

SOA WFR Journal

SOLIDARITY FOR
AFRICAN WOMEN'S RIGHTS

A force for freedom



MOUVEMENT DE SOLIDARITÉ
POUR LES DROITS
DES FEMMES AFRICAINES

Une force pour la liberté





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Foreword

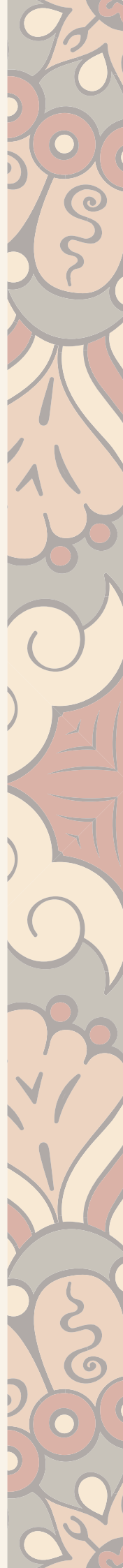
The Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR) Coalition is pleased to share some of our memorable moments from 2020.

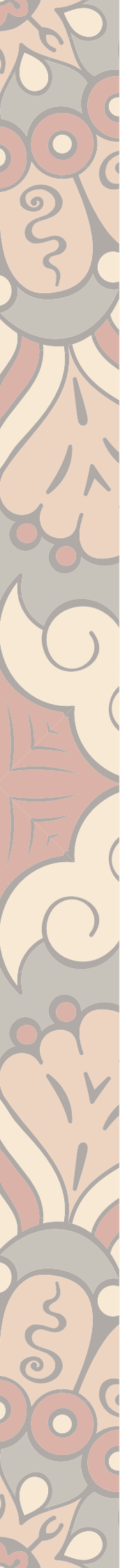
With the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic, organizations had to repurpose their interventions and adapt to the "new ways" of working that were necessitated by the constraints imposed by the Pandemic. Indeed, many organizations had to redefine, adapt and even restructure their operations. As we take stock of what the SOAWR Coalition did in 2020, we do so against the backdrop of this reality. As you read this Journal, you will appreciate that in spite of the challenges and uncertainties, the Coalition was able to achieve some admirable results.

The Coalition kicked off the year, with women and girls' rights activists from across the African continent, representing 27 countries and over 60 organizations, meeting in Nairobi, Kenya for the SOAWR Annual General Meeting (AGM) which took place from 27th to 29th January 2020. The meeting provided an opportunity for SOAWR members to network, share updates on their work to promote the integration of the Maputo Protocol in their respective countries and contribute to the development of a new Strategic Plan for the 2020-2024 period. In this Journal we share the highlights of the AGM discussing the successes and challenges in the advocacy of the rights of women and girls. We also highlight the programs rolled out to consolidate the gains made over the years and to galvanize the strengths and expertise of our members to hold African governments accountable for the human rights commitments they have made at the national, regional and international levels.

The SOAWR Strategic Plan 2020-2024, developed through a rigorous, highly consultative and member-driven process, was launched on September 30th, 2020, and is discussed in depth in this Journal. The Strategic Plan places a greater focus on ensuring domestication and meaningful implementation of the Maputo Protocol. The development and implementation of the Strategic Plan 2020-2024 is supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation (Sida) and the Raoul Wallenberg Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (RWI)

The ongoing COVID -19 Pandemic has had negative effects on the rights of girls and women in Africa. Measures imposed by African states to curb COVID-19 and the increased pressures of responding to the Pandemic continue to pose the risk of aggravating the already existing gender





inequalities and push back progress made in ensuring and implementing women's rights and gender equality. While measures such as issuing curfews, restricting movement and gatherings may be necessary to reduce the spread of the virus, they also have significant negative impacts on already vulnerable and marginalized populations, particularly women and girls. These measures have, for instance, made access to justice and redress for the increased gender-based violations an ever-elusive mirage and a living nightmare for women and girls on the Continent.

Six SOAWR members successfully implemented interventions to advance the SOAWR vision and its strategic goals as articulated in its Strategic Plan from July to December 2020, thanks to the funds Equality Now, SOAWR's Secretariat, received from Sida to support the implementation of the Strategic Plan. These organizations are: Make Every Woman Count (MEWC), Great Lakes Initiative for Human Rights and Development (GLIHD), Kadirat, Women's Rights Advancement & Protection Alternative (WRAPA), Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre (TLAC) and the Centre for Human Rights (CHR), University of Pretoria.

The year 2020 also marked the 20th Anniversary of the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, adopted on 31st October 2000. UNSCR 1325 reaffirms women's critical role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, and peace building. As we celebrated the UNSCR 1325 Anniversary, reflections were made on how countries can continue ensuring that women are involved in peace processes, such as mediation, peace building and reconstruction.

December 2020, marked the end of the African Women's Decade (AWD) 2010-2020 launched by the AU to advance gender equality by accelerating the implementation of the AU Assembly Decisions on gender equality and women's empowerment. Noteworthy, the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) had its 25th Anniversary falling in 2020 too and was highlighted and discussed throughout the year as preparations for the Generation Equality Forum ensued.

Reflections on the positive strides made thus far reinvigorates the energy to continue advocating for the rights of women and girls through the solid advocacy programs already in place and more being developed and as detailed in this Journal.

