perceived it as a relatively new and yet-to-be-explored tool in the toolbox of WPS work. Thus, moving forward with NAPs, a few things may be useful to consider.

At state level, regional reporting and monitoring can be used as tools for peer-to-peer accountability. The relative success of the African Continental Results Framework (CRF) was an unforeseen finding of this study. As the WPS expert at the African Union noted, there is a considerable gap between the aspirations articulated in WPS NAPs and the diverse activities that are reported as NAP implementation: ‘Most countries have a monitoring and evaluation framework, but do they even use it?’ (Interview, 7 June 2023). The African Union’s CRF then explicitly supports countries to work with WPS NAPs, seeks to enhance the impact of NAPs on the ground and creates accountability around having a NAP. Reporting back is less a move towards standardisation than it is about documenting challenges and advances of working on WPS. Additionally, the CRF seeks to support and empower gender ministries in expanding the WPS into other ministries (Interview, WPS specialist in the AUC, 7 June 2023). While the AU, including its WPS structures, is often criticised for lack of accessibility, practitioners have welcomed this regional development as an appropriate alternative to a global reporting system.

NAPs are currently ‘owned’ by a small circle of WPS actors and remain largely at a policy level. Therefore, the role of civil society in NAPs processes requires some clarification. Considering the widely-held assumption that civil society participation in NAP implementation is vital for success, more could be done to ensure an inclusive dialogue. Emerging best practices are important for more concrete global and national discussions around inclusive policy processes and what the role of civil society is expected to be in practice. Yet, governments may have different concerns about engaging with civil society, especially in fragile democracies that are sensitive to critique and feedback. However, if NAPs are to become an important tool for WPS implementation, the civil society needs to be able to put some form of pressure on the top-down policy processes through ideas, engagement and advocacy.

Engagement with non-traditional and innovative peacebuilding initiatives is the path to the transformative localisation of WPS aims. Instead of focusing on capacity building, which emphasises the language and best practices from global WPS discourses, experience-sharing and learning from local actors and their conflict resolution practices will be important. Making that shift can address the sense of imposition that the formal WPS NAP discourses carry and lead to more horizontal and collaborative WPS implementation. Innovative approaches to documenting and reporting on WPS initiatives could involve supporting knowledge production and research that can analyse the work done and offer new context-specific solutions.

All in all, the study of NAPs in Ethiopia, Kenya and Mali shows that WPS NAPs are meaningful policy tools if considered in a broader ecosystem of WPS-related work. As the case studies show, the three countries are in very different places regarding political will and engagement with civil society and will require different approaches moving forward. The most practical use of NAPs for local actors, civil societies and peers is to hold governments accountable. While these actors are more likely to focus on specific WPS issues than pressurise for overall NAP implementation, NAPs create a framework through which diverse WPS initiatives and activities can be brought together. From this perspective, centring NAPs as a WPS implementation tool should focus on the impact NAPs can have through monitoring and reporting on NAPs, meaningful CSO dialogue framed by NAPs, and innovative WPS solutions from the ground up.

