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## WOMEN IN PEACE AND SECURITY

### Background

Kenya's peace and security challenges impede and slow down economic development and growth, and disproportionately affect areas that are already poor and marginalized.

### Key issues of concern in Kenya include:

- i. Violent extremism (terrorism and radicalization);
- ii. Conflicts over natural resources including extractives especially in arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs);
- iii. and political conflicts (associated with elections, ethnicity and devolution).

### The roots of the conflicts are multiple and overlapping:

- i. They stem from economic and social inequalities and marginalization,
- ii. High youth unemployment,
- iii. Unsettled clashes over land and resource ownership, use, benefit and disposal,
- iv. Ethnic tensions related to political interests,
- v. and spill overs from conflicts in neighbouring Ethiopia, South Sudan and Somalia.

A number of these conflict triggers are longstanding while others are newly emerging.

Women are rarely represented adequately in the peace and security sectors yet they make up half the population of any country in conflict or at war. This remains the case despite increasing global policy awareness on how women are affected by conflict and the importance of including them in peace and security processes. For instance, the UN's landmark framework on women, peace and security reaffirms the important role women play in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. Women's contributions are also underscored in African peace instruments like the Maputo Protocol and Kenya's National Action Plan.

There are 4 Pillars which underline Women, Peace, and Security Agenda, namely; **Participation, Protection, Prevention, and Relief and Recovery.**

The Kenya National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2020 – 2024 (KNAP II) is the second phase of a process initiated in 2016 to implement the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325). By providing a framework to amplify voices of women at grassroots, county and national level, it also aligns with the Leave No-one Behind principle. It identifies duty bearers' strategies and recognizes the role and agency of women and women-led community organizations in peace and security issues, building on their analysis, knowledge, and capacity to advance sustainable peace.

Building on lessons from the first KNAP and an eye on emerging issues, the plan specifically targets critical security priorities in Kenya including climate change; violent extremism; gender-based violence (GBV); forced migration and human trafficking; and humanitarian disasters. Women and girls' participation and leadership in managing these issues is invaluable through their unique lived experiences and expertise, stemming from the varied roles they hold at community, county and national level.

### **Participation of women in the Peace and Security Sector**

There have been numerous commitments from all major Ministries responsible for Kenya's security. Specific milestones of the first KNAP include the Ministry of Defence's first ever Gender Policy, affecting an increase of women's meaningful and effective participation in decision making and the appointment of the first female Major General in Kenya, Fatima Ahmed.

The Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government has also been able to integrate gender into its peace and security architecture, signalling a two-fold increase in the number of women in peace committees, from 14% in 2013 to 29% in 2018.

The National Police Service also noted an increase of women in leadership as Assistant Inspector General and overall increase of women in the service from 8% in 2015 to 14% in 2020. Attendance of the virtual launch from Cabinet Secretaries from Ministry of Defence, Ministry of public Service and Gender, and Ministry of Interior is testament to the cross-government support the plan has.

### **Mainstreaming the Role of Women in Peace-making in Kenya**

Kenya's National Action Plan (KNAP) was launched under the theme 'Kuhusisha Wanawake ni Kudumisha Amani' (meaning 'to involve women is to sustain peace'). The action plan is timely given the serious security threats posed by radicalization and violent extremism, and the challenges the country faces in effectively responding to these.

Many Kenyan women have taken an active role in countering this scourge, particularly at the family and community level. The action plan acknowledges that women can play specific roles in this regard; particularly given their unique access and influence in the household and community. In addition, women also offer valuable insights and perspectives in how related policies and practices can be strengthened.

However, there has been a silence on women's active agency in violent extremism whether as sympathizers or as perpetrators and how this should be addressed. This is at a time when the involvement of women in radicalization and violent extremism is coming into sharp relief. A

number of Kenyan women, especially younger women, have been arrested and implicated in various ways as sympathizers and enablers in some of the recent violent extremist attacks.

Encouragingly, women are increasingly in charge of security matters and hold more and more key decision-making positions within government. Their representation is an achievement with regard to the 'participation and promotion' pillar of UNSCR 1325. This pillar is important given that the representation of women in such positions is likely to have a positive influence on the outcome of decisions taken at this level. In Kenya, female representation in such key positions should translate to more gendered and nuanced counter-terrorism responses by the government.

The participation of women in peace committees and in peace processes, is quite low, for example particularly at the county and sub-county levels. Of concern is that the few positions that are occupied by women are mostly supportive, with few women holding leadership positions.

These peace committees play an important role in providing early warning and response to conflict and security matters, which includes providing alerts on activities around radicalization in designated areas. The poor participation and representation of women in leadership positions in these committees can largely be attributed to capacity shortfalls in terms of skills training. These are some of the challenges that the National Action Plan should tackle.

The inclusivity of the National Action Plan is commendable. Of particular interest is a call to civil society organizations, academic and research institutions for research into the impact of conflict on Kenya's women and their roles, practices, and involvement. This includes areas of conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and security mechanisms and processes. Such research should also go a step further to look at the impact of terrorism on Kenyan women, as well as their roles and involvement in countering terrorism and violent extremism.

And so, it is increasingly becoming important for countries such as Kenya to take specific measures and perhaps even adopt definite plans to address the gendered nature of radicalization and violent extremism. Exactly how the strategic objectives of the National Action Plan will evolve and adapt to promote women's empowerment, leadership and participation in countering radicalization, terrorism and recruitment into violent extremism, in particular, will remain to be seen.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the empowerment and support to women in the peace and security sector, there are still many constraints to women's peacebuilding roles. These include poverty, the divisive nature of ethnic identity, and patriarchal cultures and values. Nonetheless, concerted efforts by stakeholders from various sectors are essential to peacebuilding in the communities where they occur. There is need to promote a more participatory role of women in not only preventing emergence of conflict but also in quelling the same where it arises and also to enhance their role in peace and security.