interpeace

Fala di Mindjer*

The voices of women

Beyond Social Pressure and Institutional Barriers:

The Role of Women in Decision-Making in Guinea-Bissau

United Nations
Peacebuilding

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Foreword and acknowledgements

This report developed by Voz di Paz - Initiative for Peacebuilding and Interpeace wants to show the true picture of women involved in decision-making in Guinea-Bissau. It aims to contribute to a better understanding of women's situation in this domain, and to document the issue in all its complexity and comprehensiveness, complementing previous analyses.

The participative and inclusive approach of this research offers new perspectives based on an intense series of interactions with a diverse set of key actors, including participants who either create, reproduce, fight against or suffer as a result of the limited participation of women in decision-making. The interviews provided the population of Guinea-Bissau with a unique opportunity to speak out, engage with each other, analyse and look for tentative solutions about this topic that concerns all Bissau-Guineans. It aims to function as a mirror reflecting various aspects of the actual situation, with their limitations and possibilities.

It was a long road that led to this result. We want to express our gratitude to all those stakeholders who contributed to its success:

- The Gender Promotion Initiative of the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), which generously sponsored the project, as well as the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) in New York and particularly the PBF office in Guinea-Bissau for its unconditional support during the various phases of the project;

- The Government of Guinea-Bissau, through the Ministry of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, in its capacity as co-chair of the Executive Committee for the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund in Guinea-Bissau, and the Ministry of Solidarity, Family and Social Cohesion, for supporting this initiative;

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that partner with Voz di Paz, for their work of diffusing and contributing to the dissemination of the key messages of the present report to foster a true change of mentality in society;

- The participants in the national consultations, the discussion groups and the National Conference, for their availability and ideas, without which it would not have been possible to collect this amount of information and bring it to the attention of the population and the authorities of the country.

In name of the Voz di Paz and Interpeace teams:

Filomena Mendes Mascarenhas Tipote, *Director of Voz di Paz*

Anne Moltès, *Regional Director for West Africa of Interpeace*

Our sincere thanks, in the name of our institutions and in the name of Peace. We hope that this report will be a tool of reflection and a reference for future efforts.

Contents

To navigate to a specific section of this report, click on its title in this List of Contents. To return to the List of Contents, click on the page number

List of boxes and figures

ILLUSTRATED SUMMARY

Visual synthesis of the key messages

What to remember to better understand the dynamics around women's participation in decision-making spheres

1 "Politics has a man's face"

2 The road to success usually **leads to marriage**, not politics

3 **The frustrating and discouraging** obstacles to women's social and political ascent
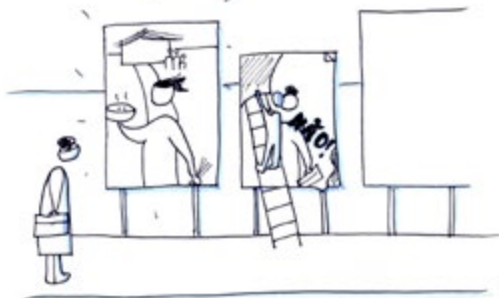
4 Beyond education, **self-esteem and self-confidence** are at the heart of women's political formation

Chapter I: Social pressure

5 The entourage, stepping **stone for the social** and political rise of women
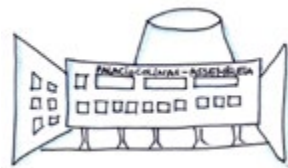
National Popular Assembly

Bantabás in the regions

Amura Fortress - Army Chief of Staff

10 Decision makers, drivers of **inclusive change**

9 **The culture of masculinity devalues women in the DSF**
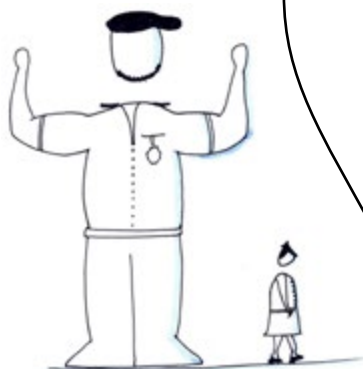
8 **Women in the Defence and Security Forces** are viewed as **illegitimate**

Chapter III: Defense and Security Forces

Chapter II: Political game

6 **Women's political mobilization does not** necessarily **lead to inclusion** in decision-making

7 **Many militant women, but few political leaders**

These visuals are inspired by bikablo© visualization tecnhiques : www.bikablo.com
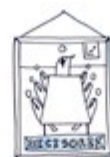
KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key messages

What should be kept in mind to better understand the dynamics affecting the role of women in decision-making

Politics is not considered a pathway to success for women

1. "Politics has a man's face"

It can be observed that both men and women tend to value and act in accordance with gender stereotypes. Women are accordingly limited to roles in the household, while men are valued in the public and political spheres. A social preference for men in decision-making bodies is particularly reinforced by women themselves, who accept and contribute to the strengthening of their role away from decision-making. Many consider it to be their role to support men in their way up, to their own detriment. This submissive attitude of self-exclusion is highly valued in society, mirroring the complexity of gender relations and their transposition in all domains of society, including in decision-making.

2. The road to success generally leads to marriage, not to politics

The success model of a woman depends on the good functioning of her marriage, which might be questioned as a result of her participation in politics. From an early age, the woman is taught to believe that she needs a man to take care of her. Sometimes, she sees marriage as an escape to a better future, an opportunity to find her way in life. According to this model, the role of the man as breadwinner and head of the family prevails and determines the success of the marriage. The risk of losing her marriage generally deters women from entering politics and assuming a decision-making position, given what society expects from them.

