

The WPS Agenda in the African Union Peace and Security Council: contributions, challenges and opportunities

A Agenda MPS no Conselho de Paz e Segurança da União Africana: contribuições, desafios e oportunidades

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Abstract

This paper analyses the initiatives related to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda of the African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC) since 2000, when the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 was launched. It seeks to answer the following question: How does the PSC conception of the WPS Agenda differ from the UNSC perspective, and how is this approach observed in PSC initiatives? The hypothesis is that the PSC's approach is rooted in a human security concept, implementing the WPS Agenda holistically by linking women's security with development. The research methodology consists of a documental analysis and is based on a qualitative approach, supported by a feminist literature review through Global South perspectives. The main documents analysed were resolutions, meeting minutes and official PSC reports, and the Continental Framework Results. The main results express that, although the WPS Agenda has experienced great progress at the normative level, there is still a gap between the concept adopted and the practical actions undertaken, given the lack of coordination with States and regional organisations, the absence of adequate funding and the insufficient initiatives associating security and social-economic development.

Keywords: WPS Agenda; Peace and Security Council; United Nations; African Union.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa as iniciativas relacionadas à Agenda de Mulheres, Paz e Segurança do Conselho de Paz e Segurança (CPS) da União Africana desde 2000, ano de lançamento da Resolução 1325 do Conselho de Segurança das Nações Unidas. Pretende-se responder à questão: como a concepção da Agenda MPS pelo CPS difere da perspectiva do CSNU, e como essa abordagem é tratada nas iniciativas do CPS? A hipótese é que a abordagem do CPS baseia-se no conceito de segurança humana, sendo a Agenda MPS implementada de forma holística ao vincular a segurança das mulheres ao desenvolvimento. A metodologia de pesquisa baseia-se em uma análise documental, conduzida a partir de uma abordagem qualitativa e apoiada na revisão da literatura feminista sob a ótica do Sul Global. Os principais documentos analisados foram resoluções, atas de reuniões e relatórios oficiais do CPS, além do Continental Results Framework. Os principais resultados indicam que, embora a Agenda de MPS tenha experimentado grandes avanços no nível normativo, ainda existe uma lacuna entre o conceito adotado e as ações práticas realizadas, dada a falta de coordenação com os Estados e organizações regionais, a ausência de financiamento adequado e as iniciativas insuficientes que associam segurança ao desenvolvimento socioeconômico.

Palavras-chave: Agenda WPS; Conselho de Paz e Segurança; Nações Unidas; União Africana.

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Introduction

This paper aims to analyse the gender initiatives of the African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC) within the framework of the “Women, Peace and Security” (WPS) Agenda. One of the main milestones of the Agenda was the launch of Resolution 1325 by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). According to the current UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, women should be at the centre of decision-making peace processes, such as in Peace Operations, given their contribution to an inclusive and gender-sensitive peace (UN, 2019). However, although it is recognised that the active participation of women contributes to the consolidation of peace in conflict-affected countries, many challenges still remain regarding concrete initiatives. The fact that only 6,000 of the 70,000 “blue helmets” (including military and police officers) in service are women elucidates this difficulty (UN, 2023).

The African continent, in particular, occupies a pivotal role in these discussions. Africa hosted half of the twelve UN peace operations active in 2023, and has led much of the international progress in implementing Resolution 1325. This can be seen in the growing number of women taking part in these operations (more than half of the female contingent is made up of nationals from African countries), in addition to the fact that some African countries (such as Ghana) are among the largest contributors in the world. Moreover, the number of women in leadership positions has increased, as can be seen in the Western Sahara peace operation (AU, 2020; UN, 2023). The African Union (AU), in particular, has taken the position of coordinating national, sub-regional and continental efforts around the implementation of the WPS Agenda, adopting several initiatives and programmes towards gender parity (AU, 2018).

Within the AU, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) has taken a central position. Created in 2004, this body is primarily responsible for guaranteeing peace and stability on the African continent, acting to prevent, manage and settle regional conflicts (Engel; Gomes, 2016). For these functions to be fully addressed, the inclusion of gender perspectives in African agendas have been considered essential. In effect, reports of sexual abuse and the relative absence of women in peace agreement delegations are some of the features that undermine a lasting solution to local conflicts (Kezie-Nwoha, 2020).

Aware of this situation, the PSC has devoted a wider attention to the WPS Agenda in its deliberations. At its 223rd meeting in 2010, the body recognised that women are among the major victims of armed conflicts, especially due to sexual violence. It has therefore committed to employing greater efforts to protect and guarantee the equal participation of women in national and regional decision-making bodies and in peace negotiations, which is a central condition for effective post-conflict reconstruction that includes gender policies (AU, 2010). In this sense, based on four pillars of action (protection, participation, prevention and reconstruction), the PSC has been working to ensure greater attention to the situation of women in matters related to peace and security in Africa.

