



ASWAN FORUM



CHAIR'S SUMMARY

**LEVERAGING WOMEN'S ROLE IN BUILDING RESILIENCE TOWARDS  
SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA**

**JUNE 2022**

## **Leveraging Women's Role in Building Resilience Towards Sustainable Peace and Development in Africa**

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### **CCCCPA**

Founded in 1994, the Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Peacebuilding (CCCCPA) is an Egyptian public agency; an AU Center of Excellence in training, capacity building, and research; and the Arab world's only civilian training center in the fields of peacekeeping and peacebuilding. It is a major voice of the Global South on a wide range of topics, including conflict prevention and resolution; peacekeeping; peacebuilding; disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR); preventing radicalization and extremism leading to terrorism; combating transnational threats; women, peace, and security; and climate, security, and development. In addition, CCCCCPA is the Executive Secretariat of the Aswan Forum for Sustainable Peace and Development, and the Secretariat of the International Association of Peacekeeping Training Centers (IAPTC).

### **Aswan Forum**

Egypt, in its capacity as the Champion of Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development in Africa launched the Aswan Forum during its Presidency of the African Union in 2019 as a high-level platform that advances home-grown solutions to address the challenges facing the African continent by strengthening interlinkages between peace, security and sustainable development through long term innovative solutions and robust partnerships.

In its capacity as the Secretariat of the Aswan Forum for Sustainable Peace and Development, the Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding (CCCCPA) hosted a virtual expert roundtable discussion titled: "Leveraging Women's Role in Building Resilience towards Sustainable Peace and Development in Africa" on 11 May 2022, as part of the preparatory process of the third edition of the Forum.

The discussion brought together a select group of experts and practitioners including government officials, civil society organizations, and regional and international organizations. We are especially thankful for the valuable contributions from the Gender Monitoring Office of the Republic of Rwanda, the Environment Protection Agency of the Republic of Sierra Leone, the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA), UNWomen West and Central Africa, the Women in International Security (WIIS) Horn of Africa, and the Borno Women Development Initiative.

### **PARTNERSHIPS**



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## KEY TAKEAWAY MESSAGES

- **African women are key pillars of resilience and are needed at the heart of action to advance sustainable peace and development, and climate adaptation.** African women should be at the forefront of climate change responses, not only because of their particular vulnerability to the implications of climate change but also given the breadth of roles they play within their households and communities towards climate change adaptation and mitigation. In addition to the pre-existing gender inequalities, climate change is another challenge aggravating women’s vulnerabilities due to its detrimental impact on livelihoods, access to natural resources, and displacement.
- **It is crucial to avoid reinforcing the victimhood narrative of women that overshadows the vital roles they play towards forging sustainable peace and development.** The full extent of women’s contributions in response to the different peace and security threats is usually poorly captured in mainstream narratives that instead tend to promote a reductionist perception of women as “victims only” in conflict-affected settings. Women’s contributions cut across all cycles of peacebuilding: (i) they form a constituency for peace with their advocacy and active engagement within the community as peacekeepers and mediators; and (ii) they have particularly effective influence as community and religious leaders at the center of extremism and terrorism prevention. Furthermore, women build community resilience through their roles as caregivers, educators, and participants in the development process.<sup>1</sup>
- **Institutionalizing gender needs as well as climate sensitivity —by situating them at the heart of peace and security efforts—is critical to avoid a siloed approach to sustainable peace and development in Africa.** The mutually reinforcing relationship between advancing the WPS agenda and consolidating peace and development gains is often overlooked, which sets them up as two separate, often competing, priorities. In addition, a dissonance between the WPS community and climate community has been noted. Recognizing the transformative potential of women and effectively leveraging their positive roles in peace and security endeavors, in light of the WPS agenda and the interconnected risks, is key for breaking silos and devising comprehensive solutions to the ever-evolving peace and security challenges.