Women's weak self-esteem makes it even more difficult to reach decision-making positions
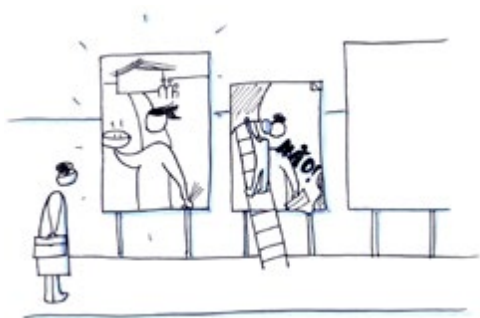
3. The frustrating and discouraging social and political ascension of women

The social pressure exerted on and by women leads to conformism and frustration. Women are only valued for qualities that are imposed on them by society, such as being altruistic, which creates an idealized picture of women. Social pressure makes them less willing to go against this picture. If a woman still decides to counter this pressure, she will fall victim of a vast campaign of defamation, many times initiated by women themselves. The lack of solidarity among women is explained by feelings of low self-esteem, which impedes them from valuing other women. Being heavily dependent on her family and community, a woman is seldom willing to risk losing her social capital to enter politics, a pathway without guarantees of success.

4. Not only education, but also self-esteem and self-confidence determine the social and political rise of women

It is commonly believed that a lack of education is the main cause for the exclusion of women from decision-making. It can be shown that in some cases, low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence contribute to the weak participation of women in this domain. Moreover, there are plenty of examples of men with little education occupying decision-making positions. This illustrates that the source of the problem can be found in the existing models of education, either formal (school) or informal (parents, community). These models do little to stimulate girls and young women to develop the self-esteem needed for their political rise.

A woman's social environment and ethnic traditions represent key opportunities for the social and political rise of women

5. The social environment, a stepping stone for the social and political rise of women

The social environment is considered an important factor influencing how women are valued in society, inasmuch as it offers them the opportunities and skills to initiate their social and political rise. This can be observed in those traditions in which the role of women is highly valued, such as the Bijagó ethnic group, which is ruled according to a matriarchal system. The Papel and Manjaca ethnic groups offer another example of women playing an important social role, as they are the guardians of the family lines.[1] The social environment, which is highly influenced by ethnic practices and where community members play a major role in their valuing of and support to women, represents a key opportunity to influence sociocultural practices that are anchored in society.

Women have a political role in the electoral process, but they rarely participate in decision-making

6. The political mobilization of women does not necessarily lead to their inclusion in the decision-making process

It is a widely held view that women play an important role in politics, due to their active engagement during electoral campaigns. However, in reality, it can be observed that this

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1   In most patriarchal traditions, the benefits of descent (heritage, throne, labour) are transmitted by the father, who is the guardian of the family lines. Among the Papel and Manjaca ethnic groups, these benefits are transmitted by the mothers, because they possess the true biological line that certifies to whom the child belongs, as it was the mothers who gave birth to them. These traditions represent an advantage for the woman in terms of family wealth, as all children from the family are due to work and support their mother's family (uncles, grand-parents), and not their father's family.

engagement – giving women responsibility in all activities related to logistics and culture – is limited to supportive roles that seldom give them access to decision-making. This phenomenon shows the existence of a gap between perceptions about women's participation, and their actual influence in terms of decision-making.
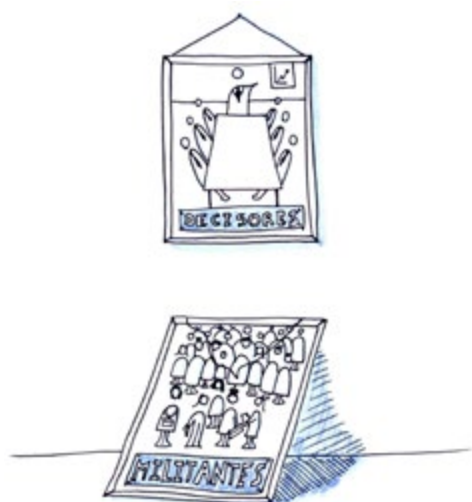
7. Many women activists, but few female political leaders

The formal structures of the political parties, which provide few opportunities to rise to the levels of decision-making, are influenced by informal practices. Despite a significant and recognized female representation at the grassroot bases of political parties, women are not included or encouraged to form part of the decision-making structures. The inherited political practices are highly influenced by the dominant patterns, and their formal structures lack the necessary awareness about the importance of integrating women in the decision-making processes of political parties.

The Defence and Security Forces are the domain of men

8. Women in the Defence and Security Forces are seen as illegitimate

The Defence and Security Forces (DSF) lack objective criteria and transparent processes, both for entering and for getting promoted. This contributes to informal practices linked to patronage and nepotism, among others, which can be observed among both men and women. However, in the collective imaginary, man is naturally associated with the DSF, given the volunteer system used during the recruitment process. As a result, women are seen as being weaker, as intruders – as being only able to enter "through the window", which means, through informal processes. The link between formality and men on the one hand, and informality and women on the other, strengthens the social belief according to which women in the DSF do not comply with their obligations of exemplarity as society expects from them.