The Resolution 1325 is a relevant starting point for thinking not only about feminist theoretical frameworks in IR, but also about feminist practice in international security in the Global South. In this context, feminist theories start by criticising the structural creation of the field of studies and the hegemonic visions of it. From the point of view of security, feminism is mainly concerned with two issues: the work carried out by women in war and peace processes (as decision-makers, leaders of social movements and the military) and, from a Global South perspective, the disproportionate violence that affects women and the issues around labour, development and social inclusion (OLONISAKIN; HENDRICKS, 2013).

In this context, this paper aims to answer the question: How does the PSC conception of the WPS Agenda differ from the UNSC perspective, and how can this approach be observed in PSC initiatives? The hypothesis is that the PSC’s approach is based on a different framework of security from that prevailing in the UNSC, given that the PSC considers the notion of human security to be better suited for the African regional reality, in which intra-state conflicts predominate and whose origins are not only military, but also economic and social. Thus, as the main AU body responsible for peace

and security, it has operated efforts to implement the four pillars of the Agenda from a holistic and integrated perspective associating security and development, even if these measures have not been fully implemented. In this sense, the proposal to integrate gender perspectives into all AU bodies is a cross-cutting idea, which covers more than one pillar, and also requires the collaboration of the other organs of the Organisation, the Regional Economic Communities and States.

Concerning methodology, this research takes a qualitative approach, based on a literature review and documentary analysis. Initially, it analyses the guiding documents of the WPS Agenda within the UNSC, especially Resolution 1325. Then, it examines the PSC's initiatives aimed at achieving the WPS Agenda at the African practical level. This was done based on reports, minutes of meetings (such as meetings 223 and 269), resolutions, declarations and initiatives adopted by the PSC on the regard of WPS Agenda – for instance, the Continental Framework Results, an initiative developed by the body to verify progress in the implementation of the WPS Agenda in both the AU and the African states. Finally, an examination is carried out to verify the success potentially achieved, as well as the failures in their implementation.

Regarding theoretical perspectives, this work engages with the Feminist International Relations Theories as a critical instrument for analysing the collected data from PSC. In general, feminists take critical ideas in order to understand the global dynamic, specifically the way in which the international system was created (centred on men and masculinity, mainly) and the theories that have tried to explain it (TICKNER, 2001). Power relations between men and women - gender - are understood as a category of analysis. In particular, a feminist approach to the Global South makes it possible to understand the structural causes of the challenges faced by women in intrastate conflict scenarios, suggesting an analysis that considers not only the strictly military dimension of these disputes, but also the underlying economic and social aspects (ONYIDO, 2013), linked to colonial ties, structural violence and international marginalisation (PARASHAR, 2018). In doing so, this paper engages with a critical analysis of the documents examined, indicating the elements of weaknesses that hinder a deepened implementation of them.

This subject is relevant taking into account the need to understand how the PSC has included the WPS agenda in its scope of action from a Global South approach. In this way, it seeks to investigate how the body works on the issue, whether it makes relevant contributions and how it differs in perspective or practice from the UNSC, considering the PSC not as a “receptor of norms” (PARASHAR, 2018), but an active player. In addition, the research investigates key aspects for greater inclusion and protection of women in the security agenda, contributing, albeit indirectly, to the discussion of public and international policies in this regard. In addition, considering the literature review, one of the main issues highlighted is the lack of a gender perspective connected to the challenges and problems of peacekeeping mandates in Africa.

The reason for choosing the PSC, in particular, is the need to understand how the AU's main authority on peace and security works on the issue, in view of its relevance as an agenda-setter that may influence the behaviour of states, while recognising the particularities of each country and region. Although authors understand the need to advance women's rights in conflict and post-conflict situations, as well as the disproportionate violence suffered by women, gender is rarely used as a category to understand the efficacy of the PSC and its operations in a broader sense. Moreover, while some research has been developed on the WPS Agenda worldwide, almost none of it has focused on the role played by the African Union as an important actor on the African continent, especially one that adopts a critical feminist perspective from the Global South.

The paper is structured in three sections. The first analyses feminist Global South perspectives on International Relations and how the WPS Agenda can be understood through this theoretical approach. The second discusses the inclusion of this Agenda in the PSC, analysing how this body has considered this issue. Finally, the initiatives adopted by

the organ are examined, assessing the progress made in designing a gender-based agenda as well as the challenges that still hinder its implementation in practice.

