Policy Brief:
Digital inclusion in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Africa

11 JULY 2022

"An inclusive process builds confidence among participating parties that their core objectives can be achieved through negotiation rather than violence. It is also more likely to address the root causes of conflict and increases the legitimacy and ownership of a political settlement."

Peacebuilding in the aftermath of conflict: UN Secretary-General's Report, 2012

UNOAU
United Nations Office to the African Union

Sweden
Sverige

Contents

Executive Summary

This policy brief explores the opportunities and challenges for digital inclusion in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (WPS) in Africa. It was made possible by the generous support of the Government of Sweden.

Research carried out by organisations working in peace and security contexts suggests that digital technologies' role in facilitating peaceful settlements and sustaining dialogue between conflicting parties and stakeholders is increasing.1 These technologies are supporting strategies, including increasing available information,

widening networks, representing issues and stories through social media, informing and engaging a diversity of stakeholders, and encouraging dialogue while engendering empathy through sharing perspectives and feelings. As the adoption of digital tools and inclusion of more stakeholders in their use begins to demonstrate value more broadly in peacebuilding contexts, it must be considered how these tools can be used in African contexts to include women.

According to research commissioned by the UN Secretary-General in 2020, while women's digital

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1   Digitalpeacemaking.com (2020)

inclusion has not been prioritised, it has also decreased in the last four years. While the African continent has made significant strides, these efforts have now reached a standstill. A review of National Action Plans in Africa demonstrates that while digital tools are considered, there is generally little consideration specifically for women's digital inclusion. Women's digital inclusion needs to be reprioritised as it can be a critical factor in the mediation and negotiation phases of broader peace processes and policies. The larger-scale opportunities that digital inclusion affords for participation in peace and political processes eliminate the need to allocate a physical seat at a table, thus challenging cultural attitudes towards spaces, which traditionally exclude women.

Digital inclusion has been prioritised as one of the United Nation's key commitments in the continuing pursuit of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, and not only has practical socio-economic benefits but can also serve to enrich the lives of individuals and communities as a whole.

This policy brief outlines the opportunities and challenges for women's digital inclusion in peace processes in Africa through the four pillars of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325.

Recommendations

1. Develop and support the development of digital inclusion, online safety and security training programmes.

2. Regional and national policies relating to the WPS Agenda should include strategic objectives for digital inclusion and transformation whilst highlighting digital security concerns.

3. Empower more women and girls into Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programmes. Support for infrastructural development to enhance

access to digital technologies and improve their affordability and security is also essential to improving accessibility.

4. Provide accessible funding for local peacebuilding initiatives to develop and make use of digital applications.

5. Support social justice advocacy and develop campaigns against social norms that prevent women in certain environments from accessing the internet.

Since the publication of the landmark UNSCR 1325 in 2000, which focused on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, the UN Security Council has made ten amendments to the resolution. The WPS framework outlines four pillars for consideration:

1. Prevention of violence towards women and girls in conflict and post-conflict contexts

2. Participation of women and gender parity in peace and security decision-making processes

3. Protection of women and girls' rights in conflict situations and protection against all forms of gender-based violence

4. Relief & Recovery needs of women to be met, and women's ability to act as agents in conflict and post-conflict contexts is strengthened.

Definitions, Opportunities and Challenges of Women's Digital Inclusion in WPS

In the context of this policy brief, the definition and importance of inclusion borrow from the UN Secretary-'General's 2012 report on "Peacebuilding in the aftermath of conflict", "which defines inclusion as "the extent and manner in which the views and needs of parties to conflict and other stakeholders are represented, heard and integrated into a peace process". The same document also asserts inclusion as central to "preventing relapse into violent conflict and producing more resilient States and societies".2

Taking 'represented', 'heard', and 'integrated' as keywords in our consideration of women's digital inclusion in peace processes, digital technologies certainly present both opportunities and challenges, as will be explored in this policy brief. Opportunities range from being less focused on physical representation and more on the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in ensuring the representation of all stakeholders; to the promise it holds for mediation, early engagement, and early warning and response mechanisms to be approached differently.