<sup>1</sup> The Role of Women in Peacebuilding | The Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights - <https://genderandsecurity.org/projects-resources/research/role-women-peacebuilding>

- Realizing the full potential of women’s transformative roles in consolidating peacebuilding and development gains is hindered due to funding challenges faced by women peacebuilders in conflict-affected settings.** Despite the major contributions of women peacebuilders to building and sustaining peace in their communities, their access to predictable and sustained financing remains inadequate. The current security landscape is causing a shift in funding priorities with an overall reduction in the cumulative amount of funding dedicated to peacebuilding in general and to women peacebuilders specifically. Only 0.2 percent of total bilateral aid directed to fragile countries benefited women peacebuilders, with this percentage remaining stagnant for decades. Furthermore, the tendency of donors to tie funding with quantified evidence of impact following traditional monitoring and evaluation frameworks, disqualifies women peacebuilders due to the nature of their activities.<sup>2</sup>
- There is a need to amplify the voices of women’s organizations at the local level to meaningfully integrate women at the grassroots level in decision-making processes.** Although women are well-positioned to identify the peacebuilding needs of their communities, and the possible mitigation strategies to risks of climate change, programming and policymaking are not all built around meaningful participation--whereby the skills and expertise of women peacebuilders do not usually influence donors financing plans and strategies. Limited representation and exclusion of local women in advisory or funding boards also restricts their capacity to influence decisions.
- Building effective and inclusive institutions is key to promoting peace and sustainable development.** Efforts geared towards capitalizing on the role of institutions in consolidating peace and security, and the importance of forging gender-responsive institutions in the face of emerging risks, remain insufficient. In post-conflict settings, “rebuilding better” necessitates reforming institutions with the view of enhancing inclusivity mechanisms by strengthening institutional capacities to respond to the differentiated needs of all segments of the society. Towards this end, gender-mainstreaming serves as an indispensable tool for institutional reform, not only when it comes to ensuring that institutions deliver to all their constituency but also in terms of leveraging women’s knowledge, expertise, and capacities in building resilient institutions. Accountability, capacity building, coherence, clear long-term planning, and gender-responsive budgeting are key factors that enable strong and resilient institutions.

<sup>2</sup> Investing in Equity: Creating Equitable Funding for Local Women Peacebuilders - Niger | ReliefWeb - <https://reliefweb.int/report/niger/investing-equity-creating-equitable-funding-local-women-peacebuilders>



Photo: Albert Gonzalez Farran / UNAMID

## Introduction

The African continent continues to grapple with armed conflict, with 15 out of the 34 active conflicts in the world concentrated in Africa.<sup>3</sup> The continent is also experiencing a range of cascading risks--varying from the rise in terrorist threats to the negative socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the serious implications of climate change--all of which have disproportionate impacts on women and girls. In 2021, 48 percent of all global terrorism-related deaths occurred in the Sahel. Women's roles in this regard--as agents of strengthening community resilience--are essential to advancing preventative approaches to extremism.<sup>4</sup> In the Sahel region for example, women are actively engaged in preventing and combatting radicalization and extremism leading to terrorism, where women-led organizations constitute key pillars of resilience to Boko Haram.

3 Alert! Report on Conflicts, Human Rights and Peacebuilding – Escola de Cultura de Pau - <https://escolapau.uab.cat/en/publications/alert-report-on-conflicts-human-rights-and-peacebuilding-2/>

4 Global Terrorism Index 2022 - World | ReliefWeb - <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/global-terrorism-index-2022>

The intertwining of such protracted challenges with the implications of climate change is aggravating many of Africa's vulnerabilities, driving up food insecurity and climate-related forced displacement.<sup>5</sup> In the backdrop of such compounded risks, African women remain at the forefront of building community resilience, carving paths for climate change mitigation, strengthening coping mechanisms, and minimizing the impacts of shocks.<sup>6</sup> Local women organizations in the Sahara and the Sahel regions are also the cornerstone of efforts aimed at improving environmental integrity and mitigating the impacts of climate change.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, despite the major contributions of African women to their communities' peace and development, the full potential of African women and girls is yet to be realized.