Faiza Jama Mohamed

Director, Africa Office, Equality Now
Founding Member and SOAWR Secretariat

Acronyms/Abbreviations

AGM	Annual General Meeting
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
ACHPR	African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights
Atwar	Atwar Organization for Research and Social Development
AWD	African Women's Decade
AUWGDD	African Union Women, Gender and Development Directorate
BPfA	Beijing Platform for Action
CAR	Central African Republic
CDC	Centers for Disease Control
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CHR	Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CSW	Committee on the Status of Women
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GEO	Gender and Equal Opportunities
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
GLIHD	Great Lakes Initiative for Human Rights and Development
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
LACVAW	Legislative Advocacy Coalition on Violence Against Women
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MINUSCA	Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic



MPSI	Maputo Protocol Scorecard and Index
MSA	Multi-Sectoral Approach
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SIHA	Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa Network
SOAWR	Solidarity for African Women’s Rights
SP	Strategic Plan
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
TLAC	Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre to end violence against women
UN	United Nations
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
VAPP	Violence Against Persons Protection
VAW	Violence Against Women
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WRAPA	Women’s Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative



About SOAWR

The Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR) Coalition is a regional membership-based network of organisations working to advance women's rights in Africa. Specifically, since its establishment in September 2004, SOAWR works to ensure that African states sign, ratify, domesticate and implement the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol).

SOAWR's goals include:

- ▶ To contribute to the accelerated ratification of the Protocol in the states that have not ratified the Protocol.
- ▶ To support the domestication and implementation of the Protocol in states that have ratified it.
- ▶ To implement tracking and documentation mechanisms on the Protocol at the national and sub-regional levels.
- ▶ To strengthen national community mobilisation efforts to popularise and use the Protocol.
- ▶ To enhance conceptual clarity of coalition members around advocating for the Protocol.

Highlights of the SOAWR AGM in January 2020

From 27th to January 29 2020, women and girls' rights activists from across the African continent, representing 27 countries and over 60 organisations, met in Nairobi, Kenya, for the SOAWR Annual General Meeting (AGM). The meeting provided an opportunity for member organisations to network, share updates on their work in promoting the integration of the Maputo Protocol in their respective countries, and contribute to developing a new Strategic Plan for the 2020-2024 period.

The participants, representing the interests of millions of women and girls across the continent, summarised close to two decades of work into strategies and approaches to guarantee women and girls' rights for years to come. Thus, the SOAWR AGM accomplished the desired goal.

On the first day of the meeting, SOAWR members took time to assess SOAWR's identity, mission and values, discussing how internal and external factors determined the Coalition's work trajectory. This session was important for contextualising SOAWR's role as a catalyst in how African governments view and relate to women and girls' rights and ensure that they are guaranteed and enjoyed. Members noted the precision in the Coalition's mission and vision statements and committed to integrating new approaches to its work since the majority of African Union (AU) member states have

ratified/acceded to the Maputo Protocol. Member organisations also had a candid discussion on the need to strengthen the work of their organisations while considering the next steps for the Coalition once the Maputo Protocol is universally ratified in all the African states.

The second day of the meeting involved a deep dive into the draft 2020-2024 Strategic Plan. The draft Strategic Plan drew from gains, challenges and lessons from the previous strategic plan (2013-2018). It casts the strategic goals, informed by the need to reinvigorate the Coalition into action by eliciting views on the next phase of the Coalition's work.

“
The SOAWR AGM was a success and a sign of a renewed push for continent-wide efforts to promote women and girls' rights in Africa.”

The strategic planning process commenced in August 2019 at a meeting with 15 SOAWR members who formed the Task Force that established a Working Group to midwife the strategic planning process. Subsequently, the Working Group set up a sub-committee that recruited the consultants, based on the Terms of Reference developed by the Task Force.

The AGM was an opportunity for SOAWR member organisations to assess and validate the draft's strategic focus, the Coalition's proposed roadmap for achieving its goals and objectives, the strategic outputs, outcomes and impact and the resources framework. Members also discussed and assessed the monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) framework that the Coalition would rely on in implementing the new strategic plan. By incorporating their own experiences, strategies, and approaches as part of their work to promote the integration of the Maputo Protocol across the Continent, member organisations were in a prime position to note new opportunities, challenges, strengths and threats in the work of the Coalition.

The main agenda for the third and last day of the AGM was an opportunity for members to review the programmatic and operational structure of the SOAWR Coalition. During the final day's sessions, members agreed to refine the regional structuring of the Coalition and adopt new regional clusters and additional members. The latter brings continental perspectives instead of solely regional perspectives into the Steering Committee. In bringing in new members with a continental outlook, the hope is that the steering committee's membership will help bridge some of the gaps of the Coalition as a whole.

SOAWR partners and collaborators, including the African Union's Women, Gender and Development Directorate, UN Women and UNDP, along with our development partners, were also in attendance and enriched the discussions with their perspectives regarding complementary opportunities and strategic priorities.

The SOAWR AGM was a success and a sign of a renewed push for continent-wide efforts to promote women and girls' rights in Africa.

“*SOAWR members agreed to refine the regional structuring of the Coalition and adopt new regional clusters and additional members.*”

The Launch of the SOAWR Strategic Plan



On September 30, 2020, SOAWR launched its Strategic Plan¹ during an online event. The event brought together SOAWR members, civil society organisations (CSOs), SOAWR donors and government representatives. SOAWR's members presented their Strategic Plan for the next four years and how they will achieve their goals.

