



# OUTCOME STATEMENT

Virtual Dialogue Forum jointly organised by  
OESG, UNDP, UNFPA, UN WOMEN, AU, ICGLR and ACCORD

## Multi-track Approaches to Peacebuilding and the Role of Women and Youth in Addressing Inclusive Political Participation, Peace, Security and Confidence Building in the Great Lakes Region

Friday 28 October 2022

### Introduction

On 28 October 2022, the Office of the United Nations (UN) Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region (O/SRSG-GL), UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN WOMEN), UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), African Union (AU), International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), and African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) jointly convened a webinar forum on **Multi-track approaches to peacebuilding and the role of women and youth in addressing inclusive political participation, peace, security and confidence building in the Great Lakes Region**. The virtual dialogue took place on the eve of the 22<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the landmark UN Security Council resolution (UNSCR) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) 1325 (2000) and for preparation of the Peace Building Commission meeting on the Great Lakes Region, scheduled for 31 October 2022.

The webinar brought together civil society representatives from women and youth-focused organisations, peacebuilding networks, and high-level representatives from the abovementioned partner organisations and Regional Economic Communities (REC's), such as the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). This group of stakeholders sought to understand the current challenges for peace and security in the Great Lakes Region and to identify strategies to increase the meaningful and inclusive participation of women and youth in peace processes that respond to the current context, including how governments need to forge new social contracts to drive innovative ways to resolve conflicts. In doing so, several priority areas were identified to feed into a regional flagship programme for WPS and Youth, Peace and Security (YPS).



**United Nations Strategy for  
Peace Consolidation,  
Conflict Prevention and  
Conflict Resolution  
in the Great Lakes Region**

The opening segment of the webinar featured remarks from Dr Vasu Gounden, Founder and Executive Director of ACCORD, His Excellency Mr Huang Xia, the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General (OESG) for the Great Lakes Region for the UN; His Excellency Ambassador Tété António, Minister of External Relations of the Republic of Angola and ICGLR Chair; Her Excellency Ms Michelle Ndiaye, Special Representative of the Chair of the Commission (SRCC) and Head of African Union Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) Liaison Office; and Dr Rhuks Temitope Ako, Focal Person Youth For Peace (Africa) Programme. In his address, H.E. Huang Xia explained:

“The organisation of a seminar on approaches to peacebuilding and the role of women and youth in inclusive political participation and confidence building in the Great Lakes Region, during this month of October, illustrates the relevance of commitment to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security, and Resolution 2250 (2015) on youth, peace and security and the prominence of this landmark resolution. The commitment of the UN system in the Great Lakes Region is reflected in the UN strategy and its Action Plan with selected priority initiatives for 2022–2023, including those related to capacity building in mediation dialogue, prevention of gender-based or gender-specific violence, resilience to climate change and natural disasters. Civil society, Women and Youth are key to these priorities.”

In further elaborating on the role of women and youth, H.E. Ms Ndiaye highlighted the importance of context-specific responses to peacebuilding and the need to recognise inclusivity in peace processes as the cornerstone of the continental body. Remarks from H.E. António emphasised the importance of a response centred on human rights and reiterated the commitment of the ICGLR to the enhanced role of women and youth on the continent.

The discussion of the implementation of the WPS and YPS agenda took place amid various existing social, security and economic challenges, not only in the Great Lakes Region, but across Africa. While many political systems have become mature and display a large measure of resilience, and democracy entrenched with free and fair elections, negative trends have resurfaced fuelling tension and mistrust. In most instances, women and youth bear the brunt of the negative developments. As explained by Dr Gounden, conflict on the continent is compounded by the challenges related to an increase in the global population and specifically within African countries, including the Great Lakes Region, where most of its citizens are young, and women represent the majority. By way of example, the DRC will join the list of top ten countries with the largest national populations. In addition, many states are still to recover from the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, while grappling with the global challenges presented by the current geo-political dynamics, including, but not limited to, the Ukraine-Russia conflict. It is against this background that there is increasing relevance for a more inclusive approach to conflict resolution that places women and the youth at the centre to ensure their voices are heard.

H.E. Ms. Kapinga Yvette Ngandu, Commissioner on Gender, Human and Social Development, ECCAS, spoke on the priority of building regional structures and mechanisms that would enable systematic implementation of national plans for the WPS and YPS agendas, as already exists at the continental level. While the commitment is strong, the Commissioner identified financing as a capacity and implementation limitation. To additionally reinforce peace mechanisms at all levels in the region, the Commissioner emphasised the importance of building an informed network of women and youth to operationalise the implementation structures in a systematic and sustainable manner.

### **Operationalising the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention, and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region**

Women, youth and children are disproportionately affected by conflict and endure the impact of what transpires thereafter. It is against this backdrop that women and youth must play a more active role in conflict prevention, mediation, peacebuilding, and political processes. Key priorities and actions for UN engagement in the Great Lakes Region, among others, are to support the implementation of the priorities envisioned by the WPS and the YPS agendas.

In outlining approaches to this kind of support and implementation, the *Multi-track Approaches to Peacebuilding and the Role of Women and Youth in Addressing Inclusive Political Participation, Peace, Security and Confidence Building in the Great Lakes Region Webinar* facilitated a space within which to discuss key areas outlined in the UN Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention, and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region.

The webinar was used to spotlight the gains that have been made and reflect on issues that continue to hinder the participation of women and youth. Moreover, it included a conversation on ongoing efforts and necessary deliberations needed to champion meaningful participation in conflict resolution at the grassroots, national, regional, continental, and international levels, respectively.

