

DDG launches Women Leadership Program in the Sahel

In the Sahel, the security sector is a male-dominated one, where the common argument against inclusion is that female expertise in security-related topics does not exist, thus excluding women from important decisions that will impact them. That is why DDG joined forces with WANEP, the West African Network for Peacebuilding, to launch a Women Leadership Program to strengthen the voice of women from the civil society in the governance of the security sector in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. This project aims to establish a regional pool of women who will be empowered with expertise and access to engage in security decisions affecting their communities and set the tone for more inclusive security governance.

Despite an extensive legal and policy framework in support of civil society and women's inclusion in the security sector governance in all three countries, a culture of exclusion persists, depriving national policies of the precious input that a diverse pool of citizens and public service users may provide. The persistence of cultural norms that excludes civilians in general, and women in particular, from security decision-making results in laws, policies and practices that fail to acknowledge the full range of security concerns affecting communities – women as well as men, boys as well as girls – leaving extensive domains of risks, vulnerabilities and concerns faced by the less power unaddressed.



On International Women's Day 2019, DRC Regional Director for West Africa, the EU's Ambassador to Senegal and the EU's Director for Foreign Policy Instruments opened the experience-sharing event that kicked off the Women's Leadership Programme. (Dakar, March 2019)

To address this challenge, DDG and WANEP have built on cross-sectorial expertise to design an innovative joint project which aims to empower the next generation of Sahelian women from diverse backgrounds, with the necessary knowledge, skills and access to break down the barriers that keep them out of security governance, and enable them advocate for and contribute to a security sector that equally addresses the needs of women, men, boys and girls. These experts will be provided with the tools, training and mentoring to make a substantial contribution to security issues affecting Sahelian communities, thus challenging the exclusionary stereotypes against women in the security sector, encouraging more inclusive security governance practices, and providing younger generations with role-models who will help them to overcome traditional barriers to women's participation in security issues.



Here the Burkina Faso Minister of Women, National Solidarity, Family and Humanitarian Action is pictured with DDG and WANEP female project leaders at the national launch of the project. (Ouagadougou, August 2019)



In Mali, the project was launched by a broad symposium involving representatives of over 30 women’s organisations from across the country, as well as women in leadership positions within national institutions such as the National Human Rights Commission or the National Assembly. In keeping with the project’s iterative and participatory build-up, their input was key in adjusting the project strategy to best reflect the lessons learnt of participant’s life-long engagement. (Bamako, July 2019.)

This three-year project, titled “Women Leadership Program for an Inclusive Governance of the Security Sector in the Sahel (Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger)”, was first launched at DRC’s Dakar Regional Office with an experience-sharing event that honored leading West African civil society women on International Day of Women’s Rights, 8 March 2019. The event brought together the broader humanitarian and development community, with the European Ambassador to Senegal and the EU’s Director for Foreign Policy Instruments, Ms Hilde Hardeman, in attendance.

Later this summer, the program was officially launched in all three countries of implementation – Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso- enabling a collaborative analysis of the barriers that prevent women’s participation and leadership in the sector and active participation of local women’s organisations in enriching the project’s approach and strategy with their feedback and experience.

In October 2019, the program launched entered its next phase, welcoming applications from hundreds of Malian, Nigerien and Burkinabe women with no particular security background, but a fierce commitment to engage in this sector and help improve the security policies and practices that affect their communities. This application call was open from the 25th of October to the 30th of November, and the selection process will spread over December, with the first training of the selected pool of women scheduled early next year.