SOAWR's priority for the next four years is to promote the ratification, implementation and domestication of the Maputo Protocol. In addition, SOAWR plans to enhance the reporting of states and CSOs on the status and enforcement of the Protocol and enhance litigation to hold African states accountable. SOAWR also plans to incentivise the popularisation and utilisation of the Protocol and be a strong coalition able to advance the Maputo Protocol, especially in North and Central Africa, by the end of 2024.

The Strategic Plan places a greater focus on ensuring domestication and meaningful implementation of the Maputo Protocol, including lifting reservations. It also includes plans to continue advocating for universal

¹ [SOAWR Strategic Plan 2020-2024. https://www.soawr.org/sites/default/files/SOAWR%20Strategic%20Plan%202020%202024%20SP.pdf](https://www.soawr.org/sites/default/files/SOAWR%20Strategic%20Plan%202020%202024%20SP.pdf)

ratification by securing ratification by the remaining 13 African countries and ensuring that no girl or woman in Africa is left behind.

The strategic priorities articulated in the Strategic Plan seek to strengthen SOAWR's ability to achieve its vision and mission. They are:

- i) To support the domestication and implementation of the Maputo Protocol by states to transform women's lived realities in Africa;
- ii) To contribute to the ratification of the Maputo Protocol in 13 African states, thereby ensuring universal ratification;
- iii) To pursue state accountability to ensure fulfilment of state obligations under the Maputo Protocol;
- iv) To promote the knowledge and utilisation of the Maputo Protocol among state and non-state actors;
- v) To strengthen the SOAWR Coalition and support movement-building in the continent to promote and protect women's rights.

The effect of COVID-19 on women's rights in Africa

The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting women and men differently. The increased pressures of responding to the pandemic risk aggravating existing inequalities and push back progress made in ensuring and implementing women's rights and gender equality. The Africa CDC² reports that there are 2,215,216 confirmed cases of coronavirus in 54 countries as of December 4, 2020, with 52,824 deaths, and the number keeps rising. In an effort to curb the growing number of cases, many countries have adopted strict preventative measures that the police and the military enforce. Twenty-two (22)³ countries had entirely prohibited gatherings, and 14 countries have partially banned gatherings as of April 17, 2020. As of April 17, 2020, of the 42 countries that had taken legislative action to address the virus, twenty-nine (29)⁴ countries had imposed either total lockdown or curfews. In more than

² Africa CDC, COVID-19. <https://africacdc.org/covid-19/>

³ ICNL, African Government Responses to COVID-19. <https://www.icnl.org/post/analysis/african-government-response-to-covid-19>

⁴ Ibid.

twenty (20)⁵ countries, the measures taken had an indefinite duration and granted the executive branch broad authority in enforcing these measures. While measures such as issuing curfews, restricting movement and gatherings may be necessary to reduce the spread of the virus, they also have a significant negative impact on vulnerable and marginalised populations, such as women and girls and persons with disabilities. For example, women in abusive marriages are now more exposed to domestic violence owing to the lockdowns, with little or reduced access to avenues of redress.



Photo credit: Reuters

Available research continues to show that the response to the COVID-19 pandemic has had consequences that uniquely affect women and girls and their rights. Women already earn less than men, assume a more significant share of the responsibilities at home, and have less access to social protection. Under the current circumstances, more women than men risk losing their jobs and livelihoods. In the healthcare sector, predominantly female⁶, women assume a heavier responsibility professionally and personally. In Africa, approximately 65%⁷ of nurses are female. The increased economic stress and uncertainty put women and girls at a greater risk of exploitation⁸. As schools

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ UNFPA, COVID 19 A Gender Lens Guidance. https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/COVID-19_A_Gender_Lens_Guidance_Note.pdf

⁷ CGDEV, How will Covid 19 affect women and girls low and middle income countries. <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/how-will-covid-19-affect-women-and-girls-low-and-middle-income-countries>

⁸ Plan International, Covid 19 FAQ. [Shttps://plan-international.org/emergencies/covid-19-faqs-girls-women](https://plan-international.org/emergencies/covid-19-faqs-girls-women)

close, more girls take on responsibilities at home caring for siblings and family members, hampering their access to education and reinforcing traditional gender roles. Lessons from the response to Ebola⁹ showed a significant reduction in women's economic and productive lives and increased poverty rates, food insecurity, and malnutrition. Without action, evidence gathered thus far points to a similar development under the current pandemic with long-term consequences that will affect women and girls the greatest.

The measures imposed to curb COVID-19 put women and girls at increased risk of violence and abuse. In Africa, one in every three women¹⁰ has experienced gender-based violence (GBV). Since the start of the pandemic, the number of reported cases of GBV, domestic violence, and sexual offences has increased in many African countries. For example, in South Africa, authorities received almost 90,000¹¹ reports of violence against women (VAW) during the first week of lockdown. The new realities can have devastating consequences for women and girls, now trapped with their abusers and prevented from accessing essential protection and services.

The pandemic is putting a toll on medical and health care facilities with strained resources and capacities. Funds dedicated to sexual and reproductive health have been reallocated to address the virus¹². Africa has also seen the highest number of mobile clinics closing their doors, with 447¹³ wholly shut than other parts of the world, further reducing access to essential care and vital health services such as maternal health. During the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, maternal mortality rates increased by 70%¹⁴. Additionally, many countries have been taking advantage of the crisis to create more significant barriers to laws on sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) like abortion and family planning, making it harder for women to get assistance.