Feminist debates and launch of Resolution 1325

The idea behind the IR Feminist Framework is based on the social constructions of gender relations that “define” the roles of men and women (TICKNER, 2001), and on the effects of war and other international dynamics on the lives of women and vulnerable groups. Thus, in situations of armed conflict, there is an increase in the probabilities in occurrence of so-called “gender-based violence” (GBV) or “sexual and gender-based violence” (SGBV) (UN, 2024). Gender-based violence was a concept created by the United Nations to elucidate concepts such as sexual abuse and violence, compulsory pregnancy, slave sex work, female genital mutilation, among others (DRUMOND, 2016).

However, in the case of the Global South, these relations are complex, as gender is one of many forms of domination (PARASHAR, 2017). It is therefore necessary to engage in a dialogue with non-Eurocentric perspectives, in order to consider the multiple violences experienced by women in the Global South, and to confront, in addition to gender, other structuring power hierarchies, such as racial and colonial domination (GILL; PIRES, 2019). The academic attempt, in this sense, is to expand the feminist agenda by deepening the understanding of its main critical pillars.

In general, feminist perspectives from the Global South tend to recognise not only the issue of women’s lack of participation in spaces of power (as feminism from the Global North and liberal feminism do), but also problems related to development, work, domestic violence and women’s structural living conditions in general. These perspectives are connected to Marxist ideals of class oppression, considering the impacts of capitalist organisation on the lives of women in developing countries (TREJO; GIORGI, 2019). Trejo and Giorgi (2019) point to the invisibility and unpaid character, for example, of domestic work carried out by women beyond their normal labour routine.

For feminist thinking in the Global South, in general, it is not possible to dissociate security from development, understood, in general, as structural political and economic issues. It is therefore necessary to identify gender-related challenges in this context. Issues such as drug trafficking and violence suffered by indigenous women (especially in Latin America), poverty and lack of access to public services and forced displacement disproportionately affect women (GIANNINI *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, Parashar (2018) emphasises the multiple marginalisation and inequalities that women from the Global South face in national and international contexts, which requires an intersectional approach.

In the African continent, the challenge of sexual violence, mass killings of women and the incorporation of children into the armed forces are highlighted. This became evident in the 1990s with the conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia, countries that experienced serious massacres and mass rapes (OLONISAKIN, 2013). This is directly related to the economic dependence of women, as well as to structural challenges in the development process of African countries (OLONISAKIN, 2013). In this way, the issue of security for feminists cannot simply be limited to the adoption of “peace agreements” (ONYIDO, 2013; HUDSON, 2016). Engaging with feminism and international security in these regions imply the formulation of policies that take into account issues of social, economic and political reconstruction, in order to establish mechanisms to combat structural gender power relations and structural violence in a postcolonial scenario (ONYIDO, 2013). Thus, African perspectives include the transformation of masculinities, considering that the cessation of violence in post-conflict reconstruction is not enough without reforms on structural gendered-power relations and country stabilisation (CLARKE, 2013).

In the case of the WPS Agenda, the African Union recognises the existence of challenges in its conceptualisation and prerogatives. For the organisation, one of the main critiques related to the UN Agenda are the limitations of the concept of gender-based violence, as this notion does not cover conflict prevention and its causes in a structural way (AU, 2019b). In addition, theoretical problems related to the pillars of protection and participation are also highlighted, due to

the lack of an approach that encompasses, within the scope of security, economic, social and political inclusion of women (AU, 2019b).

In 2000, the Windhoek Declaration was launched, an important document designed to address the issue of women in the context of peace and security. However, even before the Declaration African countries had already made progress in promoting debates on the role of women in peace and security contexts. In fact, the Union of African Women was created in 1962, which can be seen as one of the first manifestations of this topic both in Africa and at the UN, demonstrating Africa's pioneering and commitment to the debate. The Windhoek Declaration advanced such previous debates by recognising the limitations of former UN Resolutions, criticising the lack of a more comprehensive perspective (UN, 2000b). Thus, it was a significant contribution by Namibia to the beginning of the introduction of the gender agenda both on the continent and in the United Nations.

The UN formal inclusion of the situation of women and SGBV within the UNSC was materialised by the adoption of Resolution 1325 in 2000. Since the birth of the UNSC and the UN itself, the issue of women had not been formally recognised as an axis of attention in peace operations, whose main objectives were ceasefires, maintaining agreements and preventing conflicts, based on a realistic notion of security, centred on States and focused on international conflicts (OLONISAKIN, 2013). The UNSC has always worked from a generalist perspective of both "peacebuilding" and "peacekeeping", approving resolutions to send military personnel to territories in situations of armed conflict. Under this working method, the security and inclusion of women was treated only as a "plus" in the body's scope (OLONISAKIN, 2013).

In this sense, the primary difficulty in making progress on this issue lies in the implementation of actions and policies aimed at addressing the agenda's focal points, which consist of four pillars. The first one is the protection of women and girls; the second, the participation of women in peace processes (especially in military contingents); the third, the prevention of gender-based violence and sexual and gender-based violence (respectively GBV and SGBV) and, finally, the fourth, reconstruction of post-conflict territories through actions focused on this issue (UN, 2000).

