

EDITORIAL >>

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The issues of peace and security constitute a huge and important area where stereotyping of and discrimination against women persist, mainly

because this is where women's perspectives are conspicuously absent. In an effort to redress this, a number of women's groups across West Africa and beyond are taking initiatives and steps that are aimed at institutionalizing the practice of women in peace and security on the African continent.

One of such groups is the Women Peace and Security Network Africa (WIPSEN-Africa) which promotes women's strategic participation and leadership in peace and security governance at all levels. WIPSEN-Africa was established in May 2006 as a Pan African non-governmental organization that seeks to enhance women's leadership capacities and promote constructive,

innovative and collaborative approaches to non-violent transformation of conflicts, peacebuilding and promotion of human security in Africa.

WIPSEN-Africa acknowledges that women are not a homogenous group and as such, its activities and programmes are specifically adapted to meet the special needs, concerns and priorities of women working within security sector institutions.

This bulletin is aimed at profiling the role and work of women in the security sector in Africa. In this maiden edition, we focus on the role of women in the security sector from two post-conflict countries: Liberia and Sierra Leone. We begin by highlighting the gaps in on-going security sector reform processes, which from our perspective, reveals the failure of institutions, particularly state mechanisms, to protect women from the threat of insecurity. This is true even in cases where women find themselves in institutions that are supposed to be the "providers of security services". This of course is an expression of broader societal subjugation of women in acculturated and traditionally patriarchal spaces.

The commitment of states to women, peace

and security concerns goes far beyond being a signatory to universally agreed protocols or instruments; it also involves making it a national agenda and translating their commitment into frameworks and guidelines that ensure women's full and active participation in these processes. In the face of the failure of states to address the broader security needs of women, efforts have been made by women to mobilise and drive the change they want to see. The role of LIFLEA and WISS-SL in Liberia and Sierra Leone respectively fully captures such move by women to fight for their own spaces in security matters.

This bulletin will also be used in the future to highlight the role of women in the security sector across Africa and even beyond; and it will carry news about forthcoming security related activities including seminars, workshops and others that could be of immense benefit to women in the security sector. We will therefore welcome news items from organisations and institutions working on security issues that could be of interest to our audience.

Best regards,

Ecoma Alaga

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'Gendering' Security Sector Reform Processes in West Africa: The WIPSEN-Africa Experience by Ecoma Alaga

In April 2008, WIPSEN-Africa launched its Gender and Security Sector Governance Programme in partnership with the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of the Armed Forces (DCAF) under the theme: 'Gender and Security Sector Reform in West Africa: Strengthening the Integration of Gender and Enhancing the Capacities of Female Security Personnel'. The programme covers two post-conflict countries, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

The rationale for the project derives from the experiences of on-going security sector reform processes in West Africa. Very often, these are conducted without adequate consultation with and participation of women. This is despite the fact that West Africa's security institutions are still very much the domain of men and this is demonstrated by the fact that so far no one country in the sub-region has attained the required 20% quota for women's participation in the

security sector. What is even more disturbing is that even the security sector reform processes in the sub region are largely blind to issues of gender, women's participation and gender-based violence.

A number of factors explain this situation. First, West African societies are still very much patriarchal in nature and in most communities, security structures and operations are still largely seen as a male preserve. Second, insecurity is not yet largely recognized as a core aspect of the vulnerability of the poor --and with the feminization of poverty and conflict the vulnerabilities of women and girls who mostly constitute the poorest of (Contd. in pg. 2)

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'Gendering' Security Sector Reform Processes in West Africa: The WIPSEN-Africa Experience by Ecoma Alaga

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the poor are further exacerbated. Third, communities have yet to recognize the enormous contributions that women can make within the security sector and as such do not prioritize their concerns when engaged in processes such as SSR. Fourth, inadequate communication and synergy exists between women in the security sector. This presents a challenge for the role of women in such processes because without coordination and communication among them, their role will remain negligible in the new/emerging security structures.