⁹ United Nations, The Impact of COVID-19 on Women. <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-en-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1406>


¹⁰ Luc Christiaensen, Domestic Violence and Poverty in Africa: when husband's beating stick is like butter, World Bank Blogs. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/african/domestic-violence-and-poverty-in-africa-when-the-husbands-beating-stick-is-like-butter>

¹¹ VOA News, UN Chief: Coronavirus Pressures Leading to Global Surge in Domestic Violence. <https://www.voanews.com/science-health/coronavirus-outbreak/un-chief-coronavirus-pressures-leading-global-surge-domestic>

¹² Rfi, sexual healthcare efforts falter in Africa as countries focus on Covid-19. <http://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20200413-sexual-healthcare-efforts-falter-in-africa-as-countries-focus-on-covid-19>

¹³ Family Planning 2020, COVID-19 pandemic cuts access to sexual and reproductive healthcare for women around the world. <http://familyplanning2020.org/news/covid-19-pandemic-cuts-access-sexual-and-reproductive-healthcare-women-around-world>

¹⁴ Think Global Health, Gender and the Coronavirus Outbreak. <https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/gender-and-coronavirus-outbreak>



During the 16 Days of Activism, SOAWR launched a campaign on the measures to combat COVID-19 that African countries implemented during this time, addressing whether these measures considered gendered aspects of the pandemic response, based on the UN Women Gender Tracker¹⁵. Out of all 437 measures taken across the continent, 34% were gender-sensitive. In North Africa, 43% of 86 measures are gender-sensitive. In Southern Africa, 33% of 105; in Central Africa, 20% of 35; in East Africa, 43% of 103; and in West Africa, 30% of 132. Egypt, South Africa, Uganda, Côte D'Ivoire, and Nigeria are the African countries that considered the needs of women and girls the most while taking COVID-19 measures, e.g. subsidising sectors dominated by women, helping mothers and pregnant people, and those fighting GBV. In addition, Egypt, South Africa, and Uganda lead the continent with the highest number of COVID-19 response measures addressing Violence Against Women. These include new helplines, taskforces, and funds for community-level service delivery to victims, among other measures.

Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the UNSCR 1325

The year 2020 marked the 20th Anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, adopted on October 31 2000. UNSCR 1325 reaffirms women's critical role in preventing and resolving conflicts, peace negotiations, and peacebuilding. Since the adoption of the UNSCR 1325 in 2000, the Security Council has adopted 10 more resolutions addressing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda: 1325 (2000); 1820 (2009); 1888 (2009); 1889 (2010); 1960 (2011); 2106 (2013); 2122 (2013); 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019), and 2493 (2019).

So far, 25 African countries have adopted National Action Plans for the implementation of UNSCR 1325. The AU has played an important role in pushing the WPS agenda in Africa. In 2014, the AU established the Office of the Special Envoy on Women Peace & Security and appointed Bineta Diop as the Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on WPS. Furthermore, Article 10 and Article 11 of the Maputo Protocol guarantee the right to peace and calls for the protection of women in conflicts. To mitigate and resolve conflicts on the continent, AU Member States collectively committed in 2013 to "Silence the Guns" by 2020 to ensure that Africa is a peaceful place for its citizens and for generations to come. According to the then AU Chairperson Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, this project/initiative aims to "achieve peace to allow for development across Africa". Furthermore, in 2017, the AU established the Network of African Women in Conflicts Prevention and

¹⁵ UNDP, COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker. <https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/>



Photo credit: UN Women

Mediation (FemWise-Africa). Its aim is “to strengthen the role of women in conflict prevention and mediation as well as peace-making and post-conflict reconstruction and development efforts in the context of the African Peace and Security Architecture.”¹⁶

Violent conflicts throughout the continent remain the biggest threat to its development. Between 1989-2017, Africa was one of the most violent regions globally, and around 27000 people perished between 2013-2012 as a result of the conflicts in the region.¹⁷

Despite this grim reality, some countries are making significant progress in ensuring that women are involved in peace processes, mediation, peacebuilding and reconstruction.

In 2016, the Central African Republic (CAR)¹⁸ army appointed three women to serve as generals and several women to senior positions. In 2019, 46% of the early warning mechanisms supported by the UN Peacekeeping Mission in CAR, United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), consisted of at least 30% women. In addition, in 2016, over 100 women received training in mediation, leadership, and reconciliation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In 2019, 62% of local protection and early warning mechanisms consisted of at least 30% women in the DRC.

¹⁶ A Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks <https://globalwomenmediators.org/fem-wise-africa/>

¹⁷ Institute for Security Studies – “Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020” <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/monograph-203-3.pdf>

¹⁸ United Nations, Women Transforming Peace in Peacekeeping Contexts. https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/dpo_policy_brief_women_transforming_peace_in_peacekeeping_contexts_final.pdf



In Kenya¹⁹, women in service increased from 8% in 2015 to 14% in 2020 and peace committees from 14% in 2013 to 29% in 2018. South Africa's model²⁰ of women mediation forums and networks is a success that other countries have emulated. For example, the Association of African Women Mediators has been working since 2013 to empower women in negotiation techniques in conflict mediation processes.

Namibia's²¹ female representation in the peace and security sector increased in 2017, 23% in Defence, 38% in Police Force and 44% in Correctional Service; the highest levels of women representation in the security sector in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region.

Overview of the implementation of the Maputo Protocol

By 2020, 42 countries ratified/acceded to the Maputo Protocol. However, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Niger, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan have signed but are yet to accede to the Protocol. Egypt and Botswana are yet to sign and accede to the Protocol. Nine countries have submitted their state report under the Maputo Protocol.