The adoption of gender-related guidelines in Peace Operations is a relatively recent phenomenon, considering the so-called "generations" of Peace Operations (KENKEL, 2013). In this context, gender is part of the efforts aimed to rebuild and establish institutions in the Peacebuilding Operations (KENKEL, 2013) in the 1990s and 2000s. During this period, attempts were made to integrate reconstruction actions into the peacemaking process that encompassed other spheres than just the absence of conflict.

The WPS Agenda in the African Union and its Peace and Security Council

The African continent has witnessed a growing number of debates, declarations, programmes and initiatives aimed at setting the WPS Agenda at national and regional levels. An important part of this effort has been led by the AU, the main regional organisation that brings together the 55 African countries and whose foundation in 2000 coincided with the launch of Resolution 1325. In its Constitutive Act there is already a concern for the situation of women, as gender parity is highlighted as one of its founding principles (AU, 2000). In fact, the concern with WPS policies is part of the broader context in which the AU was created. The organisation was the political-institutional expression of the "African Renaissance", an idea aimed at revitalising pan-Africanism and overcoming the political and economic marginalisation experienced in the continent during the 1990s, especially due to the context of civil wars and regional instability (ADEBAJO, 2013). The concept of "African solutions to African problems" became a defining feature of its actions on both regional and international levels, reflecting the desire of African leaders to assert control over their own policies by crafting an endogenous agenda free from external interference (KAWEESI, 2023).

In order to structure its work in the field of regional peace and stability, the AU created the African Peace and Security Architecture (AAPS), whose primary function is to prevent, manage and settle conflicts in Africa, providing a set of rules, mechanisms and frameworks that must coordinate their activities towards its goals (APUULI, 2018). The main decision-making body of the AAPS is the PSC, created in 2004 as a collective security structure aimed at responding effectively to African crises (AU, 2004). Its responsibilities extend to a range of mechanisms, such as preventive diplomacy and the establishment of peace operations (APUULI, 2018). Its efforts are supported by other AAPS institutions, namely the AU Commission, the Panel of the Wise, the Early Warning System, the African Standby Force and a Special Fund.

Within such a structure, the importance of adopting gender perspectives has been recognised by PSC as a condition for an effective solution to security challenges. Indeed, the African security landscape has been strained by numerous violations of women's rights. According to a survey carried out by Afrobarometer,¹ gender-based violence was considered the main concern of the interviewed women, with around 38 per cent of them stating that this is "somewhat common" or "very common" in their communities (AFROBAROMETER, 2023). This problem is deepened in conflict-affected regions, where the practice of sexual violence as a tactic of war is widespread (UN, 2024). Furthermore, there was little female participation in the missions established to mediate peace in countries affected by civil disputes. This lack of representation has often led to the failure of implementing policies that include women in post-conflict scenarios, further complicating efforts to break the cycle of violence (KEZIE-NWOHA, 2020).

Aware of this situation, since the adoption of Resolution 1325, the PSC has endeavoured to keep in line with the parameters established by the UNSC. Part of this effort originates from the broader initiatives developed by the AU to ensure gender parity within its peace and security framework, as set out in Agenda 2063,² which emphasises the central role of women in African development and regional stability. Based on these norms, the PSC has sought to develop a gender policy aimed at increasing female participation in conflict prevention, peace operations and post-conflict reconstruction efforts (AU, 2020).

The adoption of this resolution by the PSC, however, is based on different foundations in relation to the UNSC's concept of security. For feminists from the Global South, the WPS Agenda is highly statist, based on realism and influenced by Western values that disregard the specificities of other regions, particularly in colonial and postcolonial contexts (HENDRICKS, 2017). Parashar (2018), in this sense, cautious against the notion of "best practices" of the WPS Agenda, given that it cannot encompass the complexity that women face on the ground. Thus, one of the key contributions of African feminists is their holistic approach to the WPS Agenda, which prioritises local contexts and focuses on the protection of individuals over the state (LEWIS, 2013). In this way, they emphasise the idea that the simple "absence of conflict" does not solve problems related to development and the inclusion of women, given that gender is just one category of analysis that must be considered together with other notions such as nationalism and social class, for instance (HENDRICKS, 2017).

Such critique is partially shared by the PSC. The body considers that the traditional and dominant security concept in the UNSC, rooted in realism and focused on state survival against interstate threats, presents theoretical limitations when it comes to understanding regional dynamics. In fact, Barkawi and Laffey (2006) highlighted that most of the security studies in the 20th century have taken place in an international context founded on European concepts and dominated by great powers. In contrast, the conflicts that have occurred on the African continent since the 1990s are mostly intra-state and have a multidimensional origin, in which military aspects are combined with social, economic, political and cultural factors (CILLIERS, 2004).