9. The culture of masculinity depreciates women in the Defence and Security Forces

Women in the Defence and Security Forces are often depreciated and excluded from decision-making, because they are said to "talk too much", not to be able to keep secrets or because they would be physically weaker. This perception, influenced by the strong culture of masculinity reigning within the DSF, discourages many women, causing them to give up on their dreams of climbing up to attain higher ranks. Such derogatory behaviour is also caused by a lack of inclusive structures and internal policies, which would value women's contributions within the DSF.

Power structures as vectors for change

10. Decision-makers, enablers of change and more inclusive reforms

Politicians, both men and women, can only implement reforms that aim to promote gender equality if they seek to better understand the gendered needs of the population. The debates around the effective implementation of a gender policy, which should officially be done through a revision of laws (the framework law of political parties and the electoral law) and the adoption of a gender equality law (quota law), shows the limits of what reforms can and cannot achieve. The success of such reforms should be guided by individuals who act as enablers, making sure that this process is inclusive and represents the population as a whole.

Best practices and recommendations

How to improve the implementation of solutions to promote the role of women in decision-making ?

The participative analysis carried out by Voz di Paz and Interpeace in Guinea-Bissau resulted in some key findings about the role of women in decision-making. Apart from the obstacles identified, the population also provided some pathways to solutions that could contribute to solving the problem. **These *pathways to solutions* – concrete and elaborate propositions developed by the population – can be found at the end of each chapter of the present report and are summarized in the box below.**[2]

Box 0.1 | Overview of the pathways to solutions, per chapter

Pathways to solutions from Chapter I – Social pressure

1. Create an intergenerational dialogue framework in order to define a vision for a more inclusive society

2. Value the role of traditional chiefs and legitimate leaders in the search for solutions

3. Establish a dissemination system to spread information about how the inclusion of women can help create a more peaceful society

4. Value, as part of the formal education system, the role models of successful women in politics and the DSF

5. Develop and encourage initiatives for artistic expression valuing the role of women in decision-making

6. Encourage the population to take responsibility for the promotion of gender equality in the context of peacebuilding

7. Learn from best practices regarding the transformation of the role of women in West Africa

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2   The concluding section of each chapter contains some pathways solutions, including tools and ideas for action, as proposed by the population.

8. Ensure follow-up and community support for women

Pathways to solutions from Chapter II – The political game

1. Use advocacy to engage policy-makers in the endeavour to increase women's participation in decision-making

2. Establish a monitoring system for political progress favouring the participation of women in decision-making

3. Strengthen the capacities of political leaders with regard to gender for peacebuilding

Pathways to solutions from Chapter III – Defence and Security Forces

1. Define a clear and inclusive juridical framework, taking into account the concerns of women within the DSF regarding their inclusion in decision-making

2. Improve the communication around the inclusion of women in the DSF

Apart from looking at the solutions, it is also important to consider the practices and processes that will allow for their effective implementation. As a matter of fact, the issue of the role of women in decision-making is complex, and often faces resistance and misunderstandings. How can such a situation be tackled? For this, it is fundamental to look beyond the solutions themselves, and to consider *how* they can be implemented.

This section presents some best practices and recommendations that aim to guide decision-makers and stakeholders in a reflection about *how* to implement solutions in a more effective and sustainable way. Certain processes, even if they seem to be trivial, are fundamental for their contribution to the effectiveness of peacebuilding processes. The elements presented in the non-exhaustive list below aim to guide the reflection of the reader in the design or the implementation of initiatives.

The best practices and recommendations are based on concrete examples from this participative analysis. They are meant for each actor wanting to contribute to this issue, from political actors and those in charge of reforms, to the DSF, donors, organizations representing domestic and international civil society, agencies of the United Nations, as well as every Bissau-Guinean citizen.

1. Define, through a participative process, what *gender for peacebuilding* means

Illustration: The interviews revealed a significant lack of understanding among the population, of all socio-professional categories, regarding the meaning of gender for peacebuilding. Many statements confused the words "woman" and "gender", which illustrated that there are **misconceptions and misunderstandings with regard to the concept of gender and its relevance in the context of peacebuilding**, a field that is also largely unknown. For the individuals consulted, it seems to be unclear how the rise of women in decision-making contributes to a more peaceful society.

Argument: In order to promote gender for peacebuilding, it is necessary to clearly define the underlying concepts, firstly during the design phase of the initiatives, and then during the entire implementation of the action, together with the participants and beneficiaries. Questions like: *"What is the meaning of gender and peacebuilding in the context of Guinea-Bissau? How are these concepts understood according to local habits and customs? What words would you use to communicate a message about gender and peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau Creole? What is the relation between gender, peace and peacebuilding?"* can seem trivial, but are important to bring the variety of interpretations to the surface and to establish a common understanding of these concepts.

Recommendation: For any action having to do with gender for peacebuilding, it is essential to define the key concepts involved, and above all to **involve the participants in this process**. Defining what is meant by gender for peacebuilding is a crucial first step to ensure a better understanding and ownership among participants, allowing the intended change to take root.