There has been tremendous progress in the implementation of the Maputo Protocol by the AU Members States. Most countries have adopted laws/policies to advance women's rights. In addition, the AU launched, in 2018, its Gender Strategy for 2018-2028²², one of its pillars on laws and institutions focused on the Maputo Protocol and the need for universal ratification.

The AU also launched the Maputo Protocol Scorecard and Index (MPSI). The MPSI²³ contributes to the body of tools that seek to enhance accountability,

¹⁹ UN Women, Kenya's Women, Peace and Security Agenda enters next phase. <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2020/05/kenya-press-release-27-may-2020>

²⁰ Jan Marie Fritz, Increasing the number of women mediators in peacemaking initiatives. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339618715_Increasing_the_Number_of_Women_Mediators_in_Peacemaking_Initiatives

²¹ LSE, Namibia National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security. <https://www.lse.ac.uk/women-peace-security/assets/documents/2019/NAP/Namibia-NAP-2019-2024.pdf>

²² African Union, AU Strategy for Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment. https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36195-doc-au_strategy_for_gender_equality_womens_empowerment_2018-2028_report.pdf

²³ African Union, Maputo Protocol Scorecard and index introduced to monitor implementation of Women's Rights. <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20200623/maputo-protocol-scorecard-and-index-introduced-monitor-implementation-womens>



assess the progress on gender equality and women’s empowerment (GEWE) and the implementation of the Maputo Protocol. Moreover, it enhances the accountability of member states on implementing agreed-upon commitments. The MPSI also includes a COVID-19 Response and Recovery Monitoring and Implementation Tool. According to Victoria Maloka²⁴ from African Union Women, Gender and Development Directorate (AUWGDD), the MPSI will be used as a safety measure against women’s rights violations in emergency crises. It will also protect women’s rights in the long run. Thus, it serves as both an emergency and recovery tool.

On November 17 and 18, 2020, SOAWR, in partnership with the African Union, hosted a webinar on the Maputo Protocol. The event reviewed the challenges, gaps and developments towards universal ratification and reporting. AU member states and departments, and CSOs joined the virtual meeting to discuss achievements made and next steps in achieving full implementation of the Protocol.

Despite the great strides, the implementation of the Maputo Protocol is still very slow. Since its adoption in 2003, only 16 countries (Angola, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, DRC, Gambia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritania, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Togo and Zimbabwe) as of March 2021, have submitted their periodic reports to the AU Human Rights Commission²⁵ on the implementation of the Maputo Protocol.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ ACHPR, State Reporting Procedures and Guidelines. <https://www.achpr.org/statereportingproceduresandguidelines>

African Women's Decade 2010-2020

On October 15 2010, the International Day for Rural Women, the AU officially launched the African Women's Decade (AWD) 2010-2020 to advance gender equality by accelerating the implementation of Dakar, Beijing and the AU Assembly Decisions on gender equality and women's empowerment. The Decade emphasises a grassroots approach to development. Leaders have encouraged women and those that advocate for women to take ownership of the Decade and seize it as an opportunity for sharing effective strategies.

The year 2020 marks the 10th anniversary since the Decade was launched. This is an opportunity to take stock of the achievements made during the ten years of the Decade to advance the women's rights agenda and identify gaps and challenges.

Some highlights in the past year of advancements in women's rights on the continent include, but are certainly not limited to:

▶ **Women's political participation**

2019-2020 saw an enormous improvement concerning women in politics²⁶ in the region. Not only is there a more significant number of women in parliament, but an increased number of female speakers in both upper and lower houses. Out of the 75 legislative bodies, 16 are led by women. Africa is the second region worldwide with the largest number of women speakers.

▶ **Women in the labour market**

2020 was the year with the highest number of women board members in Africa: one in four²⁷. The region is now the one with the highest number of women board members, even in comparison to Europe, which has only 23%.

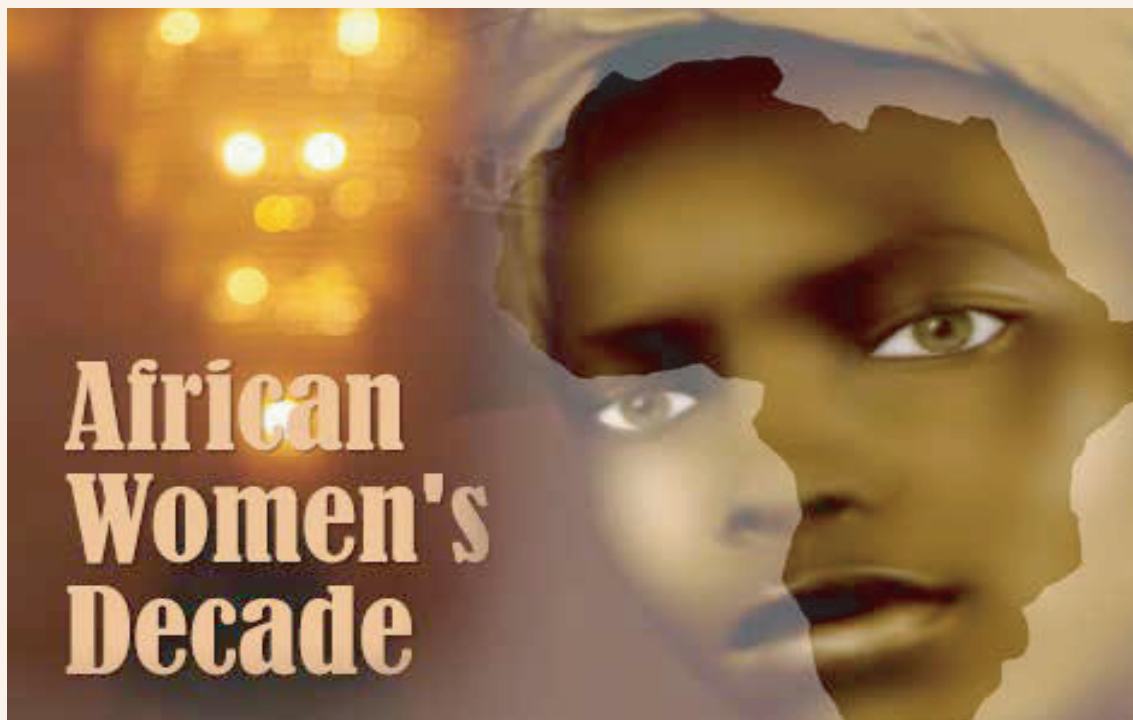
▶ **Youth-led Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights Movement**