¹ Pan-African, non-governmental research network based in Ghana that seeks to collect data on issues such as democracy, economy and social issues.

² The AU's main strategic document focused on regional development, foreseeing a series of aspirations for the continent, such as gender parity.

Therefore, rather than uncritically absorbing Resolution 1325, the PSC considers a less-centred approach on the state's military dimension more appropriate to African realities. The body, in fact, emphasised the needs of individuals and communities, highlighting the potential threats that emerge not primarily from other states, but from within these entities (TIEKU, 2007). By recognising that African conflicts have multiple causes and actors, the PSC adopts a human security approach, paying special attention to the structural factors that explain these disputes and that increase the vulnerabilities of women.

The approach centred on human security is reflected in the way the PSC has dealt with the question of women in its meetings dedicated to the topic. At its 223rd meeting - the first dedicated to the subject - in 2010, it was recognised that women were one of the most vulnerable groups in situations of armed conflict, and that this situation required both special protection in such contexts and preventive action to address the causes of this vulnerability (AU, 2010). Since then, the PSC has dedicated an annual thematic session to this subject. The subsequent meetings mostly focus on the pillars of women's participation and protection - at its 461rd, 600rd and 862rd meetings, it dealt specifically with sexual violations against women and children in situations of armed conflict, and at its 555rd, 491rd, 476rd and 803rd meetings it addressed the lack of female representation in peace operations and decision-making spaces. All meetings address the issues of violence and participation within the context of deprivation and vulnerability, highlighting the PSC's acknowledgment of the significance of these matters in its positions (AU, 2024).

In dealing with these issues, the PSC emphasises the need to strengthen links between development, peace and security as one of the axes of its gender policy. In this sense, there is a particular concern to address the causes of women's vulnerability, as economic hardship is viewed as a source of violence and insecurity (AU, 2018). Special attention has been employed to improving socio-economic and well-being of communities, in order to foster development measures from a gender perspective, especially in post-conflict situations. Accordingly, the PSC adopts an approach focused not only on achieving negative peace - the mere absence of conflict - but also on promoting positive peace, which involves creating the conditions for inclusive and sustainable development, aimed at preventing the recurrence of violence. In this sense, women must have the means to enjoy their rights and be free from forms of violence, whether physical or structural (AU, 2012). It is particularly true in the 2015 "Silencing the Guns in Africa"³ initiative, in which the AU recognises that development and peace are interdependent dimensions in assuring women protection (AU, 2016).

The institutionalisation of the WPS Agenda in the PSC is particularly important for the region, since the body plays the role of regional agenda-setter, capable of stimulating changes in the behaviour of states so that they comply with the provisions formulated within African institutions (TIEKU, 2021). Indeed, it seeks to strengthen cooperation with African States and Regional Organisations by reinforcing the need for ratifying and incorporating key AU documents on gender, such as the Africa Union's Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), which establishes rights for women in the field of peace and security (AU, 2003; AU, 2013). Moreover, the PSC recommended the appointment of a Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, who would be responsible for coordinating regional activities - the AU appointed a Special Envoy in 2014, which represented an important step in the consolidation of the WPS Agenda within the PSC (AU, 2020).

Gender policies have also been expressed in the field of peace operations. The PSC has emphasised the need to ensure greater attention to the protection of women in countries where such operations are established, as well as enabling greater female participation in civilian, police and military contingents and in command positions. Moreover, the adoption of gender perspectives in post-conflict scenarios is considered an integral condition for achieving inclusive peace and regional stability. In the strategic document "Africa Peace and Security Architecture road map (2016-2020)",

³ AU initiative that seeks to make the continent free from conflicts, genocide and human rights violations, from a perspective of interdependence between peace and development.

gender is taken as a core aspect of peace efforts. The document indicates that women should be involved from the design and operationalisation of these operations to the construction of post-conflict policies and institutions (AU, 2015a). To this end, including them in decision-making bodies and in the delegations in charge of negotiating peace would be fundamental, reflecting the need to pursue gender parity in these spaces (AU, 2010).

Just as the implementation of the WPS Agenda must adopt a holistic approach, it is also essential to reconsider the role of actors involved in both peacebuilding and conflict processes. This ties back to the issue raised by feminists from the Global South regarding the “state-centric” nature of International Relations theories, with particular emphasis on realism. In the case of the African continent, States are often the agents of violence and this is directly linked to colonial legacies and the very dynamics of state-building in the post-colonial period (LEWIS, 2013). Indeed, the consolidation of state institutions was often carried out in a context of recurrent human rights violations, including women’s rights (CLAPHAM, 1996; LEWIS, 2013). This legacy, in turn, highlights the need for actions towards development and the transformation of gender relations within these societies.