# NOTES

- 1 We have listed those which are commonly considered in the literature to constitute the WPS agenda, but the Security Council Report website lists different and more documents.
- 2 Statement can be found on <https://www.peacewomen.org/node/97401>
- 3 Declaration on 2015 Year of Women's Empowerment and Development Towards Africa's Agenda 2063 (Doc. Assembly/AU/2{XXV})
- 4 Available at: [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/35958-doc-continental\\_result\\_framework\\_on\\_wps\\_agenda\\_in\\_africa.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/35958-doc-continental_result_framework_on_wps_agenda_in_africa.pdf)
- 5 From a PowerPoint shared by the Office of the Special Envoy on WPS, later confirmed in an interview.
- 6 This has changed by now.
- 7 KNAP is how Kenya's National Action Plan on WPS is referred to by stakeholders in the country.
- 8 The Constitution of 2010 sets out National and County governments as distinct but equal.
- 9 See <https://gender.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/SIGNED-INTERGOVERNMENTAL-CONSULTATION-FRAMEWORK-FOR-GENDER-SECTOR.pdf>
- 10 See the UN Women article at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/feature-story/2022/10/kenyan-women-lead-peace-efforts-in-longstanding-conflicts>
- 11 <https://www.dii.dk/en/research/eu-vs-wagner-paramilitaries-a-view-from-the-ground-in-mali>
- 12 <https://www.usaid.gov/mali/news/jan-25-2023-justice-victims-hereditary-slavery> and <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/Africa/mali/descent-based-slavery-mali>
- 13 Detailed overview of the drafting process is available here, in an informal translation of the NAP <http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/index.php/mali/>
- 14 <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/women-transforming-peace.pdf>, p. 4.
- 15 <https://www.theafricareport.com>; 'Mali: Aminata Dicko denounces Wagner, Assimi Goïta sees red' by Flore Monteau on 3 February 2023.
- 16 <https://www.rfi.fr> 'Mali: human rights defender Aminata Dicko, target of a violent smear campaign', 2 March 2023.
- 17 <https://www.rfi.fr> 'Head of UN human rights mission expelled from Mali', 6 February 2023.
- 18 See an example of such an advertisement and job description here [https://jobs.undp.org/cj\\_view\\_job.cfm?cur\\_job\\_id=103371](https://jobs.undp.org/cj_view_job.cfm?cur_job_id=103371)
- 19 This is a suggestion often made about workshops: that actors only show up because of per diems. But there appears to be little empirical research that discusses this in depth. Therefore, the motivations of participants remain unclear.

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## List of national action plans

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# ANNEX 1. LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

	Date 2023	Name	Institution	Position	Location
1	03.03.	Meseret Ali	Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA)	Programme Manager	Ethiopia
2	10.03.	Njoki Wamai	United States International University- Africa	Assistant Professor	Kenya
3	13.03.	Diana Højlund Madsen	The Nordic Africa Institute	Senior Researcher, WPS in Rwanda	Sweden
4	13.03.	Jenny Lorentzen	Lund University	Postdoctoral researcher, WPS in Mali	Sweden
5	14.03.	Simone Mbodé Diouf	Global Network of Women Peacebuilders	Programme Officer for Africa	Senegal
6	20.03.	Torunn Tryggestad	Peace Research Institute Oslo	Deputy Director	Norway
7	21.02.	Shuvai Busuman Nyoni	African Leadership Centre	Executive Director	Kenya
8	21.03.	Hemlata Rai; Maija Santalahti; Nega Gerbaba	UN Women	Technical Specialist, WPS and Humanitarian Action; Programme Officer, WPS; Programme Officer, WPS	Ethiopia
9	28.03.	Line Grete Birgitta Brylle	Danish Refugee Council	Global Peacebuilding Advisor	Denmark
10	04.04.	Minyamir Bekele; Teketel Geneto	Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs	Head of Inclusion; Senior expert	Ethiopia
11	14.04.	Makena Kirima	Embassy of Denmark	Programme Manager, Resilience, Peace and Stabilization	Kenya
12	19.04.	Pravina Makan-Lakha	ACCORD	WPS Advisor	South Africa
13	24.04.	Emily Amlagu Opati	State Department of Gender and Affirmative Action, Ministry of Public Service, Gender and Affirmative Action	Senior Assistant Director	Kenya
14	25.04.	Jacqueline Mbogo	Tetra Tech	Head of REINVENT Programme, co-chair of National Working Group on WPS	Kenya
15	26.04.	Catherine Chegero	State Department of Gender and Affirmative Action UN Women	KNAP Analyst	Kenya
16	26.04.	Abdoul Kassim Fomba	Think Peace	National Coordinator	Mali
17	27.04.	Fadimata Mahamane; Viviane Tassi Bela	UN Women	NAP 1325 National Coordinator, Policy Specialist, WPS	Mali
18	27.04.	Fatima Maiga	Coalition of Women Leaders, North, South and Center of Mali (NSC)	Founder and President	Mali
19	27.04.	Phyllis Muema	Kenya Community Support Centre (KECOSCE)	Executive Director	Kenya
20	01.05.	Selline Korir; Clinton Gwako	Rural Women Peace Link (RWPL)	Founder; Expert	Kenya
21	07.06.	Catherine Gaku Njeru	Office of the Special Envoy on Women Peace and Security at the African Union Commission	WPS and Gender Monitoring Specialist	Ethiopia

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