- ◆ Malawi²⁸ was marked by a youth-led call for abortion law reform, calling it an essential service during the pandemic and expediting its reform to safe access. Activist Tisungane Sitima has spearheaded the action.

²⁶ World Bank, Africa takes historic lead in female parliamentary speakers. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/nasikiliza/africa-takes-historic-lead-female-parliamentary-speakers>

²⁷ McKinsey Global Institute, The power of parity. <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Featured%20Insights/Gender%20Equality/The%20power%20of%20parity%20Advancing%20womens%20equality%20in%20Africa/MGI-The-power-of-parity%20Advancing%20womens%20equality%20in%20Africa.pdf>

²⁸ IPAS, Malawi. <https://www.ipas.org/where-we-work/malawi/>



- ◆ In Namibia²⁹, the Young Feminist Movement of Namibia and Power Pad Girls spearheaded the movement to SRHR reform and pushed a petition calling for a reform in abortion law.

▶ **Gender-Based Violence bill**

Three new bills were introduced in South Africa³⁰ to tackle GBV. The bills have the purpose of facilitating the process of applying for a protection order, curbing the danger of the police not taking harassment claims seriously, promoting accountability and adequate punitive measures for offenders.

▶ **SRHR bill**

In Kenya³¹, a new bill is being introduced to reform SRHR in the country. The bill not only proposes reforms of laws on abortion also teaches sexual education for adolescents.

▶ **Land Rights**

²⁹ CNN, Abortion is legal in Namibia, but only if a woman is in danger or has been sexually abused. Activists are demanding reform. <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/11/26/africa/namibia-abortion-reform-intl/index.html>

³⁰ Mail Guardian, New laws could prove to be a win for women's rights activists. <https://mg.co.za/opinion/2020-09-19-new-laws-could-be-a-win-for-gender-violence-activists/>

³¹ The Conversation, Kenya is having another go at passing a reproductive rights bill. What's at stake. <https://theconversation.com/kenya-is-having-another-go-at-passing-a-reproductive-rights-bill-whats-at-stake-142387>

Botswana³² passed a law that finally gave women the right to own land. Previously, the 2015 Land Policy prohibited wives from owning land when their husbands already owned land.

Beijing + 25

The year 2020 marked the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA). The Committee on the Status of Women (CSW) carried out a review and appraisal of the implementation of the BPfA. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), in collaboration with UN Women and the African Union Commission (AUC), conducted the fifth review of the implementation of the BPfA on the African continent at the end of 2019. The objective was to assess the progress made and challenges encountered in the implementation of the BPfA and serve as an opportunity for awareness-raising and consultation at the national level with a broad range of stakeholders within and outside government. The review informed the 2020 Global report on Beijing +25, thereby ensuring that the African perspective is well captured.

The current landscape is marked by the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the adoption of Agenda 2063 by African Leaders as the “Africa We Want”. Furthermore, the Beijing+25 review has the purpose of focusing on economic growth while addressing climate change, security, and women’s rights.

A total of 48 country reports were received and analysed. Key findings UNECA³³ identified included:

- ▶ Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education for girls has grown in most countries.
- ▶ Maternal health has improved all over the continent.
- ▶ Advocacy for VAW has improved; however, reporting and monitoring have remained low.
- ▶ Countries have made efforts to integrate more women in security

32 Keletso Thobega, Botswana opts to make land owners of wives with new law, Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-botswana-women-landrights-trfn/botswana-opts-to-make-land-owners-of-wives-with-new-law-idUSKBN2682XF>

33 UNECA, Africa regional review of twenty-five years of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA). <https://www.uneca.org/events/gender-equality-and-empowerment-women/africa-regional-review-twenty-five-years-implementation>



Beijing + 25

Africa Review

forces following UN Security Council resolution 1325.

- ▶ Women continue to face higher unemployment, and the majority of women work remains in the informal sector.
- ▶ Some of the best achievements in the region include the criminalisation of GBV, the right to inheritance, the legal representation of women and, to some extent, legal literacy.
- ▶ Women's representation in the media has also increased.
- ▶ Women's political participation had slow and uneven progress.
- ▶ Data and statistics continue to be essential to improving programs, but there is slow progress in the making.
- ▶ The economic growth the continent has shown has not translated into a decrease in poverty, thus exacerbating gender inequality.

