



GENDER ALERT



HUMANITARIAN GENDER ALERT- WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AND HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN CONTEXT OF ETHIOPIA

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Photo: UN Women/ Bethlehem Negash

Introduction

The purpose of the quarterly published Gender Alert is to highlight gender specific impact of the multiple crisis in Ethiopia. This issue focuses on women's engagement in peace and security. It is a snapshot on the situation in Ethiopia when it comes to women participating in peace related processes.

Ethiopia signed a peace deal on 2 November 2022, after a two-year conflict in the northern part of the country, which had a devastating impact especially on women and girls. Besides the conflict in the northern part of the country, a few other regions are not stable. There is potential risk of other larger scale conflict and humanitarian crisis.

Although the conflicts affect women the most, women are underrepresented and even absent in number of peace processes and institutional frameworks. Women's participation in the peace processes is essential to ensure sustainable peace. There are various mechanisms of ensuring more women engagement in peace and security, as active participants as well as beneficiaries. For this to happen there is a need to have a robust gender sensitive institutional set up. It is in that context that UN Women and partners have been working with the Government of Ethiopia to develop the first ever National Action Plan (NAP) for Resolution 1325 – Women, Peace and Security. The leadership and ownership of the process by the Ministry for Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA) and the Ministry of Peace (MoP) is most important. In addition, the role of women's movement is paramount to ensure participatory NAP process.

Background

Peace Agreement and the Peace Process

The Government of Ethiopia and Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) signed the Agreement for Lasting Peace and Cessation of Hostilities on 2 November 2022. Although very young, the signing of peace agreement has brought hope to the people most affected by the two-year old brutal war that killed an estimated 600,000 people.¹ Following a surprise agreement, H.E. Olusegun Obasanjo, the head of African Union mediation team that brokered the peace process, said, "This moment is not end of the peace process. Implementation of the peace agreement signed today is critical for its success"²

The absence of women from the peace negotiation process was rather vehement. The agreement did not have any woman signatory. Further, there was only one-woman negotiator on the government's side and none on the TPLF side. There was one woman mediator in the three-person AU-led mediation team, former Deputy President and Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka of South Africa.³ The agreement seems to have failed to identify women as actors to the conflict and subsequently in the peacebuilding. In the Article 6 of the agreement talks about Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of 200,000 combatants⁴ of TPLF but does not mention women. Yet, not only there are a few women as active combatants but also women have been highly disproportionately affected by the conflict. Women also have a significant influence on the dynamics of conflicts and wars through their husbands and brothers.

¹ Olusegun Obasanjo: *How Ethiopia's Peace Plan Will Work* | The Brenthurst Foundation

² *Combatants in Ethiopia's Tigray war agree to stop fighting* | Reuters

³ Olusegun Obasanjo: *How Ethiopia's Peace Plan Will Work* | The Brenthurst Foundation

⁴ *The New Humanitarian* | *As Ethiopia's Tigray peace deal is hailed, a tricky implementation lies ahead*

They therefore constitute a significant group not to be left out at any stage of the peace process. The Agreement also mentions constituting a team of African Experts to monitor the implementation of the agreement without making a specific mention of women being part of it. However, refers to specific needs of women to be addressed in humanitarian needs of Internally Displaced People (IDP) at Article 5. According to the data collected by UN OCHA, the Tigray insurgency had displaced 2.1 million people within the Tigray region, 52% of internally displaced persons (IDPs) are women and girls as of July 2021.⁵ The peace agreement condemns sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and violence against women, girls, children and elderly at Article 4 (2) on Protection of Civilians.⁶

The Article 10 on Transitional Measures envisions of implementing a “comprehensive justice policy” that demands highest levels of accountability and redress for victims and recognizes the cases of SGBV as an area to be addressed. A Joint Investigation report by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and OHCHR released in November 2021⁷ claimed of finding substantial ground on how women and girls have been subjected to rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, sexual mutilation and other forms of torture and dehumanisation; and that rape and sexual violence have been used as a weapon of war to inflict lasting physical and psychological damage on women and girls in Tigray.⁸ Similarly, investigation report by EHRC covering events beyond June 2021 and targeting Amhara and Afar regions documented widespread, cruel, and systematic sexual and gender-based violence including gang rape against women of different ages - girls and elderly women. Sexual violence, which was sometimes deliberately committed in front of family members of victims/survivors and with the knowledge of military commanders and officials, were found to have an objective of demoralizing, dehumanizing and punishing communities, often indiscriminately and sometimes in a targeted manner.⁹ Given the significant suffering women sustained due to the war, specific mention on accountability for SGBV cases would have served as a recognition as well as a commitment to redress victims.

