

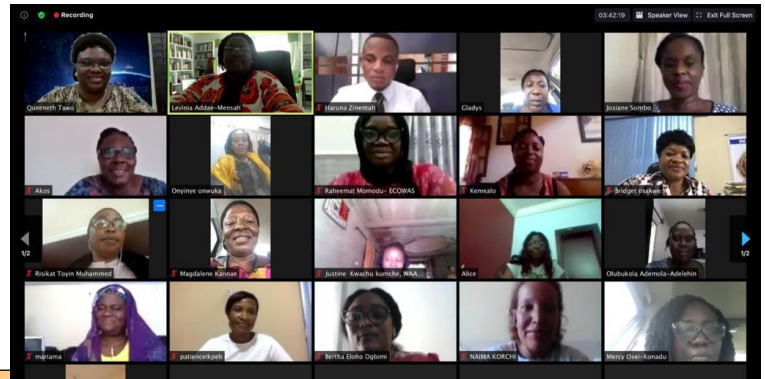
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# GENDERconnect



Left: Young women leaders meet in Burkina Faso. Right: Some of the participants at the maiden edition of GenderTalk Series #1

## Advancing the WPS Agenda through Community-Led Interventions

It has been established that women and children bear the brunt of conflicts and wars all over the world. Despite significant contributions women make to conflict prevention and management, they continue to be poorly represented in both formal and informal peace processes. Women peacebuilding efforts at the local level are not recognized even though scholars are unanimous that community-led peacebuilding interventions hold the key to connecting local-level initiatives to international programs and provide the opportunity to move local knowledge from the bottom up. As part of efforts to address this anomaly and bring local women peacebuilding initiatives to the front burner, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) held the maiden edition of its Gender Talk Series under the theme: **“Advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda from a Community Perspective”** on September 22 and 23, 2020. The two-day Forum featured eight Panelists drawn from Burkina Faso, Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. In the spirit of WANEP-ECOWAS long-standing partnership, Hajia Raheemat Momodu, Head of Division, Human Security and Civil Society, ECOWAS Commission gave an overview of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF), which she described as ‘a groundbreaking document anchored on the human security prism!’

The highly interactive and participatory forum also had in attendance representatives from the AU, ECOWAS, UN, other civil society organizations including women groups, to discuss and share best practices for advancing the WPS agenda at the community level. Discussants reiterated the disproportional impact of conflict on women and children, a situation made worse by the COVID 19 pandemic. They unanimously agreed that community women are missing in decision-making and leadership positions and surmised that *‘Without women they can be no peace and development as women hold the key to sustainable peace!’*



**SPEAKERS:** From top left -right: Hajia Raheemat Momodu, ECOWAS; Ms Yadicon Njie Eribo, Women’s Affairs Coordinator TRRC, Gambia, Madam Euphemia Akos Dzathor (Mama Awanyo I of Ghana) – Independent Consultant and Community activist; Ms. Loda Coulibaly, Network of Young Women Leaders of Political Parties, Mali; Emem J. Okon , Kebetkache WDC and Zonal Coordinator, WANEP-NIGERIA; Ms. Gameti Germaine, National M&E Expert / Focal Point of the Decentralization Support Programme, Togo; Ms. Guingani Antoinette, Member of WANEP Burkina’s WLP / President of the Women, Education and Environment Association of Ouhiyouya, Burkina Faso; Mariam Dia, Gabou - Association Representative in Tanaff / Reporter for Gabou Community Radio, Senegal and Haja Marie Bob-Kandeh – Community activist, Sierra Leone Market Women Association.

## DRIVING THE WPS AGENDA: *Lessons from the Field*

**“...Without adequate funding, one cannot achieve much!”** – Queen Mother

**Q**ueen Mother, Mama Awanyo 1, officially known as Euphemia Dzathor is a female traditional ruler from the Alavanyo Deme community in the Volta Region of Ghana. The community has a history of protracted communal conflict leading to colossal breakdown of basic amenities such as education and loss of economic activities – endemic poverty, high rate of school drop-out, youth restiveness among others. The community operates two layers of leadership structure – the male chief’s jurisdiction covers everyone while the Queen Mother’s jurisdiction only covers issues of concern to women such as ensuring that women perform their gender roles as expected. As a Queen Mother, Mama Awanyo 1 often used her position to advocate for better life for women and children by providing educational support and small grants to women, lobbying for increase in teachers posting to the schools and providing aid in the provision of teachers’ accommodation. She ensures that women in her community benefit from government policies such as the free education policy and other basic amenities. Her efforts and consistent advocacy seem to have paid off with most of the youth now gainfully occupied and the community recording increase in school in-take leading to significant reduction in the numbers of out-of-school children and the rate of school dropouts. Probably, the most obvious success is the fact that women are now allowed in the meeting of elders. This is no mean feat in a patriarchal society where gender norms are strictly adhered to. For the Queen Mother, a lot still needs to be done because as she said; *“we are not yet there! Women are still lagging woefully behind in meaningful participation in leadership but without adequate funding, one cannot achieve much!”*

**“Women have become more assertive and demanding their rights!”** – Emem Okon

**I**n Nigeria, women’s contributions to communal peace process is being recognized in the Niger Delta where the Eleme Council of female chiefs have recorded significant success in ending the spate of violence against women in their community. One of such female chiefs is Chief Miriam, who is a long-term beneficiary of WANEP capacity building initiatives and a member of the customary court. Women in the communities have been empowered and have become assertive in their localities. Rumuekpe women working in close collaboration with other CSOs such as the Kebetkaket Women Development Center led by Ms. Emem Okon, contributed to ending violent crises in their local government area by brokering peace between the warring youth, rebuilding schools and aiding in the resettlement process. Women are now included in community development clusters and government structures where they serve as female council members and lending their voices in support of the oil spillage clean-up campaigns. Emem summarizes the progress made so far in community-led interventions thus; *“the women have been so empowered to become assertive and demand for their rights. This is a welcome development and a plus for women’s effective participation at the community level!”*

## Traditional Values Accelerate Women’s Voices for Peace in Cameroun and The Gambia

**I**n Cameroun, the Women in Alternative Action project is utilizing traditional values to give space to women’s voices under the Queens for Peace International project. The project focuses on empowering women in traditional institutions, such as wives of traditional rulers and female chiefs, to promote the implementation of UNSCR 1325. The Queens for Peace project employ a strategy known as ‘pillow diplomacy,’ to solicit the support of traditional/community and religious leaders for the inclusion of women in community peace processes. This has provided a space for women to contribute meaningfully in the process and ensure that their voices are heard. Their efforts and contributions have changed the dynamics in community peacebuilding initiatives.

In The Gambia, the mothers club is a potent force in the community used to ensure the enrolment and maintenance of girls’ in schools. They monitor school enrolment and sustenance, advocate to end girl-child marriages, provide guidance and counselling services, fund raise and advocate for boy’s involvement on gender issues to advance girls’ growth.

*‘The Queens for Peace project employ a strategy known as ‘pillow diplomacy,’ to solicit the support of traditional/community and religious leaders for the inclusion of women in community peace processes.’*