Gender Initiatives in the Peace and Security Council: Improvements and Challenges

This section analyses the initiatives launched by the PSC in relation to the WPS Agenda, aiming to identify the progress made and the challenges that the body still faces in the enforcement of gender initiatives. The PSC distinguishes between measures to promote women’s participation, protection and the prevention of gender-based violence. The documents “AU Strategy for Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment” (AU, 2018); “Report on the Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda” (AU, 2020); and “Continental Results Framework” (AU, 2019a) are used as a basis for this study.

Among the initiatives mapped through these reports and documents, twelve projects promoted by the PSC in partnership with other African regional organisations were highlighted. The mapping of the initiatives sought to verify those that specifically fall within the scope of peace and security. There are also initiatives of an integrated character, i.e. those promoted in partnership with the Regional Economic Communities (RECs). The table below shows the projects found in the research, following the four pillars of the WPS Agenda:

Table 1 – Agenda WPS pillars and PSC initiatives

Pillar	Initiatives		
Participation	African Media Monitor	Adoption of Rules 27.5 and 28.g	FemWise-Africa
Protection	Gender training for officers - AMISOM	NAP's (National Action Plans) for training for "trainers"	Towards Quality and Accessible justice for All - Benin.
Prevention	The AUC Continental Early Warning System	Country structural vulnerability and mitigation strategies (CSVMSs) country structural vulnerability and resilience assessments (CSVRA s)	Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) policy
Recovery	16-days of Activism against Gender-based Violence (Central Africa Republic)	Capacity-building workshop - MISAHEL	AU Mission in Burundi: microcredit for SGBV victims.

Source: self-elaboration based on <https://bit.ly/3KIZFi1>.

Considering the table, there is an effort to train officials and blue helmets to protect women from gender-based violence, specifically from sexual abuse - the African Union Mission to Somalia is one of the main cases of training actions (AU, 2020). From the point of view of prevention, there is the creation of data and information production networks, with

the support of initiatives such as the African Media Monitor, as well as the creation of indicators to assess the vulnerability of women in conflicts.

Among these initiatives, the FemWise project stands out as one of the main initiatives to promote the participation of women in peace processes, playing a significant role in the improvement of the WPS Agenda in Africa (AU, 2020). This initiative was established by the AU in 2017, based on the Pan-African Network of the Wise in partnership with UN Women, which sought to create an action plan to combat sexual violence against women and children in armed conflict scenarios (AU, 2015). The PSC supported and led the project.

In addition, FemWise-Africa worked to create conflict prevention and mediation initiatives within this network of women (AU, 2020). Therefore, the project aimed to act as a channel of participation for women in all spheres of the peace process, as diplomats, members of civil society or the military. Among its main priorities are the professionalisation of women for peacemaking, the increase in the number of women in peace processes and the study of women's participations (AU, 2015). Between 2018 and 2020, the project trained around 100 women a year to work in peacemaking processes (AU, 2015). In this sense, eight States⁴ contributed to national group works to develop actions during the same period (AU, 2015). In 2019, FemWise was able to send one member to South Sudan and two members to Sudan to support the peace processes conducted by the AU (AU, 2020).

Regarding integrated actions, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has developed the Gender Development Centre, within the Organisation's conflict prevention framework. In 2019, ten of the member states developed National Actions Plans (NAPs) to implement the WPS Agenda: Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Niger, Nigeria, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. ECOWAS Action Plans relied mainly on workshops to implement the Agenda, in order to propose actions towards women's economic empowerment based on the pillars of the Lomé Declaration of 2018.⁵

Despite these improvements, the PSC still faces challenges in fully implementing the WPS Agenda, such as insufficient coordination with the RECs and States and the lack of adequate funding. The PSC guidelines ultimately depend on the willingness of States and RECs to carry them out. The RECs are recognised by the PSC Protocol as an integral part of the AAPS, and their cooperation is crucial to achieve regional stability. Although a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the AU and the RECs in 2008, some difficulties remain, namely the relative lack of clarity regarding the limits of each institution's mandates with regard to peace and security (ENGEL; GOMES, 2016). This is reflected in the WPS Agenda, where there is an overlap of efforts and a lack of coordination both between the AU e the RECs and between these organisations and Member States (AU, 2024).

States also play a fundamental role in ensuring the realisation of the PSC's provisions. This is most evident in the participation pillar, especially in the inclusion of women in peace operations, since the decision to send female contingents ultimately rests with government authorities. However, Hudson (2016) emphasises that States often violate women's rights, which makes it even more difficult to achieve greater female participation in strongly patriarchal societies. Thus, as several of these countries have not yet achieved gender parity at national level, the scope of regional quotas is likely to remain limited (BOKERIYA; KIAMBA, 2023). In addition, many women trained under FemWise-Africa are not even sent to conflict scenarios (BOKERIYA; KIAMBA, 2023).