Ethiopian National Dialogue

On 13 January 2022, the Ethiopian Government announced the establishment of a National Dialogue Commission (ENDC). The commission has objectives of facilitating consultations between various segments of society to identify the root causes of fundamental national issues, implement an effective national dialogue process by ensuring that dialogues are inclusive and lead by a competent and impartial body as well as lay a firm foundation for national consensus and the building of a state with strong legitimacy. Despite pressure from civil society and women's organizations, of the 11 commissioners appointed, only 3 are women. Additional concerns have been raised on the non-transparency of the commission's selection process and the impartiality of the body. Although there was uncertainty if gender was a priority for ENDC when it was established, the ENDC seems to have developed stronger commitment for meaningful participation of women in the process. Although the ENDC has not shared a roadmap, a commissioner in a recent meeting with UN Women, shared that the selection methods for dialogue facilitators and participants have been completed which will ensure participation of women as facilitators and participants in the dialogue process. It was also shared that ENDC will be hiring a gender coordinator mainstream gender in the dialogue process. However, it is quite evident that the ENDC requires substantial technical support to make the dialogue process gender-responsive and inclusive.



Community conversation facilitators at a meeting
Photo: UN Women/ Bethlehem Negash

⁵ OCHA, “Situation Report - Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update - 26 Jul 2021”, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Tigray%20Region%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%2026%20Jul%202021.pdf>

⁶ Redwan Hussien on Twitter: “<https://t.co/NGYqUz1XNW>” / Twitter

⁷ The JIT covered the period between 3 Nov 2020 (start of the conflict) and 28 June 2021 where the government of Ethiopia declared a unilateral cease fire and only focuses on atrocities committed in Tigray Region. <https://ehrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/English-Executive-Summary-AAIR.pdf>

United Nations Resolution 1325

Ethiopia faces a challenge of not having a specific normative framework to promote and demand accountability for participation of women in peacebuilding. It promulgated its first National Policy on Women (NPW) in 1993 to recognize the rights of women, which was later fortified by the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) in 1995. However, the scope of National Policy on Women was limited as it fails to make a systematic analysis of the various ramifications of the absence of women from decision making positions in all sectors, especially in peace and security. Much later in 2006, the National Action Plan for Gender Equality (NAP-GE) in line with the Federal Constitution and Beijing Platform for Action (BPA) of 1995; Ethiopia made a political commitment to develop a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (NAP-WPS), however the process has been slow due to many factors.

Context analysis and baseline situation: A prerequisite for an evidence based UNSCR 1325 National Action Plan (NAP) process

To support the NAP development process, UN Women has undertaken three assessments on the legal, policy, institutional and overall context in the country regarding Women, Peace and Security (WPS). The **Institutional Audit on Women, Peace, and Security Situation in Ethiopia** provides a comprehensive overview and analysis of the current situation in Ethiopia. It examines the intersection of gender and peace and security issues within different political, socio-economic and cultural contexts in Ethiopia. The **Analysis of International and National Normative Frameworks Related to The Women Peace and Security Agenda in Ethiopia** identifies needs for legislative and policy reforms and advocacy interventions and provides information on the legal and policy gaps that exist regarding WPS. The **Context assessment on WPS situation in Ethiopia** focuses on institution-specific information on existing capacities, priorities, risks, achievements, levels of commitment, and challenges related to WPS in Ethiopia and assesses the gender policies of institutions, availability of human resources, financial resources and organizational culture in relevant institutions working on WPS in Ethiopia. These studies provide valuable information for the NAP development process in terms of priorities, gaps and existing good practices. Findings and recommendations from the studies are included below.

INSTITUTIONAL AUDIT ON WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY SITUATION IN ETHIOPIA

Findings

- There are improvements in systems since 2018 (as a lot of institutions audited have gender mainstreaming manuals), policies (as policies underwent revision from the first national Women Policy to the current 10-Year Development Plan), institutional arrangements (as almost all institutions have gender directorate and units in their organizational structures), budgeting (as some institutions started tagging specific budget to gender issues) and research/knowledge products (as a lot of gap assessments and intervention outcome evaluations exist).
- A lot of institutional gaps and barriers still hinder women; (1) from ascending to leadership and decision-making positions; (2) from being protected from (gender-based) violence and discriminations in public spaces, including in recruitment and promotion; (3) and negative attitudes (at societal at homes by family members and in community, and at workplace by leaders and fellow workers) still exist in diverse forms (both overt and covert).

Recommendations:

- MoWSA, in collaboration with UN Women and MoP work on coherence and partnership among WPS relevant institutions from federal to local levels.
- Coordinated by the MoWSA, the existing, at times fragmented, gender and WPS structural arrangements in the relevant institutions should be harmonized, and gender and WPS units should be strengthened with adequate facilities, budgets, and human resources.
- Coordinated by the MoWSA, progress in the implementation of the gender and WPS agenda should be periodically monitored, and data and evidence should be disseminated to inform policy and the existing policy approach should be reviewed and revised.
- Coordinated by MoWSA and participating education, training and research institutions, a targeted education, training, and experience sharing platforms should be introduced.