In recognition of the above gaps and challenges, WIPSEN-Africa and DCAF sought to strengthen the capacities of women and their organisations in the security sector. In this light, they have increasingly sought to ensure functioning platforms for women in the security sector to strategise on how to protect and advance their rights through the revitalisation of existing, or the creation of female security staff associations. Both organisations have also sought to strengthen the capacities of parliamentarians, civil society women's organisations, oversight gender and security institutions and female security personnel to mainstream gender and women's issues into new security structures and operations. Finally, they are making efforts to promote knowledge generation in the area of gender and SSR through the documentation of lessons learned and best practices.

So far, our pilot project has targeted actors in Liberia and Sierra Leone as beneficiaries. We are working with people drawn from parliamentary committees on defence and security, including female parliamentarians; female security sector personnel from the police, prisons, armed forces, customs, immigrations, fire service, oversight institutions such as the Office of National Security in Sierra Leone and Ministry of National Security in Liberia, anti-drug agencies, judiciary, intelligence services and private security companies. Civil society women's groups and traditional authorities

were also targeted but in a minimal way.

WIPSEN-Africa and DCAF have carried out a needs assessment that was aimed at generating ideas and consensus to inform the design of the project. Further, consultative meetings were held with female security personnel and other national actors involved in SSR. In addition, capacity building trainings on gender and security sector reform were also held for parliamentarians, female security personnel, the justice sector, and the Ministry of Social Welfare Gender and Children's Affairs in Sierra Leone. Our organisations have also convened strategic planning workshops for female security staff associations: Liberia Female Law Enforcement Association (LIFLEA) and the Women in Security Sector in Sierra Leone (WISS-SL). We have organised awareness raising lecture series on security issues and dialogues between young persons (girls and boys) and female security personnel aimed at reducing negative stereotypes and encouraging increased female enrolment. Other activities include city-wide marches by women in the security sector as a way of raising the profile of female security personnel in a patriarchal environment where issues of security are perceived to be a sole task for men. The sessions with young persons and the 'Women in Security' marches were supported by Womankind, a UK-based women's rights organisation.

Findings from the project highlight the paltry number of women in the security sector as well as reveal the myriad of issues confronting particularly female security personnel. Among others, these include but are not limited to the following:

- Under-representation of women in decision making, particularly among the career service personnel. Men currently hold Directorate positions and often do not consider the impact of decision making on



Participants at 1st Ever Gender Training for RSLAF
Supported by AWDF

women;

- The lack of an effective recruitment and retention strategy that will encourage more women to be recruited;
- Lack of training for female security sector personnel. Very few women benefit from training programmes because most often priority is given to men;
- General low-level representation of women within the security sector; and lack of incentives for women to join security sector institutions;
- Non-existence of gender policies that would provide a framework for advancing the rights of women as well as men. Only the police forces in both Liberia and Sierra Leone have gender policies;
- Weak or non-implementation of existing policies and non-commitment to gender equality;
- Poor governance mechanisms within security sector institutions to check issues relating to gender discrimination;
- Lack of initiative and self-confidence among female security personnel;
- Lack of properly organized and functional association for female law enforcement personnel, which leads to lack of cohesion and networking among them.

These challenges call for an integrated and coordinated approach of all actors. WIPSEN-Africa, DCAF, and Womankind are committed to this process and will continue to work towards ensuring effective, democratic and equitable security institutions that are responsive to the broader security needs of women, men, girls and boys in West Africa.

Hurrah! WISS-SL is born!



The Women in Security Sector in Sierra Leone (WISS-SL) was established in June 2008

following a one-day consultation on Gender and SSR organised for women in the security sector by WIPSEN-Africa and DCAF. Today WISS-SL records a membership of over 80 individual women drawn from eight security sector institutions namely the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF), the Sierra Leone Police (SLP), the National Fire Force (NFF), Private Security Companies, Office of

National Security (ONS), Immigration Services, Prisons Services, and the Navy.

WISS-SL's core mandate is to advocate for women's rights and gender mainstreaming within the security sector through the promotion of inter-agency cooperation, capacity building, networking and exchange of best practices. For more information on WISS-SL contact Lt. Feima Vandi on fpavandi@yahoo.com

The Renaissance of the Liberia Female Law Enforcement Association (LIFLEA)

One of the key organizations that has benefited from the intervention of WIPSEN-Africa and DCAF, is the Liberian Female Law Enforcement Association (LIFLEA). Since its establishment in 2000, LIFLEA has faced both structural problems and political challenges that have minimized its capacity to support women in the security sector in Liberia.