On the other hand, considering women's digital inclusion in Africa's WPS Agenda, the skills and socio-economic requirements of access to digital technologies conspire with broader challenges of infrastructure, connectivity and politicised access, as has been seen with countrywide internet shutdowns, to serve as barriers. The current statistics of access to technology by women in Africa generally is concerning, more so as the world sees more technological development and thus more expensive technology.

Digital inclusion is described as providing "affordable access to the internet including meaningful use of digitally enabled services. [1]' This is measured by examining specific communities' access to digital technologies, digital literacy levels and consumer safety in digital spaces, improved education, civic engagement, and application of digital technologies and increased participation in peace and political processes. However, in rural communities and conflict zones, where access to digital technologies and infrastructure is limited, organisations have used mobile technologies, including SMS texts and short voice messages, to bridge the gaps where people cannot access or benefit from information published through digital platforms. Using mobile technologies enables inclusion in discussions of peacebuilding and security of those with a mobile phone not included in digital initiatives due to lack of access. Through engaging and connecting with women on the ground and gathering data, those working towards the WPS Agenda can use this evidence to call on national and regional decision-makers to intervene and work with those communities to reach peaceful solutions.[2]

[1] The Age of Digital Interdependence Report (2021) commissioned by the UN Secretary-General as part of the Roadmap for Digital Cooperation (2020)

[2] Puig Larrauri & Kahl (2013)

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2   https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/67/499

A study by Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security reveals that women are involved mainly in informal peacemaking. Any increased use of digital technologies at this stage of the peacebuilding process must also be met with focused efforts in addressing digital skills gaps with local peacebuilders. Therefore, the digital exclusion of women poses significant risks to their inclusion in relief and recovery processes.
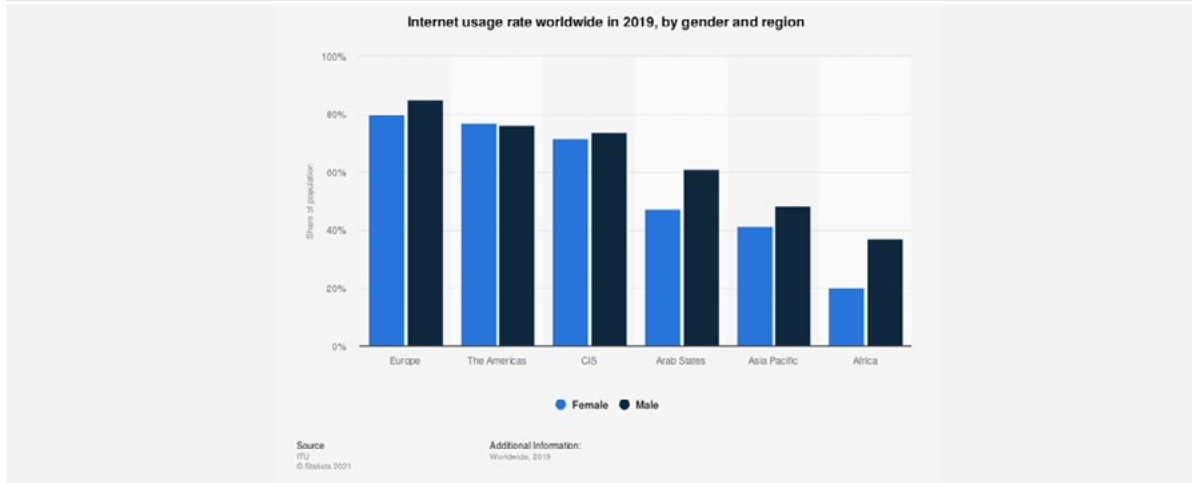
Statistics from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) suggest that only 47% of people in developing countries have access to the internet, compared to 87% in developed countries. Where access is possible, men and those living in urban areas make up most users (47%), leaving women, rural communities, people with disabilities and older people behind. When we consider conflict environments' spatial security, the lack of safe spaces for women becomes another factor in the gendered nature of access to information.