⁸ Report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by all Parties to the Conflict in the Tigray Region of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia <https://ehrc.org/download/ehrc-ohchr-joint-investigation-report-on-tigray-conflict/>

⁹ <https://ehrc.org/in-a-first-of-its-kind-human-rights-situation-report-on-ethiopia-ehrc-submitted-to-the-house-of-peoples-representatives-the-commission-call-for-government-to-protect-respect-and-guarantee-hu/>

- Coordinated by the MoWSA, women's organizations and CSOs working on gender and WPS relevant programs, should be organized, and maybe twinned to promote gender equality and WPS-agenda and enhance coherence.
- Coordinated by the MoWSA, a standard accountability mechanism to track progress on gender and WPS initiatives should be introduced in the relevant institutions.

ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL NORMATIVE FRAMEWORKS RELATED TO THE WOMEN PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA IN ETHIOPIA

Findings

- At national level, Ethiopia has multiple legal and policy framework that recognize the equal rights of women in social, economic, cultural and political spheres. This can be interpreted to include the meaningful participation of women in all peace and security processes.
- Ethiopia does not have sufficient legal and policy framework to implement UNSCR 1325 and other subsequent WPS resolutions within its national structure.
- The existing laws do not give sufficient emphasis on how women are discriminately bearing the brunt of conflict. They also fail to strategize specific measures that ensure the fair representation of women at all levels of decision-making; devise effective early warning and prevention measures; protection of women's human rights in conflict and post-conflict settings; and how women's special needs should be addressed in humanitarian settings.

Recommendations:

- The Ethiopian government should revise its current criminal law to incorporate and recognize crimes against women's physical and psychological being- such as anti-harassment law.
- Ethiopia should adopt a NAP that clearly discuss and provide the national priorities of the country with regard to peace and security.
- It is recommended that Ethiopia adopts a separate legislation that clearly recognizes the rights of women in conflict settings.
- Women's rights advocates, such as civil societies, shall actively participate in legislative and policy reviews and ensure that women's rights are protected in the peace process.

CONTEXT ASSESSMENT ON WPS SITUATION IN ETHIOPIA

Findings

- The assessment found that from the participants of the study, there is an understanding on the importance of women's role in WPS. However, women's role and representation in both formal peace and security related sectors and informal peace processes including conflict resolution as well as post conflict reconstruction is extremely low.
- Women's role in the overall WPS is more visible in before conflict phases as part of the violent conflict prevention agent and mostly in local level conflict management through traditional institutions that are organized to handle intra clan/ ethnic groups compared to formal peace processes. Although women are not excluded from working as security personnel such as police, national defense, security administration, and in peacekeeping missions, their representation is very low. Existing workforce data from key security sector institutions such as administration and security, police, justice, and peace institute show that women participation is only 15 %; whereas women's representation in these institutions at senior level leadership positions is only 21%.
- Post 2018 political reform induced violent conflict triggered major legislative and policy reform including involvement of CSOs in peace and security issues.
- Lack of a full understanding and implementation of UNSCR 1325. Inadequate access to resources and information to support peace building activities, lack of localization of the policies at the lower levels and poor implementation of legislative and policy provisions persist at all levels.
- Unavailability of specific policy on peace and security and mainstreaming gender within the peace and security issues. Poor implementation of existing legislations and policies that allow women's equal participation in leadership.

Recommendations for MoWSA and other relevant Institutions:

- Technical capacity and awareness on the nexus between gender, peace, and security by MoWSA and its partners.
- Development of a standalone peace policy and action plan on WPS and allocate adequate budget through leadership of MoWSA.
- Strengthen Coordination and collaboration among relevant institutions working on peace and security by MoWSA and other relevant institutions.
- Strengthening the relief and recovery of violence affected communities and survivors of violent conflict as well as sexual violence.
- Increase women's participation in peace and security sectors by Security institutions.
- Develop gender responsive early warning mechanism and use early warning indicators relevant to Conflict Related Sexual Violence.
- Develop, and popularize innovative approaches to messaging the role of women in peace and security.

Analysis – Women's Participation in Peace and Security

Peace Agreement and Peace Process

A mapping made by UN Women at the beginning of 2021 on Initiatives and Entities Working on Women, Peace and Security in Ethiopia has showed that many actors in the country do not engage with the WPS agenda. This is mostly due to lack of institutional and technical capacity among the civil society organizations, which was mainly caused by the restrictive Charities and Societies Proclamation from 2009 that prevented CSOs' engagement in peacebuilding and conflict resolution until being replaced by a new proclamation in 2019. The more than decade long absence of the CSOs from engaging with the affected communities also caused them legitimacy costs as the CSOs are not seen as the voice of the affected communities.