2. Identify and strengthen existing capacities
for promoting women's involvement in decision-making
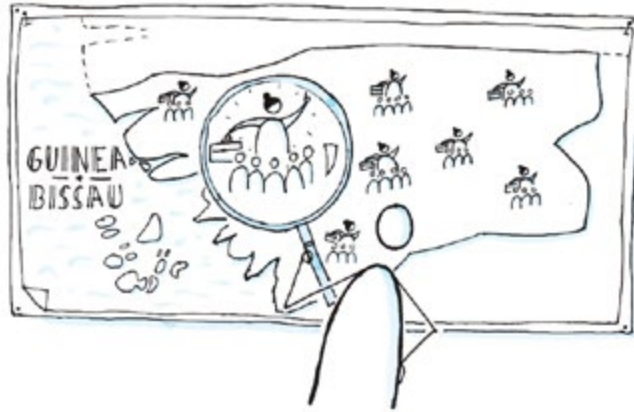
Illustration: This report shows the existence of several **positive factors** that contribute or have the potential to contribute to the advancement of women in decision-making. Women's networks at the local level in the *Mandjuandades*[3] or in political parties are concrete examples. Some ethnic groups in Guinea-Bissau have practices and habits that are favourable to the advancement of women, which constitutes a base for their rise into decision-making (see *Key Message 5* of this report). The stories of women who succeeded in making a career in politics or in the DSF also illustrate that the participation of women in these domains is possible and positive.

Argument: There are several endogenous capacities present in Guinea-Bissau that could help promote the role of women in decision-making, but they are often unknown or undervalued. To point out and strengthen these capacities does not only help save resources, but also allows these capacities to be valued and helps them to expand.

Recommendation: In the first phases of launching a project to promote the role of women in decision-making, it is highly recommended to **map existing capacities** in the intervention zones. It is an important step for the success of an initiative to meticulously map the communities, relations and key resource persons involved in the advancement of gender for peacebuilding at the local level.

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3   Traditional gatherings where women play a socially accepted and valued role.

3. Consider the key actors and the strategies that lead to the intended change, in order to contribute to making the population responsible for the promotion of the role of women in decision-making

Illustration: In discussions about the advancement of women in decision-making, it can be noted that a frequent question is "from where" the solutions should come: from the citizens (changing their mentalities), from civil society (strengthening its capacities), or from the State (making laws). The consultations revealed that **it is easiest to point fingers at others** and say that the change should come from them. It can also be observed that few people want to be responsible for the promotion of the role of women in decision-making.

Argument: The central argument in the debate is not contained in the question of *"who should take responsibility to promote the participation of women in decision-making?"*. It is necessary to ask questions about *"the different levels of responsibility and engagement"*, or about *"the groups of individuals or institutions (citizens, civil society, State representatives) involved in the implementation of the solution"*. Such questions point at the necessity to identify the key actors who produce a change, and the ways to do so.

Recommendation: For each action planned, it is essential to identify, 1) **the intended change**; 2) the actors that produce such change; and 3) the most appropriate strategies to produce the intended change. There are several methodological tools that can be used to define, test and evaluate the change over time, such as the *Theory of Change*.[4]

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4   To know more about the Theory of Change and peacebuilding methodologies, see the materials of *Reflecting on Peace Practice*, by CDA Collaborative.

4. Identify and mitigate the risks of working on the issue of the place of women in a more peaceful society
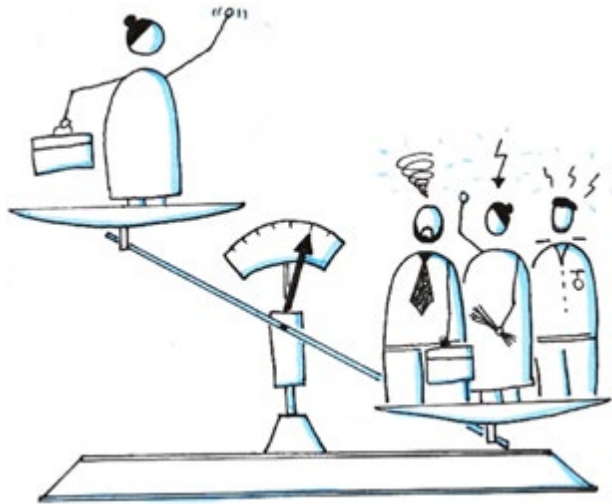
Illustration: During the consultations, many men and women showed signs of **resistance and reluctance** when confronted with the question of promoting the participation of women in decision-making. Many people admitted being afraid that promoting the participation of women would change the social order and eliminate the traditions and traditional roles they valued. Men, in particular, expressed negative feelings regarding a change that would take their role in society away from them. Some women, who already had a vulnerable position in their communities, also expressed doubt regarding the real benefits that a change would bring, as such a change could also lead to even more exclusion and make their situation even more vulnerable.

Argument: Promoting the participation and the inclusion of women in decision-making is a complex issue and leads to reflections about the place of men and women in society. Perceptions about the consequences can create real risks for the implementation of an action, and lead to increased vulnerabilities, resistance and, in some cases, violence.

Recommendation: In order to mitigate the risks related to the promotion of women's participation, it is imperative to conduct an in-depth analysis of each risk of the proposed action, most notably in the sociocultural domain. It is also recommended to **make it explicit to each target group** – men and women separately, according to their age groups – **what the implications of the action** (and of the intended change) **would be for each risk identified**. Given the profoundness of the issue at hand, it also becomes necessary to elaborate mitigation strategies that include key actors, to be identified for their influence in the social order, such as traditional chiefs and religious leaders.

5. Keep the *success factors* in mind to safeguard the impact of actions aiming to promote the participation of women in decision-making

Illustration: According to the individuals consulted, **the actions** that aim to promote the participation of women in decision-making **can suffer from certain shortcomings**, most notably the frequent use of language that is inadequate for the audience. The lack of follow-up mechanisms also constitutes an impediment for the success of proposed actions, as it does not allow for a real monitoring and rooting of the intended change. The lack of spaces of dialogue and feedback where participants can contribute to the evaluation of the actions was mentioned as another obstacle for the creation of an open relationship between implementers and beneficiaries.