Similarly, a United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) data revealed that only 17.8% of Africans have internet access in their homes, with merely 10.7% having home-based computers. From a gendered perspective, data from the ITU shows that 11.2% more African men than women have access to digital technologies.

urther threats that exacerbate digital gender inequalities in Africa thus include poverty, inadequate and lack of education, and digital illiteracy. Cyberbullying, cyber misogyny, and various forms of digitised discrimination are among the issues that discourage some women in their use of digital platforms like social media.3 Therefore, these and other factors present the need to consider the dangers of exclusion alongside the encouragement of the adoption of digitised peace processes in relation to women.

When we consider the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Africa, the importance of preparedness for a rapid change in technology

FIGURE 1: THE INTERNET GAP IS LARGEST IN AFRICA, WITH MALE USAGE AT 37.1% AND FEMALE USAGE AT 20.2%.

Internet usage rate worldwide in 2019, by gender and region

Source
ITU
© Statista 2021

Additional Information:
Worldwide; 2019

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3   https://en.unesco.org/publications/thechilling

and equal access is demonstrated further by suggestions that some technologies, like digital autonomous weapons, will see the emergence of new forms of gender-based violence in conflict.4 Facial recognition technologies have also been touted for their discriminatory potentials and the misuse of data collected through Artificial Intelligence (AI).5 Similarly, limited digital access and the prominence of digital illiteracy means careful management is needed by mediators to avoid, on the one hand, the misrepresentation of perspectives and, on the other, the prominence of the views and needs of those with access, over those without.

Therefore, the digital empowerment and digital rights of womenin peace processes are essential for the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Africa. This policy brief addresses women's digital inclusion in the context of the four pillars of UNSCR 1325.

Digital Empowerment: Equipping technologically disadvantaged individuals with digital skills and knowledge required to engage and participate in processes that facilitate their quick and easy re-integration into a digitally paced world.

Digital Rights of Women: Having equal access to the digital space.

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4 https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/10/pdf/201110-wps-essay-transforming-security-e.pdf
5 https://theconversation.com/ai-facial-analysis-is-scientifically-questionable-should-we-be-using-it-for-border-control-155474

PARTICIPATION

Tackling barriers for African women's participation in WPS through digital inclusion

On the margins of the training workshop on transitional justice held in 2019, a meeting involving a representative from the Tabu tribe with whom the Awlad Suleiman tribe have had a long-standing dispute was held. This culminated into reconciliation between the two tribes.

A review by UN Women of 31 major peace processes that took place between 1992 and 2011, 16 of which were in African countries, revealed that "only 4 per cent of signatories, 2.4 per cent of chief mediators, 3.7 per cent of witnesses and 9 per cent of negotiators are women".[6] This included the 1999 Lomé Peace Agreement, Sierra Leone, where women only participated as witnesses and constituted only 20% of witnesses. At the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi (2000), women were only present as part of negotiating teams and made up only 2%. For five of the 16 African peace talks included in the analysis, women participation was 0% in all areas.

Opportunities for the participation of women in peace processes through digital inclusion, therefore, presents opportunities to close these gaps[7]. This section considers the digital inclusion of women from the following perspectives:

6   https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/03AWomenPeaceNeg.pdf
7   https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/dpo_call_to_action-final_091020.pdf

1. Inclusion of gender issues and perspectives of women

2. Participation of women at the negotiating 'table'

3. Presence of gender expertise at mediations

4. Enabling environments for the voices of women at peace talks

5. Capacity to participate and the awareness that participation is possible

Digital platforms like social media present new environments for communication and engagement in peacebuilding and mediation. While examples of the Arab Spring (2010-2012), and more recently the #EndSars campaign in Nigeria (2020), which was led largely by young women, demonstrate their use by young women and men in participation towards mobilising for political change, there are some nervously from mediators, on the use of social media in their work. This is largely due to the growing threat of disinformation and misinformation, and an example of why the CyberMediation Initiative (now CyberMediation Network) was set up to explore the potentials that technology holds in mediation. There are also suggestions that the opportunity here is to consider how the peacebuilding industry might contribute to tackling the potential threats of social media in mediation and capacitating the social media literacy of stakeholders on using such platforms responsibly.8