Despite setbacks over the years, its members have resolved to enhance the capacity of the organisation in order to achieve the goals and objectives for which it was established. Furthermore, the female security personnel also want to play a critical role in the on-going SSR process in Liberia but they are unable to do so effectively without revitalizing LIFLEA as a viable and constructive association. Through the intervention of WIPSEN-Africa and DCAF, the association has already benefited from the following: a needs assessment, dialogue and consultations with other stakeholders on SSR issues, a community parade and training on gender and SSR issues. It is out of these efforts that LIFLEA agreed to convene a strategic planning workshop in order to strengthen itself as an effective actor in the SSR process; and ultimately, in order to fully

achieve its objectives. An initial reflection session was organised in October 2008.

In March 2009, LIFLEA convened a Strategic Planning Workshop, which was timely for a number of reasons. In March, a number of activities were held in Liberia to celebrate the achievements of women in the country and globally. On International Women's Day, March 8, 2009, the Government of the Republic of Liberia, headed by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, launched its National Action Plan on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Capitalizing on the momentum of this landmark achievement, President Johnson-Sirleaf hosted an International Colloquium on Women's Empowerment, Leadership Development and International Peace and Security (March 7-10, 2009). All of these events galvanized the energies of members of LIFLEA to reorganize, revitalize and give new direction to their association so that it can serve as a guiding body on gender, and security sector reform and governance in Liberia. For more information on LIFLEA contact Betty Broh on bbroh777@hotmail.com



Catching-Them-Young: Special Initiative to Bridge Inter-generational Divide

In the effort to increase female enrolment and retention in security institutions, WIPSEN-Africa and Womankind organised a series of lecture and dialogue between young persons (boys and girls) and female security personnel. This involved the following activities: a) presentations by female security personnel about their various institutions and the role of women in these security institutions; b) a dialogue session on security issues

between the female security personnel and girls; and c) development of a mentor-mentee relationship between the female personnel and young girls who expressed interests to pursue careers in specific security institutions.

In Liberia, five female security personnel made presentations during panel discussions on behalf of all the SSIs. In Liberia, 40 young persons participated in the lecture series. They were drawn from 6 schools: 1) GW Gibson High School, 2) Muslim Congress, 3) St. Peters Lutheran High School, 4) Newport Junior High School, 5) St. Theresa's School, and 6) D.

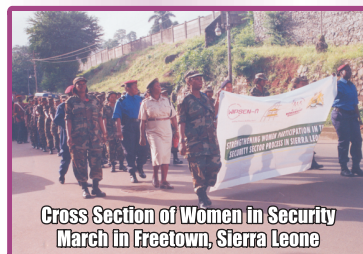
Tweh Memorial High School. Based on the Liberian experience, the approach in Sierra Leone was revised to include representatives from each security institution. In Sierra Leone, 179 students from six schools (4 mixed and 2 girls only) in Bombali, Makeni and Magburaka participated in the lecture series and mentorship drive, namely: 1) Birch Memorial Secondary Schools, 2) Benevolent Secondary School, 3) St. Joseph's Convent, 4) Islamic Secondary Schools, 5) Mathoral Government Secondary School for Girls, and 6) Pampana Secondary School. The activities took place on 23 October and 29-30 October 2008 in Liberia and Sierra Leone respectively.