Deficient data on the scale of impact of conflicts on women is another area of challenge. In the lack of which evidence-based advocacy for women's participation and identification of their needs is practically impossible. Gender disaggregated data are hardly available to scientifically determine the needs of women in IDP camps or for those living in the refugee camps.

A The 2nd of November 2022 Agreement highlights the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration for the Tigrayan combatants but data on their genders is not available.

Women's Coalition on National Dialogue has demanded that the Commission must ensure that women, in their intersecting identities, are meaningfully included in the National Dialogue (ND). This must also include women in humanitarian settings and internally displaced women. The women directly affected by the absence or deterioration of peace and security are best source of information and insights and should be active participants in the process.



*Community leaders from Oromia region participating in the training on customary dispute resolution mechanisms
Photo: Courtesy of Ministry of Peace*

WPS and the NAP process

The unforeseen challenges such as the conflicts in the Northern part of the country and worldwide COVID-19 pandemic caused major distractions for the government from prioritizing the NAP-WPS. In addition, the CSOs face challenges of low levels of knowledge and awareness, lack of coordination and networking, sustainable funding and inadequate normative frameworks to implement WPS effectively.

In response to the Agreement for Lasting Peace and Cessation of Hostilities signed on 2 November 2022, UN Women has intensified consultations with women's networks to explore venues to amplify women's voices and participation in peacebuilding, national dialogue and transitional justice processes that the Ethiopian government is leading. UN Women continuously supports the technical and operational capacity building of CSOs in forms of small grants and through other financial support provisions to enable national CSOs work on WPS. Furthermore, UN Women partnering with the National Technical Committee on NAP-WPS to launch regional and local consultations on WPS agenda as part of the process of developing the NAP.

Legal barriers to women's participation in peace process

Political participation is a potential way to participation in Women, Peace and Security agenda matters, and thus it is relevant to account for political hindrances in relation to barriers to women's peace and conflict resolution work. There are several barriers for Ethiopian women who wish to participate in politics, such as possible heightened risk of political violence interlaced with existing gender-based violence and many forms of violence against women human rights defenders.¹⁰ Women's participation in electoral processes is not actively promoted in Ethiopian law. In 2019, ahead of the 2020 elections, a legal amendment banning public servants from standing for election.¹¹ For women public servants who might consider running for political positions, this can hinder their participation as the requirement to resign creates income gaps and insecurities not all are willing or able to take. Additionally, the same election law package did not pass a bill that would have given women candidates a priority if they received the same number of votes cast as male counterparts.

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Highlights of the 3 studies conducted by UN Women in 2022

The three studies on the current WPS context in Ethiopia highlight that despite an extensive policy framework on gender equality and women's empowerment, Ethiopia lacks a legal and policy framework that effectively underlines the provisions of the WPS agenda. The existing laws do not give sufficient emphasis on how women are discriminately bearing the brunt of conflict and fail to strategize specific measures that ensure the fair representation of women at all levels of decision-making. Peace and security related institutions and processes remain male-dominated, and women's role in peacebuilding and conflict resolution undermined. Women have not been sufficiently protected from conflict and related violence, and more action is needed to hold perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence accountable. In addition, the studies show that despite growing interest toward the WPS agenda, awareness, capacity and resources on it remain low across stakeholders, and actions are incoherent.

It is of utmost importance to ensure the integration of provisions of the WPS agenda in national policies, such as the gender policy and peace policy and to continue engaging across sectors.

- Women face harassment and SGBV when participating in politics. Therefore, addressing SGBV in general is utmost important.
- Although the normative framework in Ethiopia does not prevent women's participation in politics, it does not encourage it. Placing quotas and giving women candidates priorities, would enhance women's participation in decision making.
- Integration of the WPS agenda into national policies, such as the gender policy and peace policy are necessary to ensure women's participation in peace and security. WPS process should go hand in hand with the national dialogue process to ensure that women's participation is ensured systematically in all peace processes.

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Participants, organizers and the facilitator after a successful capacity building training

Photo: Courtesy of Ethiopian Media Authority

¹⁰ Richards, 2020. ([891_Barriers_to_women's_participation_in_elections_in_ethiopia.pdf\(ids.ac.uk\)](#))

¹¹ Kiruga, 2019.

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**UN Women Ethiopia Country Office UNDP
Regional Service Center, 2nd Floor P.O.
Box 5580, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia Tel:
+251 115 170 825/170 819
Fax: +251 115 538 163
Web: www.unwomen.org**

**Contact Person: Schadrack Dusabe,
Deputy Country Representative/Head of
Office a.i to UN Women Ethiopia**