5 State of the Climate in Africa 2020 - World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and World Meteorological Organization (WMO) (WMO-No. 1275), WMO (Geneva: WMO, 2021). - [https://library.wmo.int/index.php?lvl=notice\\_display&id=21973#.Yqn31HZBw2w](https://library.wmo.int/index.php?lvl=notice_display&id=21973#.Yqn31HZBw2w)

6 Empowering Young Women to Stand up for Conflict Resilience - ISS Africa, May 7, 2018 - <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/empowering-young-women-to-stand-up-for-conflict-resilience>

7 Environment of Peace: Security in a New Era of Risk- Karolina Eklöv et al., (SIPRI, May 2022) - <https://sipri.org/publications/2022/other-publications/environment-peace-security-new-era-risk>

## Women's Role in Building Community Resilience in a Landscape of Cascading Risks

The positive role of African women in peace and development interventions continues to be underleveraged due to a range of challenges mainly driven by gender stereotypes that impede women's active and meaningful participation. Cultural and social norms continue to limit women's ability to contribute to responses aimed at tackling different security risks. In some contexts, gender stereotypes undermine women's roles as influencers and decision-makers, reinforcing the perception that issues of peace and security are an "all-male terrain", which results in the under-recognition of women's contributions to peacebuilding efforts. Existing inequalities and gender gaps fuel women's persistent vulnerabilities in fragile settings vis-à-vis peace and security risks, which also diminish resilience capacities. In this regard, climate-related risks affect women disproportionately given their overrepresentation in traditional agricultural sectors, and informal jobs--with minimal land ownership and decision-making power, thus compromising their ability to effectively adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change. Overall, women's resilience capacities are limited due to their dependency on sectors that are highly vulnerable to disruption by climate disasters and therefore directly exposes their livelihoods to risk.

In addition, digital inequalities have been noted among the barriers limiting women's ability to harness information and communication technologies (ICT) in strengthening their peacebuilding advocacy. ICTs enable cross-border and intergenerational exchange among women's networks and help build international solidarity. Additionally, ICTs are crucial tools for women to raise, access, and manage funds through the use of crowdfunding platforms where online visibility enables women peacebuilders to seek financing opportunities. Accordingly, limited connectivity and capacity gaps in this sense are

challenges hindering African women's ability to capitalize on ICTs to advance their efforts in the face of peace and security risks.

Despite the specificities of each context, many women peacebuilders around the world face similar challenges--which highlights the importance of experience-sharing platforms that showcase best practices and lessons learned in overcoming the challenges facing women peacebuilders. More efforts should be exerted to create cross-continental spaces for connection and experience-sharing between women's organizations around the world. This limited exchange of experiences usually results in reinventing the wheel where African women peacebuilders unnecessarily exhaust time and resources on trial-and-error instead of directly resorting to tried-and-tested means in relation to effective resilience techniques and responses.

Another key challenge disrupting women's meaningful engagement in facing the different peace and security threats, is the silo between peacebuilding finance and women's organizations, which serves as a barrier to enabling the potential of women in responding to Africa's cascading risks. In light of the changing national priorities worldwide, international organizations and donor agencies have limited their long-term funding schemes and are instead working on short-term and ad-hoc projects, thus limiting women's access to predictable and sustainable financing. Additionally, structural barriers such as output-driven financing models and exclusionary eligibility criteria make it harder for local women peacebuilders to apply for funds. Furthermore, funding mechanisms usually follow daunting bureaucratic procedures that end up sidelining local women's organizations in need of funding right from the application process--even more so now as competition between local networks is growing while at the same time resources are scarce. In fact, financing partnerships between the donor community and local women organizations are not usually built on a true partnership where both parties are equally able to influence financing decisions. Accordingly, this reduces work with local



women organizations to an afterthought rather than a serious effort to capitalize on their expertise and indispensable local knowledge.

Despite all these challenges, women peacebuilders in Africa are actively engaged in building their communities' resilience to a range of cascading security risks. In particular, contexts highly vulnerable to the threat of terrorism, such as the Sahel region, serve as an example of engaging women as positive actors in tackling drivers of extremism and counter radicalization. Women's spheres of influence as mothers, wives and sisters in such contexts allows them to play a pivotal role in the prevention of extremism and terrorism. Moreover, women's positions as traditional leaders in many African contexts enable them to leverage their influential capacity to advance preventative and countering approaches to extremism and radicalism leading to terrorism through promoting alternative narratives that debunk extremist ideologies. In northeast Nigeria, women are at the heart of efforts aimed at countering Boko Haram through their meaningful participation in the civilian resistance to the insurgency, in addition to their role within the formal security responses. In Borno State, women are frontline fighters in the Civilian Joint Taskforce countering Boko Haram's violence. This sheds light on the broad spectrum of roles played by African women in combatting terrorism, including through community bottom-up approaches, and formal security responses.