It is worth noting that most of the students had negative perceptions of security sector institutions. Such negative perceptions about security agencies are responsible for the unwillingness of girls' to join the sector. In a particular instance in Sierra Leone, a girl from the Mathoral Government Secondary School for Girls who had an interest in joining the Sierra Leone Police Force (SLP) had mixed feelings after listening to her colleagues' negative perception of the SLP. The experiences from both countries illustrate the enormous challenges of encouraging women to join the security sector. **Join our campaign 'Security is also a Woman's Issue'.**

Showcasing the Amazons: Highlight of the Women in Security March in Pictorials



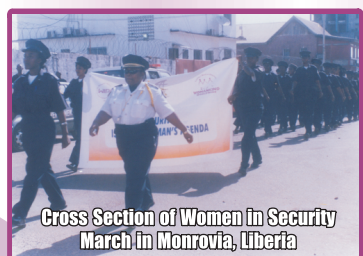
Women in Security March in Sierra Leone



Cross Section of Women in Security March in Freetown, Sierra Leone



Female Personnel of Group 4 Securicom (Private Security Company) in Sierra Leone



Cross Section of Women in Security March in Monrovia, Liberia

Bravo to a 'She-Brigadier'



WIPSEN-Africa and its partners join the Women in Security Sector in Sierra Leone (WISSSL) in congratulating Madam Kestoria Kabia on her promotion to the position of Brigadier. This is the highest-ranking position ever occupied by a woman in the 48-year history of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF). Brigadier Kabia you have made history as the first woman brigadier in Sierra Leone. Congratulations **SHE-BRIGADIER!**

Interning with WIPSEN-Africa by Victoria Ake

The Women Peace and Security Network Africa (WIPSEN-Africa)'s internship programme is a proactive effort towards bridging intergenerational gaps, with the ultimate goal of increasing the number of young women in the field of peace and human security. It is designed to expose young female professionals to diverse areas on peace and human security at an early stage in their career, by providing them with requisite skills and field-based practice and experience in peace and security in Africa.

To some, the very mention of the term "intern" usually instills an understanding of a number of activities such as operating photocopying/fax machines, stacking mountains of paper clips, and running other errands. On the contrary the internship programmes is not intended for such activities. The interns are not employed to do photocopying and paper stacking. The greatest benefit of doing an internship with WIPSEN-Africa is an opportunity to undertake interesting and challenging activities and research into a plethora of issues. WIPSEN-Africa provided an environment where I gained practical experiences in the area of peace-building and human security, which has helped me in many ways and will place me in good stead in the future.

The programme provided me with field experiences, which facilitated my application of theory and skills gained in the classroom to work-related problems and experiences. This has enabled me to acquire new understandings, ideas and skills that cannot be achieved in the classroom. The field experience gained develops interns' understanding of professional work standards and practices as well as gives them the opportunity to examine the nature and function of their professional role within a professional environment.

Another advantage of doing an internship with WIPSEN-Africa is the quality of the organization. WIPSEN-Africa has a very positive profile, reflective of both the high caliber of staff and high quality of programmes, projects and publications. As an intern, I was fortunate to reap the benefits of this profile by the way of access to conferences, experts and resources in the field within both West Africa and the wider world.

WIPSEN-Africa's quality of work and professionalism is the best, and is only matched by the sheer dedication and commitment shown by all the staff. The working environment in the office is

delightful and this makes work so much more productive, not only when the work team has such a clear strategy for all of the projects, but really when the staff are as friendly as they are at WIPSEN-Africa, encouraging and committed to making the internship process a valuable experience. There is an international mix of staff at WIPSEN-Africa and this provides an enabling environment to approach, debate and understand issues from diverse perspectives.

From my very first to last day as an intern, I was treated as a valued member of staff and made to feel and understand that any input I might have would be taken aboard by the staff. I was encouraged to take part in numerous research projects and allowed the pleasure to work alongside professional and courteous staff.

At the end of the day, a prospective intern is categorically assured of enjoying each day of his/her internship - a rare thing for many people in the world of work. I can assure you that not only will it be a very professionally rewarding experience with a first class organization, but also personally with a great and excellent staff.

Upcoming Activities on Gender and SSR

- Leadership and Organizational Management Training for the Liberian Female Law Enforcement Association (LIFLEA) and Women in Security Sector in Sierra Leone (WISS-SL); 25-29 May 2009, Accra, Ghana
- Gender Training for Senior Management of the Ministry of Defence, 22-23 July 2009, Sierra Leone

About WIPSEN-Africa

Women Peace and Security Network Africa (WIPSEN-Africa) was established as a women-focused, women-led Pan-African Non-Governmental Organisation to promote women's strategic participation and leadership in peace and security governance in Africa.

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