The COVID-19 pandemic has meant that there was little choice but to adopt more technologically enabled peacebuilding. Messaging apps like WhatsApp and Telegram have been used by organisations like Réseau des Femmes en Action pour le Développement Social - Network of Women in Action for Social Development

- (REFEADES), in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). REFEADES used WhatsApp to communicate with other human rights activist groups

> The Digital Mediation Toolkit9 identified five opportunities for the use of digital tools to improve inclusion in mediation. These included:
>
> 1. The inclusive of a broader range of views and perspectives
>
> 2. The opportunity to increase the number of people at the table without the worry of actual physical space
>
> 3. Opportunities to engage young people in talks
>
> 4. Safer, less resource-heavy and more viable consultation using digital means
>
> 5. Online consultation as a starting point to the resumption of talks

in the country during the COVID-19 lockdowns. WhatsApp has also been used for awareness-raising, conflict analysis, and direct communication with local actors who have the local intelligence needed. It has also been useful for participation with communities in more remote areas. For rural women, the development of communicative infrastructure gives them greater access to affordable technology through which information can be channelled, and thus knowledge empowerment and participation can be achieved. This means a shift in power relations from women simply benefiting from the outcomes of peace talks, to them being afforded more opportunities

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8   https://repository.graduateinstitute.ch/record/298396/files/Hirblinger_Digital%20Inclusion_in_Peacemaking_A_Strategic_Perspective.pdf
9   https://peacemaker.un.org/digitaltoolkit

for active participation.10 For example, consultation, polling and focus group discussions can be facilitated through messaging apps, online questionnaires and other digital tools used to gather the views and needs of those who cannot otherwise participate in offline consultation techniques. Beyond the benefits of reaching women in remote locations, there are also benefits of limiting the resources required for participation, safety and addressing the socio-cultural and religious barriers women face in some communities in their attempts at voicing their perspectives. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have been used in the distribution of consultation tools. Social media has also been used for women's rights campaigning using, for example, hashtags like #dehydratenow, #BringBackOurGirls, #HeforShe, #GenerationEquality, among others, to build participation. These developments mean mediators and gender experts should also be proactively listening on such platforms, and there are suggestions of the use of social media analysis tools, and other such data analysis tools, in mapping voices of different groups and interests who are 'speaking' on social media.11 This is necessary for both capturing their views and identifying underrepresented voices. These opportunities for increasing women's participation through digital inclusion are also examples of the many opportunities for bypassing elite actors and gatekeepers of the negotiation table.12

In countries where there are fears of hacking of conversations on platforms like WhatsApp, organisations interviewed for this policy brief have said they preferred using platforms like Telegram and Signal for the participation of women. These platforms have end-to-end encryption preventing the monitoring of conversations by hackers and other actors. However, it is crucial for

organisations using digital solutions to stay up to date with the wide range of platforms on the market and the various user agreements conditions and encryption solutions they offer. This is in consideration of the rapid growth and changes of such technologies.

> According to the UN's Roadmap to Digital Cooperation (2020), access to broadband and internet usage in Africa is the lowest of the global regions, with only 28% of people digitally participating.

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10 https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01436597.2015.1136208?journalCode=ctwq20
11 https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/20200929-pw_168-digital_inclusion_in_mediated_peace_processes_how_technology_can_enhance_participation-pw.pdf
12 https://www.stabilityjournal.org/articles/10.5334/sta.cp/

PROTECTION AND PREVENTION

Potentials women's digital inclusion hold for protection and prevention

Heads of UN missions police chiefs meet in Addis Ababa at the 3rd Heads of Police Components retreat. 31 July – 2 August 2018. Source: UNOAU