Climate change is another key threat that African women are actively involved in addressing—using their unique traditional knowledge and innovative approaches to mitigate and adapt to its impacts. In their capacity as the primary users of energy equipment, African women are boosting Africa's low-carbon transition by migrating to energy-based technologies in meeting their household's day-to-day needs. African women are also the cornerstone of ecosystem restoration projects such as the African-led Great Green Wall initiative, taking root in Africa's Sahel region, at the southern edge of the Sahara Desert, which seeks to put a halt to environmental

degradation. Additionally, in many sub-Saharan countries, women are building resilience to present and future crises arising from the detrimental impacts of climate change by promoting kitchen gardens and climate-friendly farming strategies. Mindful of such contributions, a number of national machineries of disaster risk management in African countries, including Niger and Mali, integrate a gender lens in responding to climate-induced disasters.

## **Towards Resilient African Institutions: Advancing Gender-Sensitive Approaches**

The primary responsibility to tackle Africa's cascading risks lies with national institutions; however, the ability of African institutions to deliver on such a mandate and cope with the wide range of risks and challenges is limited due to either resource or capacity gaps. In order to remain steadfast in the face of the ever-evolving peace and security risks, African institutions should effectively leverage the positive roles of women to uphold inclusivity, and enhance accountability and service delivery. Breaking the silos between community needs and institutional responses is in fact a key recipe for success towards adequate service provision, and resilience to risks and shocks. Therefore, reforms aimed at strengthening institutional capacity should focus on capturing the differentiated needs of men and women in conflict and post-conflict situations to effectively deliver to the different segments of society.

Moreover, national institutions need to make the most out of women's potential as decision makers and strategic pillars of resilience, without limiting their involvement in what are typically characterized as "women's issues" or gender issues. In practice, such generalizations lead to undermining women's knowledge of their communities, and their needs. Within the same context, the differentiated needs of women and men continue to be neglected in institutional responses to security challenges, which results in gender-blind policies and plans, thus compromising institutional resilience to such

challenges.

Institutional reforms should stem from gender-sensitive conflict and risk analyses as well as tried-and-tested gender-sensitive standard operating procedures that act as a guiding framework, with the aim of systematically integrating women's needs in risk analyses, and mitigation and adaptation strategies. Towards this end, systematic gender mainstreaming that aims at boosting inclusivity is key, especially during post-conflict reconstruction and development. In these settings, gender-sensitive conflict analyses help institutions address the root causes of conflict and people's needs, which also boosts institutional preparedness and resilience. Additionally, the systematic integration of both men and women's perspectives and needs at the institutional level requires long-term planning along with regular monitoring. In this regard, Rwanda is one of Africa's good practices with the establishment of its Gender Monitoring Office - tasked with enhancing gender accountability through monitoring the respect and compliance of gender-related commitments across public, private, and non-governmental institutions. Adopting a gender-responsive approach does not only entail appointing gender experts within the institution, but it also includes efforts to strengthen gender expertise among employees to enable them to account and plan for the needs of both men and women in their respective work areas. Adopting gender-sensitive strategies and gender-responsive budgeting remain key good practices in institutional reforms towards inclusive institutions. Given the interconnected character of the different risks facing the African continent, applying a gender-responsive approach is critical for resilience-building where understanding the differentiated experiences and perspectives remain key for effective engagement and disaster management.

The siloed approach in addressing Africa's compounded security risks and threats is increasingly felt at the working level. For example, gender-sensitive climate adaptation efforts in Africa are seriously hindered due to the dissonance between women's organizations and advocates of climate action, despite the increasing awareness of the need to address climate change through an inclusive lens. Similarly, organizations working on peacebuilding struggle to systematically account for the different exacerbating factors of conflict such as climate change in their peacebuilding efforts. Adopting gender and climate-sensitive approaches to peacebuilding efforts are therefore key towards integrated responses to Africa's interconnected risks. Towards this end, building African capacities vis-à-vis gender-sensitive disaster and climate risk management is pivotal for accelerating adaptation towards a peaceful and climate-resilient Africa.





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