Argument: Some practical factors and aspects are important to ensure the ownership of the intended change. If these are not understood or taken into account by the implementers, this could render the action ineffective.

Recommendation: Before launching an action in order to promote the role of women in decision-making, it is necessary to **become aware of the *success factors*** that contribute to the efficacy of an action, namely 1) the recognition of the specific sociocultural dynamics of each region, which could influence the behaviour that will be adopted by the actions' personnel (appropriate clothing and language); 2) the inclusion of representative and diverse participants; 3) the implementation of a monitoring plan to ensure an adequate follow-up; and 4) the inclusion of spaces for evaluation and feedback, which guarantee the protection of the anonymity of the participants.

INTRODUCTION

Consultation in the Biombo region, 30 March 2017.
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Introduction

Are Bissau-Guinean women really excluded? They are largely absent from decision-making in the majority of formal and informal institutions of power. Women occupy few seats in Parliament, and only represent a minimal percentage of the Army and the higher ranks of the Defence and Security Forces. The under-representation of women in decision-making is almost systematic.

The low participation of women in decision-making, most notably in politics, is a problem that is still extensively discussed at the international level. Addressing this issue is a priority for a large number of countries, as attested by the 193 member States of the United Nations, when they adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Goal 5.5.[5] Aside from being a priority issue at the global level, the subject is particularly critical in the context of peacebuilding, where the role of women has also been widely acknowledged, most notably by the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, in 2000.[6]

The lack of equality and equity in decision-making has numerous consequences, which have been documented by a growing number of actors worldwide. Several case studies have provided input for a broad discussion on the issue. This report hopes not only to contribute to this discussion, but before all to propose an alternative interpretation of the problem, looking at the issue from a peacebuilding perspective.

The participatory approach of the study conducted by Interpeace and Voz di Paz allowed in-depth and critical analysis of the role of women in decision-making in Guinea-Bissau, based on societal concerns. *Fala di Mindjer* – the present report – offers an extensive reading that could support future actions aiming to contribute to the inclusion of women in decision-making.

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5   United Nations, "Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"
     https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld.
6   United Nations (2000), "United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security",
     www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/cdrom/documents/Background_Paper_Africa.pdf.

i. Current Situation

Evidence

The history of Guinea-Bissau has been marked, since the struggle for independence, by female figures who have left a powerful impression on society. The women who contributed and got involved alongside men in the liberation of Guinea-Bissau have been recognized for their role during the struggle. They are considered an honour for the country, and are often remembered in the same way as the national heroes.

After the Declaration of Independence, few women have continued to play a prominent role at the highest levels of decision-making in the country. It can be seen that **women were and are still under-represented** in these areas, above all in the National People's Assembly (ANP), where they have always formed a minority, as shown in Table A. The pattern is similar, in the Government, political parties and the Defence and Security Forces.[7]

Table A | Number and percentage of women in legislature since 1973[8]

Legislative Term	Number of Women	Number of Men	% of Women
1973-1976 (I)	10	110	12%
1976-1984 (II)	19	131	23%
1984-1989 (III)	22	128	26%
1989-1994 (IV)	30	120	36%
1994-1999 (V)	9	91	11%
1999-2004 (VI)	7	95	8%
2004-2008 (VII)	13	87	16%
2008-2012 (VIII)	11	89	13%
2014-2018 (IX)	14	88	17%

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7   In the Government led by Prime Minister Umaro Sissoco Embaló (November 2016 – January 2018), out of 32 members only 4 were women. Source: Presidential Decree on the Formation of the Government, 2016. In the Armed Forces, only 4 women reached the position of Colonel. In 2008, the military contingent consisted for only 3.93% of women, and in the Security Forces there were only 2 women with the rank of Colonel. Source: Military Census (2008), Republic of Guinea-Bissau.

8   GODINHO GOMES Patrícia (2013), *Na senda da luta pela paz e igualdade. O contributo das mulheres guineense*s, Buala, available at: www.buala.org/pt/mukanda/na-senda-da-luta-pela-paz-e-igualdade-o-contributo-das-mulheres-guineenses#footnote27_glozrn5.

In spite of their weak representation in decision-making, **it is important to recognize the influence and the various roles played by women at the different levels (social, political and cultural) of decision-making**, even if these roles are not valued and taken into account.

During election periods, women do not only vote, but in some cases also run as candidates and play a remarkable role in the mobilization of the masses for political activities and for voting. In the political parties, networks and associations, at the local as well as the national level, the presence and influence of women is notable and recognized.

The present report aims, among other things, to reveal the inequalities in treatment and opportunities between men and women, at various levels. It also intends to provide evidence of the considerable obstacles that impair the participation of women in decision-making, both in absolute numbers in the high-level bodies of decision-making (ANP, Government, Defence and Security Forces) and in qualitative terms, in order to understand why women, in spite of their important roles in society and politics, are still facing limits and obstacles in their rise to decision-making positions.

Consequences

The low levels of participation of women in decision-making have several consequences. With women being excluded from the processes of designing and defining the national governance objectives, the policies that have been elaborated and implemented by different governments over the years did not have the intended results, as they did not take the needs and particular interests of this important segment of the population into account.

This failure had the following consequences:

- the marked exclusion of women from decision-making mechanisms, on the local as well as national level;

- the persistence of certain harmful practices against women;

- the underutilization of the competences of women by society;

- the exacerbation, in some cases, of sexist behaviour that can lead to social and political violence, which often contributes to the weakening of the social fabric.