Since the four pillars were established in 2000, initiatives such as Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces for Women and Girls have emerged using digital tools as one of the implementation methods in local communities. In Maputo, Mozambique, school girls and boys have held workshops to discuss critical issues around making the city safe for women and girls. Following this activity, social media was used to promote the voices and suggestions of schoolchildren and policy changes to support new safety measures. Using social media made these suggestions public, increased the girls' visibility in public life, and showed them in public spaces in the city, normalising their presence.[1] Another more recent example was highlighted in Nigeria, where The United Network of Youth for Peace and Diplomacy (UNYPD) offered peacebuilding training to young women. When Covid-19 stopped the in-person training, UNYPD used grant money to buy equipment and software subscriptions to offer the training online. As a result, the women who were trained have set up in person peace clubs to continue to act as agents of peace, teaching peacebuilding skills to

others and complementing their new digital skills.[2] Although these projects are only happening in small numbers across Africa, they can empower and include women in implementing the WPS pillars more evenly, transforming the successful implementation of the agenda as a whole.

[1] UN Women (2020)

[2] Peace Direct, (2021)

Digital inclusion of African women in identifying potential risks and threats in conflict areas represents a bottom-up approach in developing early warning and early intervention mechanisms that can lead to both protection and prevention. For example, in protecting women against sexual violence and harassment, initiatives like the Harassmap tool (Egypt), which four women developed, used SMS13 to collect information about attackers and their locations. This information helps to identify sexual harassment hotspots, and security officials are deployed to guard these areas. Such first-person reports help mediators, peacebuilders and policymakers to understand and develop data-driven intervention mechanisms for the protection and prevention of sexual violence in conflict. These accounts and information also help debunk stereotype and people's relationship and perspective of sexual-based violence and are central to developing campaigns and community mobilisation. Harassmap and similar technologies are great examples of how technology-enabled crowdsourcing can help to include women in data gathering and crisis mapping as prevention and protection mechanisms. Similarly, the global initiative "Take back the tech!" started in 2006 by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC),14 campaigns for ICTs

users to use platforms to end violence against women. These and other examples demonstrate how ICTs are being used to support women to speak about sexual violence and for peacebuilders and organisations to provide help and support to survivors.

The ever-changing dynamics of conflict means that the mapping of security risks for the protection of women should be done in collaboration with the women themselves who are victims and survivors of said risks. In training women in environments of conflict, with the knowledge and skills that help them frame their experiences in the context of provisions and frameworks like UN Security Council resolutions and other mandates and treaties relating to human and women's rights, these women become empowered and active participants in providing useful contributions to strategies deployed for their protection.15 Such training and collaborations can be supported through ICTs like SMS, messaging apps and radio.

It is essential, however, that initiatives do not make assumptions about preferred platforms by users. One organisation interviewed for this policy brief, which prioritised its SMS platform for its initiative, found that most users came from its website, mainly because people did not remember the phone number. This example also demonstrates the importance of introducing multiple avenues for digital inclusion of women in such initiatives as contributions do have socio-cultural limitations when it comes to digital and data access;16 this can affect the demographics of where reports come from. Therefore, the suggestion is that an evidence-based understanding of the use of technology by women in the communities served is conducted, and a hybrid approach

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13 https://www.ushahidi.com/uploads/case-studies/ImpactReport_2018.pdf
14 An international network of civil society organisations founded in 1990.
15 https://odihpn.org/magazine/building-a-web-of-protection-in-darfur/
16 https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/dpo_call_to_action-final_091020.pdf

to inclusion that uses both digital and analogue mechanisms, deployed.

The active collaboration in developing protection mechanisms will also address criticism that the protection lens often presents women as vulnerable and passive. Therefore collaborative approaches further enhance opportunities for co-designing of solutions.17 The sharing of said experiences by women must also come with support for them individually. Thus, such initiatives must have a triangulated approach in digital inclusion of women towards protection and prevention:

1. Empowering women to share their experiences;

2. Facilitating their contribution to protection and prevention mechanisms; and,

3. Direct support by protection and prevention actors.

The active implementation towards protection and prevention of data gathered through such initiatives will contribute to the UN Secretary-General's call for better use and deployment of data across the UN family.18

There are undoubtedly existing processes of gathering the experiences of women in relation to the protection and prevention pillars (see, for example; the Gender-based violence information management system19), and part of the move to the digital inclusion of women is the automation of processes and mechanisms that are currently paper-based. However, such digitisation must improve the process of collection, offer additional benefits to the women, for example, anonymity, and reduce existing gaps of access.