Confronted with this reality, the PSC has called on States and RECs to implement national and regional plans aimed at achieving Resolution 1325. Currently, 32 African states⁶ have adopted NAPs and four RECs⁷ have adopted

⁴ Burundi; Central African Republic; Democratic Republic of the Congo; Rwanda; South Sudan; Sudan; Uganda and Tanzania.

⁵ Declaration on Peace, Security, Stability and the Fight against Terrorism and Violent Extremism. The idea of the workshop was to integrate the economic empowerment of communities with the issue of security.

⁶ Angola, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte D'Ivoire, Djibouti, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, South Sudan, Togo and Uganda.

⁷ ECOWAS, Southern African Development Community, Great Lakes Region e ECCAS.

Regional Plans, making Africa the continent with the largest number of these kind of plans in the world (AU, 2020; PEACE WOMEN, 2024). Nevertheless, there are still challenges in verifying their functionality, particularly due to the lack of data provided by States and RECs and the absence of monitoring instruments (AU, 2024). To solve this, the PSC envisaged the development of a continental monitoring tool. As a result, the Continental Results Framework (CRF) was created in 2018, a mechanism that provides 41 indicators (28 for States and 13 for the AU) of implementation of the four pillars of Resolution 1325. In addition, the AU's appointment of a Special Envoy for WPS, in 2014, helped to promote coordination with other African actors (AMANI AFRICA, 2020).

Even when these provisions are effectively adopted, it is difficult to translate them into local reality. In the context of peace operations, the inability to pay greater attention to local particularities and to include the interests of the women have limited the implementation of these plans, a factor that is often linked to higher failure rates in these operations (KUMALO, 2022). The PSC has recognised that the 30% quota for women's participation in peace processes has not yet been achieved (AU, 2024). Although the AU had made efforts to foster women's participation in the peacekeeping operations in countries such as Burundi, Sudan, Somalia and Mali, the female contingent has never been expressive (Olaitan, 2023). In such environments, violence perpetrated by the personnel of these operations has raised considerable concern. Given that, the PSC has acted both to punish the perpetrators and to include gender efforts in the training of troops (AMANI AFRICA, 2020).

Regarding the protection pillar, the number of women who suffer gender-based violence remains high, as occurred in South Sudan, even after a peace agreement was signed in 2018 (KEZIE-NWOHA, 2020). The CRF itself also has limitations, such as the lack of standardised indicators (which leads to different interpretations by States) and the absence of guidelines for the RECs (AU, 2020). The report presented by ECOWAS, for example, is not fully based on the strategies defined by the PSC and also demonstrates lack of coordination with the NAPs of its members, resulting in a loss of synergy (AU, 2020). For Hudson (2016), one of the reasons for the inefficiency of similar instruments is their top-down design, with little involvement of local women.

There is also the absence of regular and adequate funding for the PSC. An AU report indicates that only about 0.25 percent of the AU Commission's budget is allocated to the WPS Agenda, and even this small amount is not properly distributed for each pillar (AU, 2020). The AAPS Peace Fund also does not indicate specific allocations (AU, 2020). At the level of the States and RECs, despite the fact that each national and regional plan provides for its own funding mechanisms, what is observed is the exclusion of these measures in their budgets (AU, 2020). This is done in spite of what establishes the reconstruction pillar, which demands a specific budget allocation for the adoption of gender measures in the post-conflict phase (AU, 2019a).

As a result, the AU as a whole is forced to rely on foreign aid. According to a study produced by the president of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, more than 90 per cent of the AU's financial needs are provided by external donations (KAGAME, 2017). This, however, raises questions about its economic dependence and the imposition of extra-regional agenda on regional interests (Kaweesi, 2023). In this respect, even cooperation with the UN, and particularly with the UNSC, has been characterised by insufficient funding for PSC activities, especially concerning peace operations (Williams, 2014). The lack of resources is related to the staffing limitations of the body, which has a small number of officials for a growing demand (ENGEL; GOMES, 2016). Therefore, the absence of a regular funding mechanism poses a significant challenge to the realisation of the strategies established by the PSC, hindering progress in advancing the WPS Agenda.

What can be observed from this scenario is that there is a wide gap between the normative initiatives of the PSC and their effective implementation. It must be emphasised that simply adopting a human security perspective does not guarantee effective protection for women, given that even this concept can be considered and put in practice without taking gender policies into account. It is in this sense that authors such as Lewis (2013) advocate a feminist analysis of the

notion of human security. In fact, Global South lenses on feminism offer mechanisms for investigating the functionality and effectiveness of the initiatives of the WPS Agenda, especially by highlighting the perspective of human security through a feminist prism, criticising traditional security and questioning the “Western” Feminist Agenda (LEWIS, 2013).