These implications also represent a non-compliance with the principles of equity and equality of rights, embodied in the Constitution of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, and other rules that guarantee a democratic rule of law. Moreover, they form a risk for social peace and make them an example of the social injustice that Bissau-Guineans have identified as one of the root causes of conflict.[9]

9   According to the results of the consultations in *The Causes of Conflict in Guinea-Bissau* and the *Vision of Women Leaders for Peace and Development in Guinea-Bissau*, published by Voz di Paz in 2008-2009 and 2013 respectively, social injustice and exclusion are among the main sources of conflict and social tension.

Taking this into account, it can be concluded that the active participation of women in decision-making can engender significant and positive changes in society. Involving women in decision-making therefore constitutes a central element for peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau.

Box 0.2 | Conceptual elements: decision-making, gender and peacebuilding

The issue of the role of women in decision-making is based on various concepts that should be identified. The idea is not to reach a general consensus, but to make suggestions for elementary definitions that are considered to be essential in the context of the present report.

Decision-making | Decision-making is perceived to be the space where important decisions are made that have an impact on society or on specific groups or communities. *Participation* and *access* to decision-making refer to the passage of a situation of *exclusion* to a situation of *inclusion*. *Influence* and an *active role* in decision-making refer to an active state in which a change can be achieved. All these concepts are critical for decision-making.

Gender | Gender is a social construct that socially defines men and women, with their behaviours and their determined functions in society. Gender equality means not only equality of opportunities regardless of gender, but above all the recognition of singularities and the appreciation for the social and cultural contributions of both men and women.[10]

Peacebuilding | Peacebuilding is a transformative process that enables societies' capacities to be strengthened to manage conflicts in non-violent ways. It is an inclusive and transversal process that requires the engagement of various actors at all levels of society, working together to build a more peaceful society, irrespective of the origins of tensions.[11]

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10 Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (2001). "Gender Mainstreaming: Strategy for Promoting Gender Equality", www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/factsheet1.pdf.

11 Interpeace, "What is Peacebuilding": www.interpeace.org/what-we-do/what-is-peacebuilding/.

ii. Methodology

In an effort to contribute to peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau, Voz di Paz and Interpeace launched a project seeking to promote the role of women in decision-making and in the peaceful management of conflict. This project consists of a participative and representative analysis of the obstacles and opportunities for women's participation in decision-making, as well as awareness-raising and advocacy activities based on the results of the consultations.

This project, entitled *"Towards a New Balance in Guinea-Bissau: Creating Spaces for a True Participation of Women in the Peaceful Management of Conflicts and in Governance"* is implemented by Voz di Paz - Initiative for Peacebuilding and its partner Interpeace, in Guinea-Bissau. It has been funded by the Gender Promotion Initiative of the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund. The project has also collaborated with Bissau-Guinean State institutions that promote the advancement of women as part of their mandate, such as the Institute for Woman and Child of the Ministry of Family, Social Cohesion and Women, which also sponsored the project.

This project aims to contribute to the National Policy for the Promotion of Gender Equality and Equity and reinforce the three axes of the national strategic plan of the Government named "Terra Ranka", namely: the promotion of reconciliation and national dialogue, the protection of human rights and the promotion of participative development.[12]

This report, the central element of the project, aims to present new perspectives on the situation of women in governance, in order to reveal the complexity and comprehensiveness of the topic, and to complement previous analyses. It is meant for stakeholders involved in the promotion of women's participation in governance in Guinea-Bissau, but also for all those who want to improve their understanding of the challenges and possible solutions regarding the exclusion of women in governance.

Enabling greater ownership through a participative approach

The first open consultations about the participation of women in decision-making in the history of Guinea-Bissau took place in October 2017, in the context of this project. Representatives of political parties, civil society organizations (CSO) and the Defence and Security Forces (DSF), as well as traditional and religious leaders, civil servants and private and social communication actors, were offered a unique opportunity to speak out. They revealed their perspectives on the obstacles and opportunities for

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12   The National Policy for the Promotion of Gender Equality and Equity was approved by the Council of Ministers on 4 November 2017. The Policy (2016-2025) foresees the fulfillment of eight (8) axes, namely: the mainstreaming of the issue of gender equality; legislative and legal action in order to improve the legal and juridical framework of the country in order to realize Gender Equality and Equity objectives and Human Rights pertaining to women; sectoral policies sensitive to gender; the promotion of women in public administration; the economic empowerment of women; the fight against gender-based violence – preventing and combatting all forms of violence and trafficking of women and girls; women's participation in decision-making; and the production and dissemination of data about Gender Equality and Equity.

women's participation in decision-making, described the potential of women and proposed consensus-based solutions to the obstacles identified.

The methodology adopted to achieve the objectives was highly participative. The principle of inclusivity was at the core of the approach to ensure that no national component was excluded, and to promote and ensure the participation of key socio-political actors in all regions, making sure that regional particularities were taken into account.

This participatory approach ensures high-quality and first-hand information collection and allows for greater interaction and dialogue between stakeholders involved. This approach has proved effective in promoting exchanges and triggering collective analysis and consensus on the problems discussed.

National consultations

For three months, Voz di Paz consulted the population throughout Guinea-Bissau, enabling a broad range of participants to take ownership of the project. Twelve consultations were held in eleven localities in all the eight regions of Guinea-Bissau, namely in: Biombo, Canchungo, São-Domingos, Mansoa, Farim, Gabú, Bafatá, Catió, Buba and Bubaque, as well as two workshops in the capital, Bissau.