In developing technology-enabled interventions that allow women to report and contribute to developing protection and prevention mechanisms, such interventions must make confidentiality and informed consent a priority. Thus, existing encrypted platforms like Signal and Telegram serve as a cost-effective starting point for cash-strapped initiatives and organisations. Support towards cybersecurity and the cyber resilience20 of local peacebuilding initiatives and organisations is vital to explore further in terms of how stakeholders and donors might support such organisations. As shared by organisations interviewed for this policy brief, limited skills and infrastructure have meant dependency on technological professionals outside of their country, often in Europe and the USA. This has meant increased costs, and where volunteers are used, this has meant slower deployment and hiatus of projects. Some also rely on free, open-source platforms like WordPress that perhaps have limited functionality tailored to the project's needs.

For digital inclusion to be most effective, mediators must resist the need to control the environment, as digital inclusion also means allowing the users to drive the digital environment.

One aspect of the protection pillar that warrants further review is how WPS Agendas" definition of protection are themselves being stereotypical in how it defines the protection of women within a victimhood paradigm.

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17   https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/dpo_policy_brief_women_transforming_peace_in_peacekeeping_contexts_final.pdf
18   https://www.un.org/en/content/datastrategy/images/pdf/UN_SG_Data-Strategy.pdf
19   https://www.gbvims.com/gbvims-tools/
20   Fredrik Björck et al., 'Cyber Resilience – Fundamentals for a Definition', in New Contributions in Information

Systems and Technologies, ed. Alvaro Rocha et al. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 311–16.

Several barriers hinder women's access to information and technology

1. Age

2. Gender

3. Socioeconomics

4. Government restrictions

5. Geography

6. Digital literacy

The gendered nature of access to digital media and technologies is intertwined with other barriers, including:

1. Access to education

2. Language

3. Online security

4. Misinformation

5. Cyberbullying

6. Cyber misogyny

7. Concern over the use of digital technologies in mediation

8. Concern over the security of digital platforms

RELIEF AND RECOVERY

Photo credit: US Institute for Peace

Issues of open governance and demo-cratic approaches to regulating access to technologies like the internet continues to be a significant barrier to digital inclusion in Africa. Addressing this requires invest-ment and partnerships in technological and infrastructural innovations across Africa. A current example of this type of partnership exists between the govern-ment of Nigeria and IBM and was signed in January 2020 towards addressing digital skills gaps in the country. Such partner-ships are great when they drill down into local communities, and if accompanied by a concerted effort to improve infra-structure, tackle the gender disparities in access to education and socio-economic statuses of these communities.

Mobile phones and social media have been used in different ways in humanitarian and peace pre-vention and relief efforts. For example, in 2011, Safaricom, Yu and Airtel provided mobile banking platforms free for emergency responses after the drought in Kenya. Facebook offers crisis sup-port features like Safety Check that allow users

to notify individuals in their network that they are safe during an ongoing disaster. Facebook also provides the Community Help feature that enables users to get and provide help during disasters. Help includes but is not limited to providing shelter, supplying food, volunteering to an onsite medical team, among other things. The app also allows users access to a fundraising feature that supports fundraising campaigns for different types of disasters.21

Social media platforms like Facebook, specifically Facebook groups and pages, can be used in the relief and recovery process, such as reconciliation in conflicting communities, facilitating the community to share and reflect. The ways social media are and can be used in relief and recovery efforts further demonstrate the urgency in addressing digital divide gaps and online harassment and misinformation if women are to be genuinely included in these efforts. The social media platform of choice should also rely on the understanding of the most used platforms locally. In Libya, for example, Facebook is the most used platform. In Nigeria, Twitter is the most popular for socially active citizens and is widely used by politicians more than other platforms. However, the use of such platforms must be in consideration of both sides: mediators and citizens. Therefore, to be inclusive, the designing of technology approaches and use of technology for relief and recovery efforts needs to understand the limitations, for example, around data protection and privacy, of these social media platforms; another factor that might deter women from

participating. How platforms like Facebook gather user data, for example, is much debated.22 Linguistic barriers and other political factors, like country social media regulations that might limit engagement, must also be considered.