Upon the request of the UN Secretary-General, the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region has developed a strategy for peace consolidation, conflict prevention, and conflict resolution for the Great Lakes Region. The aim of the proposed strategy is to create synergies and responses to existing frameworks and mechanisms at regional and national levels under existing UN interventions in the region. The UN Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention, and Conflict Resolution (2020–2030) commits to supporting effective and sustainable implementation of UNSCR 1325 (2000), with the intention of promoting inclusive, equitable, just, and resilient societies and institutions. The Strategy seeks to ensure the inclusion of women and youth in key decision-making dialogues by encouraging the region's leaders to foster political spaces for women and the youth. Furthermore, the Strategy seeks to strengthen leadership skills; support the ICGLR Regional Women Forum (RWF); and establish a network of women community leaders and mediators to promote peace and democracy in the region. Additionally, the Strategy intends to support programmes, mechanisms, and existing regional fora, such as the Regional Youth Forum (RYF), to increase and improve the representation of young people in decision-making structures, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding efforts at the national and regional levels.

These strategies and initiatives cannot be implemented without the sustained role of civil society organisations (CSOs) at grassroots and national levels, which work to amplify the contributions of women and young people as agents of change and restoration in the region. As such, the webinar provided a valuable platform to reflect and share ideas and best practices on how to promote the role of women, youth and civil society in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. In addition to this, it provided an opportunity to discuss how to rebrand the region around common values of peace, good neighbourliness, and mutual cooperation which is inclusive of all segments of society.

**OUTCOMES from the webinar on Multi-track approaches to peacebuilding and the role of women and youth in addressing inclusive political participation, peace, security and confidence building in the Great Lakes Region highlighted the following points:**

1. Context-specific approaches are key to ensuring the maximum impact of the intervention. While it is important to reflect on the broader conflict trends in the Great Lakes Region, the various realities on the ground that disproportionately affect women and youth must be carefully considered. Vulnerable groups within the women and youth categories must be further delineated to ensure effective representation, such as persons with disabilities, refugees, and internally displaced persons.
2. The role, participation and decision-making of women and youth in peacebuilding requires a systematic approach at the formulation and implementation levels. Successful examples of action plans, national plans, and national structures for peace exist in some parts of the Great Lakes Region. This should be replicated throughout the entire region.
3. Promote improved synergies between institutional oversight and grassroots activities. For example, limited bureaucracy and increased flexibility will help facilitate improved cooperation between these stakeholders.
4. Facilitate networks and linkages between the YPS and WPS agendas across the region for enhanced collaboration on cross-cutting issues. Inter-generational dialogues have provided successful opportunities for such collaboration.
5. Situate participation and inclusion through higher education and harness the value of women's and youth's 'human capital' to provide economic resources which, in the context of conflict prevention, can contribute to building resilience.
6. Digital spaces are becoming an increasingly accessible and effective means of mobilisation for youth participation.
7. The importance of encouraging discussion among partners and member states on financial support was highlighted as a significant factor in the meaningful participation of women and youth. Specifically, the financing of preventative structures is a key investment that is lacking.
8. The discussion on innovative practices to integrate the WPS and YPS agendas highlighted the following:

- 8.1 Coalition-building by women is an effective strategy to engage in formal peace processes, as seen in the specific cases of the DRC, Uganda, Burundi, and South Sudan. It allowed for the representation of a common agenda. It physically brought women to the 'peace table' but also via a representative. However, this inclusion needs to be visible at the stage when transitional frameworks and agreements are being developed.
- 8.2 At the track two and three levels, there are grassroots mediation networks that provide monitoring and contribute to early-warning systems. This is an important example of well-maintained networks which facilitate information sharing, mediation in both conflict and refugee spaces, promotion of transitional justice, training, and advocacy at the national policy level. The insights based on the work of these networks should directly feed into regional frameworks to reflect the realities on the ground. These networks act as a critical conduit linking the grassroots level with the national level and validate the national women's agenda. This is an important reflection of the role of women in both formal and informal peace processes, which needs to be better documented.
- 8.3 There are increasing examples of young people forming networks and coalitions in the Great Lakes Region, including national youth councils and advocacy groups. The DRC has done well to include collective youth representation through a national coalition of YPS and a national action plan endorsed by the government. Despite the challenges posed by funding and the lack of integration of the YPS agenda in the region, youth networks illustrate the resilience of the youth in responding to issues of peace and security in the region.
- 8.4 The current high-level discussions and renewed advocacy around the WPS and YPS agendas have re-energised civil society participation on issues of peacebuilding in the region. The WPS and YPS agendas are, therefore, well-positioned to build on this momentum through the strengthening of national civil society entities in all ICGLR states. This must include training, improved capacity building, and increased collaboration to work more strategically in furthering the WPS and YPS plans.
- 8.5 The legitimacy and value of local peace actors need to be better appreciated. The YPS and WPS agendas must be firmly rooted in the promotion of educational programmes and conflict prevention in addition to responses to ongoing conflict. The recent Kenyan election period saw women organising peace committees at the grassroots level and provides a powerful example of innovative conflict prevention.
- 8.6 The cases of the First and Second Congo War illustrate the central role of women and civil society in advocating for peace outside of the state and tapping into informal networks of support. There is thus a need to consolidate and strengthen networks and create permanent structures for dialogue and more sustained engagement on threats to peace. This engagement must include state leadership and decision-makers.
- 8.7 The meaningful participation of women and youth in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and reconstruction are rooted in global and regional frameworks, including those of the ICGLR. The role of the ICGLR in actively supporting the implementation of and accountability to its frameworks was underscored. Accountability should include a special emphasis on the protection of women and youths from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).
- 8.8 In formulating strategies to promote the uptake of the YPS and WPS agendas, it is essential to develop practical recommendations which consider how to deconstruct stereotypical and destructive perceptions of the roles of women and the youth in society.