The participants were identified by Voz di Paz, using criteria of representativeness and inclusiveness, with the support of the Regional Spaces for Dialogue (RSD – see Box 0.1) and the community radio stations, which helped to disseminate information to participants over the radio. Each consultation session gathered an average of 55 participants, including the members of the RSD. In total, **591 people participated in the panels, 58% were women and 26% of the people were under the age of 35**. The panels were developed on the basis of technical and empirical knowledge, territorial and social representativeness, and sociocultural balance (gender, ethnicity, religion, age). Women from different social classes, age groups, ranks (police, military and paramilitary) and sectors (social, political, economic, cultural) were represented.

Each consultation session was sequenced to answer three research questions about the obstacles for women to participate in decision-making, the potential for women in this field, and the identification of solutions and recommendations. The sessions were facilitated by the Voz di Paz team, which has a proven track record facilitating free-expression workshops, where participants are invited to express themselves in a spontaneous way.

Reflection groups

The results of the national consultations were presented to experts and resource persons with a track-record and proven competencies in the domain. Five reflection workshops were held seeking to analyse and enrich the results, and to propose recommendations, suggestions and possible pathways to solutions.

National Conference : validation and prioritization of the results

The preliminary results collected through the national consultations and reflection groups were then presented to a group of 50 Bissau-Guinean representatives during a National Conference that was held on October 10 and 11, 2017. The Conference aimed to enrich and validate the results and to debate the pathways to solutions. The National Conference was more than a classical ceremony of validation, it was a crucial step to promote ownership of the participants towards the project. The heterogeneous composition of the participants mirrored the geographical, ethnical, socio-professional, religious, gender, age and political diversity of Guinea-Bissau.

During the National Conference, a democratic voting took place to elect two priority subjects. Selection criteria included potential for catalytic change and relevance in the context of Guinea-Bissau (taking into consideration local realities and the current political situation). The issues of social pressure and the dynamics of the political game were selected as priority subjects.

Apart from the prioritization and the debates during the Conference, a significant result was achieved by raising participants' awareness of their individual responsibility in producing the necessary changes.

Box 0.3 | Voz di Paz' Regional Spaces for Dialogue

The **Regional Spaces for Dialogue** (RSD) are peacebuilding structures of Voz di Paz, based in the eight regions of Guinea-Bissau. They use tools such as inclusive dialogue, exchange of experiences, coexistence in diversity, and coalitions of positive local forces for peaceful objectives. They are the vectors of a firmly rooted peace, becoming increasingly owned by the populations at the grassroots. They are instruments of peace education seeking to achieve greater awareness on the necessity to pacify social relations as a trigger for development.

The RSD consist of volunteer groups that have been carefully selected for their capacity to be agents and catalysers of local dynamics for the firm rooting of peace. They work as flexible structures, have a large power of initiative and work in close cooperation with Voz di Paz.

More information about Voz di Paz' Regional Spaces for Dialogue can be found in the References of this report or at the following link:

www.interpeace.org/resource/local-infrastructures-for-peace-in-guinea-bissau-the-contribution-of-the-regional-spaces-for-dialogue-to-peacebuilding/

iii. Research and audio-visual communication

Parallel to the consultation process, Voz di Paz used research and audio-visual communication tools based on information and communication technologies (photography, sound and image), with the objective of documenting the entire consultation process, as well as to help stimulate dialogue. The use of these images, photos and sound was subject to the approval of the participants in each consultation session. The data collected – images and sound – were afterwards used by Voz di Paz for its large-scale dissemination and awareness-raising activities.

Radio spots and programmes were transmitted nationwide through Rádio Sol Mansi and Rádio Jovem. These radio stations transmitted, over their respective radio channels, three spots at fixed hours three times a day, and programmes of forty-five minutes twice a week, as of June 2017. These programmes were also retransmitted by thirty-three radio stations in the entire country, for a better dissemination among the entire population.

Box 0.4 | Radio spots to stimulate a change of mentality

The radio spots drew attention to socio-political problems while stimulating a change of mentality. They also transmitted important messages about the role, value and importance of women in socio-political and religious life, which were issues discussed during the consultations. The radio spots urged for the appreciation and respect of women, as can be seen in the following quotes:

"I have no problems saying that the man is the head..., but if the man is the head, so what is the woman, I ask myself? That is because the woman is everything. And if she's everything, that is because she's more important." [13]

"Women have value... women are gold, diamond. A woman gave birth to ministers, a woman gave birth to the President of the Republic, women give birth to the headman and they give birth to the imam. She rules her husband's house, so why can she not rule the country?" [14]

"The Prophet Muhammad said that Allah had told him: Respect the women. And the companions asked him: Why? And he answered: My mother was a woman... and it's because of her that the world was created, that death was created... and that justice and peace exist. We should respect the women. Thus ordered the Prophet, who is the first and the last." [15]

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13 Eusébio da Costa, teacher, consultation event in Canchungo, 31 March 2017.
14 Fatumata Bá / Mamé di Cooperante, chairwoman of Mulheres Bafatá, consultation event in Bafatá, 29 April 2017.
15 Aladje Bua Grassi, chairman of the Fiscal Council of Imams of Guinea-Bissau and member of the Regional Space for Dialogue, consultation event in Bafatá, 29 April 2017.