Data ethics23 and protection are among the many security concerns for digitised approaches to women inclusion in the WPS Agenda. The monitoring and response to the COVID19 pandemic prompted the UN and its entities to release a joint statement24 on the ethical use of data collection, processing and response. However, critics of the use of technology in early warning initiatives have questioned if there is evidence to suggest the investment and use of technology in early warning initiatives have led to faster response. The issue, however, goes beyond the technology itself; the question is the extent to which the development of technology-based early warning and response mechanisms on the women's inclusion spectrum comes with ethical considerations of use.25 For example, mechanisms that document, report and warn of sexual violence; what are the ethical considerations for data storage?26 What might be the most effective and inclusive approach to response? Who should respond? Essentially, what is their analysis framework of use?

There are many examples in the UN and other organisations of the use of technology in relief and recovery initiatives; many, do not demonstrate consideration for women inclusion. UN's Global Pulse27 initiative is an example of recognising the role big data and AI plays in peacebuilding, humanitarian efforts and development. Its cloud

21   Camila, Y., Erica, D and Aashna, P. (2020). A Review of Social Media Use During Disaster Response and Recovery Phases
22   https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/11/technology/facebook-privacy-hearings.html
23   https://hhi.harvard.edu/files/humanitarianinitiative/files/signal_obligations_final_05.24.2018.pdf?m=1606847511

https://hhi.harvard.edu/files/humanitarianinitiative/files/data_preparedness_update.pdf?m=1607547533 https://hhi.harvard.edu/technology-and-innovation
24   https://www.unglobalpulse.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Joint-Statement-on-Data-Protection-and-Privacy-in-COVID-19-response-Final-12112020-1-3-4.pdf
25   https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2012/10/wpssourcebook-04e-genderresponsiveearlywarning-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1203
26   https://hhi.harvard.edu/files/humanitarianinitiative/files/data_preparedness_update.pdf?m=1607547533
27   https://www.unglobalpulse.org/

application, PulseSatellite28 is a collaboration with UNOSAT that deploys a hybrid of AI and human skills to gather and analyse satellite imagery to support on the ground operations during humanitarian crises and conflict. Such initiatives have clear contributions to peacebuilding; less clear though is if and how the gender lens is applied especially in consideration of inclusion of women.

In its study on gendered Artificial Intelligence, UNESCO found, among other things, how digital voice assistants "model acceptance and tolerance of sexual harassment and verbal abuse"29 and other attributes that demonstrate limited gender sensitivities in such technological advancements. This is perhaps speaking to a broader issue of limited gender representation in the industry. For Africa, with such feminist critique of digital technologies also comes the question of social context and representation in technology developments that consider both the dynamics on the continent and peace and security. In other words, for the intentions of the producers of new technologies to bear relevance to the realities of women, peace and security in Africa, the active participation of African women should not just be at the point of use, but with African women as part of the development of technologies. Thus ensuring their experiences can be part of this very early stage of development.30 Among the consequences of the lack of representation of women and girls, and even more so, African women and girls in cybersecurity frameworks mean more conscious attention needs to be paid to addressing online sexual exploitation and abuse of women and girls.31

The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic saw the Multi-door Court House at the Oyo State High Court in Nigeria launch e-mediation sessions during the pandemic and has continued with this approach to date. While this seems like a better, quicker option in a fast-paced world, it is a double-edged sword for those women with little digital skills and access. These digitalised solutions can also prove problematic for women and girls experiencing gender-based and partner violence and may not be able to leave their home and environment of violence. There are concerns about the potentials of impersonation of victims/survivors and the extent to which such courts can verify their identity.