UNECA also identified seven priority actions:

1. The disruption of harmful social, cultural and traditional practices;
2. Sustainable financial resources;
3. Investment in technology-based tools that facilitate data management;
4. Institutional potential to support women's rights;
5. Digital technologies in supporting women's access to services;
6. Coordination of continental strategies;
7. Effective implementation, reporting and accountability of UNSC Resolution 1325.

SOAWR and SIDA Grants

In 2020, Equality Now, the SOAWR Secretariat, received funds from the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) to support the implementation of SOAWR's new Strategic Plan. Funds were then made available to sub-grant SOAWR's members to support individual organisation's initiatives towards implementing the Strategic Plan in the context of the All for Maputo Protocol Initiative.

From July to December 2020, six SOAWR members (MEWC, GLIHD, Kadirat, SIHA, WRAPA, and TLAC & CHR.) successfully implemented interventions to advance the SOAWR vision and its strategic goals as articulated in its Strategic Plan.



Make Every Woman Count

Make Every Woman Count (MEWC) is an African woman-led organisation formed in 2010. MEWC documents and analyses the status of women's rights in Africa through focused research and dissemination of published works in the form of reports and policy briefs to support evidence-based advocacy to uphold women's rights in pursuit of gender equality in Africa.

Since 2011, MEWC has been monitoring and documenting the status of women's rights in Africa to hold African governments accountable to the commitments they made to include gender equality in policy decisions in the context of the AU's African Women's Decade (AWD) (2010-2020) which was launched in 2010 by the AU with a call for actions. MEWC started by providing an assessment of the progress of the AWD and holding governments accountable for their commitments. MEWC has been collecting disaggregated data and published yearly reports on the status and progress of African women and girls' rights and the goals of the AWD since 2011.

MEWC received the SIDA/SOAWR grant to produce a final report on the African Women's Decade that will analyse the progress/gaps made in terms of

securing, realising, and extending the rights for African women and girls during the AWD. It will also highlight trends, challenges, best practices, and areas of contention and make recommendations for the AU Member States to advance the women's rights agenda going forward. MEWC's goal is to transform this report into a valuable tool that can be used by governments, human rights practitioners and organisations to advocate for the advancement of women's rights and gender equality in Africa. The report will be launched in 2021.



Great Lakes Initiative for Human Rights and Development (GLIHD)

GLIHD is a human rights and public interest organisation. Its mission is to contribute towards respect, promotion, and fulfilment of the rights of individuals and groups through human rights monitoring and advocacy of both national and international human rights normative frameworks in Rwanda and the Great Lakes Region, where human rights are relatively respected and enjoyed. It has, since 2015, popularised and advocated for the domestication and implementation of the Maputo Protocol in Rwanda and has been instrumental in advocating for the lifting of the reservation on Article 14(2) (c) of the Protocol in addition to submitting alternative/shadow reports to the African Commission.

Under the generous support from SIDA/SOAWR, GLIHD implemented a project entitled "Empowering communities and engaging stakeholders to decrease stigma and discrimination caused by unsafe abortions among women and girls of reproductive age using the Maputo Protocol". The project's focus was to look into the implementation, knowledge, and enforcement of the Maputo Protocol, as the state has already implemented other steps. SRHR is a central thematic area in the advancement of women's rights. However, it remains an issue in Rwanda, like in many other African countries, due to inflexible social customs/culture, religious beliefs, and low knowledge of the SRHR legal regime. One of the concerns is unsafe abortion practices, where adolescent girls and women put their lives at risk to end unwanted pregnancies. The project goals were to equip health care providers, media personnel, local enforcement agents with Maputo Protocol and embedded rights to comply with the Protocol in their daily work to reduce stigma and discrimination among adolescent girls and women caused by unsafe abortion.



Kadirat

Kadirat was formed in 2004 by a group of Tunisian women activists who have a long experience in civil society activism, who headed other CSO's, and who are members of different national, regional, and international networks. Kadirat focuses on women's rights such as political participation, economic empowerment, ending GBV/ violence against women and girls, and advocating for law reform on gender equality and VAW.

Kadirat's project advocated for the implementation of the Maputo Protocol by Tunisia, which ratified it recently, by analysing laws that need to be amended or adopted in line with the Protocol and thereafter advocating for law reform. They also produced a domestication document to guide the advocacy in Tunisia. Furthermore, Kadirat aimed to grow the regional networks composed of women's rights organisations in Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. Additionally, Kadirat aimed to popularise the Maputo Protocol and train key actors, such as CSOs, magistrates and lawyers.

During its intervention, Kadirat implemented a well-conceived, well-written, comprehensive domestication guide that also contributed to fruitful and informative exchanges with the new SOAWR members from their Sub-region. Three new, very active CSOs: Fondation Pour l'Egalité/ CIDDEF, Atwar Organization for Research and Social Development (Atwar) and Jossour from Algeria, Libya and Morocco, respectively, have joined SOAWR and have therefore strengthened the North African cluster.



Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa Network (SIHA)

Since its inception, SIHA has sought to encourage grassroots women-led civil society and groups throughout the region to generate inclusive solutions to gender equality issues.

With SIDA/SOAWR funding, SIHA implemented a project that sought to take advantage of the ongoing transition in Sudan after the December 2018 Revolution to sensitise and advocate for increased implementation of international frameworks for gender equality. The project developed

a manual on the Maputo Protocol and CEDAW and undertook awareness and capacity enhancement webinars to support women in understanding the issues at stake, discovering and valuing their own experience, skills, knowledge, and strengths and increase their confidence in demanding their rights. In addition, SIHA intends to leverage the experiences of WROs in Djibouti, Egypt, Somalia and Somaliland to provide the diffusion of different perspectives in the transition process and women's rights campaigns.