Moreover, Lewis (2013) emphasises that drawing up policies without the involvement of the local population tends to produce unsatisfactory results. In peacekeeping operations, the lack of full participation of local women has proved counterproductive, as their effectiveness is weakened by the failure to take into account the interests of those directly affected (OLAITAN, 2023). Onyido (2013) shares this overview and highlights the risk of homogenising women and of failing to recognise that even among women the impacts of conflicts vary according to social class and the social context in which each one is inserted. Parashar (2018) went further in its critique by considering the adoption of NAP’s by States an endorsement of the exclusive statist perspective of the WPS Agenda formulated by the UNSC.

Thus, even though the PSC adopts a broader perception on the protection of women, there are practical limitations to unifying all dimensions of the WPS Agenda. Only a few initiatives of the body address issues of socio-economic inclusion linked to post-conflict reconstruction, and there is no systematic reference to translate them into practice (AMANI AFRICA, 2020). With regard to development, there are no specific initiatives on this issue in the meetings nor references to the reconstruction of territories and the integration of women in these processes. Similarly, another practical problem is the absence of suggestions on how to implement the measures proposed in the PSC’s meetings, without specific proposals connecting regional or national development policies. For authors such as Hudson (2016) and Hendricks (2017), this lack of concrete measures underscores the difficulty of promoting structural changes in gender relations.

Therefore, one of the main fragilities of the PSC approach is that its initiatives are fundamentally fragmented and limited in scope, lacking a systematic strategy that effectively improves the situation of women in contexts of armed conflict (HENDRICKS, 2017). The heavy reliance of the AU on international donations hampers the development and implementation of a sustainable long-term strategy. Furthermore, its ability to encourage nation states to adopt and to materialise NAPs has proven insufficient, given the slow progress that has been made in recent years. For Onyido (2013), a fragmented approach of the WPS Agenda is incapable of promoting a structural change in the situation of women, which denotes a difficulty that the PSC still faces in this direction.

Final remarks

The debate on gender in international relations reveals how the dynamics of international security have been established and operated. The impact of armed conflicts on women, especially those coming from the “periphery” of the system, as well as the masculinisation of decision-making spaces, indicate the need to think about the inclusion of a feminist perspective on International Relations, especially in Peace Operations. Therefore, there is a need to understand women as subjects and agents of International Politics, that is, as a constitutive and essential part of actions aimed at preventing armed conflicts and building peace. This work has discussed the PSC’s approach to the WPS Agenda, based on a feminist point of view, with the aim of exploring the differences in perspective between the adoption and implementation by this body and that of the UNSC, and how this understanding is reflected in the initiatives of the PSC.

The primary distinction lies in the emphasis on human security and development as essential elements for achieving more effective outcomes in addressing gender-based violence and preventing conflicts. From an African perspective, concepts such as “gender-based violence” and gender power dynamics cannot be separated from the structural foundations of African societies and their peacebuilding processes. Thus, it can be argued that the African Agenda not only reproduces the UN agenda but also introduces theoretical and conceptual innovations aimed at dismantling structural power relations.

It is clear that the PSC has effectively incorporated gender perspectives into its work. The body has introduced the WPS Agenda both in its work and in regional discussions involving other African actors, such as States and RECs. The number of meetings, programmes, declarations and initiatives dedicated to the issue has grown, which reinforces the recognition that the inclusion of gender perspectives is considered a fundamental element for the body's work in its efforts to stabilise the African continent and promote inclusive peace in post-conflict scenarios. In this sense, although the PSC's approach adopts a perspective linked to human security and development, the four structuring pillars of Agenda 1325 are followed.

However, there are also limitations from a practical point of view. Much of the body's efforts is reflected at the normative level, while the operational dimension still faces difficulties. Yet again, although the PSC highlights the limitations of the UNSC's conception of security, only two initiatives have successfully promoted measures to prevent violence and integrate women into development. Most of the initiatives focus on the pillar of participation.

The still low participation of women in peace negotiations, the high number of victims of sexual violence in regions affected by civil conflicts and the slow inclusion of gender perspectives in post-conflict strategies demonstrate that. Although mechanisms such as the CRF are considered important advances in verifying the implementation of the WPS Agenda, the difficulties of coordinating with states and RECs and the lack of resources for the PSC and the AU itself limit progress, since the PSC depends on the cooperation of other African actors for its guidelines to materialise. In addition, the absence of endogenous funding highlights a material obstacle to the adoption of the necessary measures. The AU's security budget allocates few resources to integrating gender policies, which increases the difficulty of establishing the initiatives foreseen in the four pillars in an integrated manner.

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