28 https://www.unglobalpulse.org/microsite/pulsesatellite/
29 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000367416.page=85
30 https://www.tkg-info.de/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Bacherlor-Thesis_22_Clara-Winkler.pdf
31 https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2020/06/action%20brief%20%20wps%20%20cybersecurity16620final.pdf?la=en&vs=1656

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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How can we ensure the digital inclusion of Women in Africa's WPS Agenda?

First Female Police Commanders Course, 3rd – 8th December 2017

This policy brief has outlined the opportunities for the digital inclusion of women in Africa's WPS Agenda, be it for preventative measures and early engagement to facilitating effective mobilisation that holds the potential to lead to political change towards peace. There have also been calls for the WPS Agenda to be less traditional in its thinking of security and be more conscious that emerging and new technologies also mean a need for more deliberate efforts towards improving cybersecurity. This is particularly important as surveillance and spying technology development will significantly impact the extent to which digital inclusion of women can be achieved. Whilst technologies like AI, Machine Learning, Big Data, Blockchain technology, among others, hold promise, the barriers of access discussed in this policy brief means their use in Africa is still limited. Nonetheless, strategies for the participation of women peacebuilders in the WPS Agenda must not ignore digital, especially in engagement with young women peacebuilders who value social media platforms like Twitter as a fundamental part of their political participation.

Recommendations

Knowledge exchange and training

1. Develop and support the development of digital inclusion training programmes. For users, such training programmes address gaps in digital literacy and online safety for women with limited skills. A multi-level approach will mean, on the one hand, training programmes on basic digital literacy skills. On the other, programmes around online safety, for example, by providing educational resources to train women on the safe use of digital technologies and the internet. Specific safety programmes will include, for example, capacity-building exercises that train women on identity protection techniques. Digital inclusion training is also necessary for organisations and experts on applying a gender lens to digital products for peacebuilding. These activities should include opportunities for knowledge exchange through collaborations with local peacebuilders to share best practices and work with academia and policymakers to develop policy and knowledge exchange processes.

Regional and national strategies

2. Regional and national policies relating to the WPS Agenda should include strategic objectives for digital inclusion and transformation. This includes, for example, support for countries to include digital inclusion in their National Action Plans (NAPs). Regional steering committees can help monitor and evaluate such objectives to establish standardised guidelines benchmarking and tracking digital inclusion for women at national and regional levels. Such tracking and mapping mechanisms of the digital mediation process allow for comparing and sharing of best practices. Thus identifying opportunities for innovative use of technology in peacebuilding at micro and macro levels and supporting the establishment of policies that promote ethical and social justice agendas for digital inclusion.

Industry Development and Collaboration

3. Empower more women and girls into Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programmes. This is key in addressing male dominance in the production of digital technologies that do not consider the gender lens in their production. By incentivising organisations to consider and address women's digital inclusion within their organisations and by supporting training and STEM incubator programmes targeting women and girls, this gender gap in technology production and development will begin to close. This will require collaborations between private and public sector organisations and making funding available to develop women and girls focused programmes. Attaching gender ratios to funding for investment and experimentation on the emerging technologies of Virtual Reality, Blockchain Technologies, AI and Machine Learning can serve as an incentive to technology organisations in this space. Support for infrastructural development to enhance access to digital technologies and improve their affordability is also essential to improving accessibility.

Support WPS initiatives and organisations towards digital inclusion

4. Accessible funding for local peacebuilding initiatives will allow initiatives and organisations to capitalise on their localised knowledge

to develop practical digital applications for peacebuilding. Such funding must be accessible, especially considering the usual financial reporting processes that often require formal registration and financial reporting frameworks. In stringent political environments and conflict situations, this limits how some local initiatives, informal networks and smaller organisations can access the available funds.

Social justice advocacy

5. Support social justice advocacy and develop campaigns against social norms that prevent women in certain environments from accessing the internet. Campaigns that seek to improve freedom of speech, online safety, privacy, among others, will help to raise awareness and initiate action by digital gatekeepers and platforms.