The grant contributed to building a critical mass of women's rights activists who can argue against the demonisation of regional and international protocols on gender equality. More so, the project succeeded in increasing the conceptual and technical capacity of 84.9% of the women's activists taking part in the project.



Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA)

Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA) is a leading voice in the advocacy and campaign against VAW in all its ramifications. It served as the foundation Secretariat for a 65-member Coalition, Legislative Advocacy Coalition on Violence Against Women (LACVAW), for over ten years and remains a member of its Board. In addition, WRAPA engages in legislative advocacy for legal reforms and public education on international law. For example, it successfully campaigned and advocated for Nigeria's ratification of the Maputo Protocol leading to ratification in 2004.

WRAPA's project with SIDA/SOAWR funding used a Multi-sectoral Approach (MSA) to increase and amplify the demand for the domestication and implementation of the Maputo Protocol, the Gender and Equal Opportunities (GEO) Act and the Violence Against Persons Protection (VAPP) Act in Plateau and Kaduna States, respectively, in compliance with the African Women's Protocol at both national and regional levels.

With its intervention, WRAPA was able to increase awareness and knowledge of the VAPP and the GEO law amongst state and non-state actors. The organisation also developed a state-specific strategy to advance the effective

implementation of the existing model laws to ensure coordinated and result-oriented actions. As a result, a state-led steering committee established that it would continue to sustain the results achieved and serve as champions of the project. Furthermore, due to the increased scale of awareness-raising, there is evidence of receptivity of the laws at all levels in the project state; more so, there is now a commitment of high-profile public officials and traditional rulers to advance actions towards the effective implementation of model laws in the project states.



Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre to end violence against women (TLAC) & Centre for Human Rights (CHR)

Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre to end violence against women (TLAC) is a registered non-governmental organisation (NGO) that was established in 1996 to promote and defend the rights of women, promote women's freedom from violence and access to effective quality services.

The CHR, based at the Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria, is both an academic department and a non-governmental organisation. It works towards human rights education in Africa, a greater awareness of human rights, the wide dissemination of publications on human rights in Africa, and the improvement of the rights of women, people living with HIV, indigenous peoples, sexual minorities and other disadvantaged or marginalised persons or groups across the continent.

The project with SIDA/SOAWR funding aimed to promote state accountability towards fulfilling its state obligations under the Maputo Protocol. This was done in three ways: a) conducting an audit of all laws in South Africa that have been enacted to prevent and respond to VAWG to assess the level of domestication and implementation of the Maputo Protocol in a bid to inform advocacy work targeting state and non-state actors; b) carrying out a capacity enhancement of CSOs working in the women's rights sector on the substantive provisions of the Maputo Protocol and advocate for its use at various national, regional and continental platforms in Malawi and South Africa; and c) carrying out a capacity enhancement and technical support to CSOs working in the women's rights sector on the state reporting obligation and their role of shadow reporting in Malawi (scheduled for review by the African Commission).

SOAWR Vision

African women fully enjoy their rights as provided for under the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

SOAWR Mission

Hold African Union Member States accountable and enhance partnership to fulfil their obligations under the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa; and encourage other stakeholders to actively apply the Protocol for the promotion and protection of the rights of women.

SOAWR Core Values

1. Equality and non-discrimination

We believe that the full implementation of the Maputo Protocol is key to addressing the patriarchal and sexist character of institutions, norms and governing values in order to realize full equality and end discrimination against women and girls and realise full equality.

2. Solidarity and partnership

We believe in solidarity as a means to building an effective transformative movement for change in Africa. We therefore envision SOAWR as a collective force for action for women's freedom and rights. We shall act together and support the struggles and initiatives of women Rights champions and organizations across the continent and with vertical and horizontal partners of women's rights across the world.

3. Freedom and dignity

We believe that freedom is central to social justice. We are a force for African women's freedom; we are driven by the principle of defending and upholding women's voice, agency, dignity and rights across the African continent. We therefore envision SOAWR as a collective force for action for women's freedom and rights.

4. Diversity and inclusivity

We believe in the diversity of women and their unique strengths and insights. We also recognise that women's intersectional identities may interact to intensify violations and we work towards eliminating such discrimination. We believe in holding each other accountable to the indivisibility of women's rights and we believe in the importance of courage to confront patriarchy. Therefore, we consciously work in the margins of society and work with and for women in the margins.

5. Commitment and accountability

We believe that progress towards a continent where women's rights and dignity are secured will only flow from action by networked, committed and inspired women and women rights champions who are guided by high standards of accountability. Without the passion and commitment and accountability internally and by Member States, transformation will be slow to achieve.

We are in Solidarity for African Women's Rights



A force for Freedom


Mouvement de Solidarité pour les droits des Femmes Africaines



*Une force pour la
liberté*

I support the
Maputo Protocol
because it protects
Womens rights in
Africa.


Mekdelawit
Tsfaye
Equality Now

A young woman with dark hair pulled back, smiling warmly at the camera. She is holding a white rectangular sign with both hands. The background is a lush garden with various green plants, including a large tree with feathery leaves. The entire image is framed by a thick orange border.

I need the Maputo
Protocol for healthy
women and sustainable
development.

**SOLIDARITY FOR
AFRICAN WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

A force for freedom



**MOUVEMENT DE SOLIDARITÉ
POUR LES DROITS
DES FEMMES AFRICAINES**

Une force pour la liberté

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