The realization of a documentary film completed the research and the dissemination of the present report. The film faithfully reproduced the voice of the people who took part in the consultations and serves as a record of the entire consultation and validation process with the potential beneficiaries. Additionally, the film will help disseminate the obtained results in order to promote a change of mentality.

Moreover, Voz di Paz also produced a comic book for a better dissemination of the project results at the national level. The comics, which combine drawn pictures with texts written in Guinea-Bissau Creole, narrate the message to be conveyed in a simpler and clearer way.

iv. Systems analysis and structure of the report

In order to deepen the analysis of the data collected during the consultations, the researchers from Voz di Paz used a systemic-thinking approach. A systems analysis aims to go beyond the simplistic logic of cause–effect and linearity of other types of analyses, and to make the complexity of the dynamics that structure a certain phenomenon more explicit. Instead of focalizing only on some root causes of a problem, it intends to identify the structuring dynamics linking all causes and consequences.

For this, it is necessary to identify the main factors influencing a phenomenon ("the causes and the effects" of the classical analysis) and then to identify the interactions and interdependencies among these factors. The central aspect of the systems analysis resides in the identification of certain groups of factors that influence the entire system, thus creating the structuring dynamics of a phenomenon. Some of these structuring dynamics are being presented in this report.

Based on these analyses, which have been validated by the stakeholders in the course of the study, five main themes have been identified to create a complete diagnosis of the role of women in decision-making. The themes were regrouped in three structuring dynamics, which form the chapters of this report, namely 1) social pressure exerted on women, 2) dynamics of the political game, and 3) the particularities regarding the weak representation of women in the Defence and Security Forces (DSF).

The video that accompanies the report

Audio-visual documentation to stimulate dialogue and the exchange of ideas

During the consultation phase, the audio-visual team of Voz di Paz captured the impressions and the opinions of the people of Guinea-Bissau in its audio-visual documentation. Two videos were produced in the framework of the present report, intended for various audiences.

The documentary film, realized in Guinea-Bissau Creole, faithfully reproduces the voice of the people and presents the consultation process in a comprehensive way. The documentary film, validated by the members of the National Conference organized by Voz di Paz and Interpeace in October 2017, targets the population of Guinea-Bissau, with the objective to stimulate dialogue and the exchange of ideas.

A short video, produced on the basis of the full-length documentary film, summarizes concisely the key messages of the report. It targets a broader audience, and is available on the Internet at the following link, in various languages:

https://vimeo.com/interpeace/fala-di-mindjer

Excerpts from the consultation events are shown during the National Conference organized by Voz di Paz and Interpeace, Bissau, 10 October 2017. Copyright Interpeace.

CHAPTER I: SOCIAL PRESSURE MAKES IT DIFFICULT FOR WOMEN TO PARTICIPATE IN DECISION-MAKING

Consultation in the Gabú region, 28 April 2017. Copyright Voz di Paz.

Chapter I: Social pressure makes it difficult for women to participate in decision-making

The participation of women in Guinea-Bissau's political life is limited, especially in decision-making. The women of Guinea-Bissau, in spite of their significant participation in the construction of the Bissau-Guinean State (for their role in the struggle for national liberation), are rarely present and represented in the national institutions and in decision-making. This structural problem finds its origins in institutional and social practices that promote gendered stereotypes in society.

The political participation of women in Guinea-Bissau is limited and conditioned by values and factors linked to culture and tradition, many of which have been assimilated by society through education. Power relations between women and men are very much dictated by the traditional and customary ideology of Guinea-Bissau which has forged an unbalanced cultural construct and has assigned gendered roles in society. According to this construct, influenced by gender stereotypes, the Bissau-Guinean woman is defined as a housewife, a mother and wife, regardless of her personal achievements, potential, experiences and social position.

Box 1.1 | Ethnic groups are determinant for the role of women in society

Ethnic traditions very much guide women's behaviours and perceptions when it comes to their role in decision-making. Ethnic peculiarities and variations require us to pay particular attention to the different traditional dynamics influencing the role of women in society, so that concrete and targeted solutions can be formulated.

The consultations revealed the existence of ethnic differences when it comes to concrete topics that directly or indirectly determine the participation of women in decision-making, such as marriage, education for girls, or ancestral rites and traditions.

Marriage, in its different varieties (arranged, forced or out of free will) is an obstacle across social, regional (urban and rural) and religious groups, but the perceptions about it and the weight assigned to it vary. Except for the Bijagó ethnic group, whose tradition allows a woman to choose her husband, all other ethnic groups in Guinea-Bissau have a conservative vision about marriage. In the Oio region, ethnic groups adhering to Islam (such as the Mandinga, Oinca and Mansoanca ethnic groups) are

particularly outspoken about the idea that the *schooling* of girls can cause them to not accept arranged marriages, which is then used as a justification to not send them to school.

Also, when it comes to *ethnic traditions and rites*, it can be observed that the Bijagó ethnic group attributes a particular role to women. They have the highest decision-making power in the community and discuss all the social rules that determine the lifestyle in Bijagó society. This is the result of the matriarchal system, in which the woman is the figure who communicates directly with the spirits, and therefore leads all the traditional rites and ceremonies. Women are feared by men, who have great respect for them.

Among the Manjaco and Papel ethnic groups, living in the regions of Biombo and Cacheu, the role of women and all social regulations are defined in the sacred forests, by men. This creates problems of *Mandjidura,* which is a curse with a request to the Gods to harm a person who does not accept to obey the social rules defined by the men, so no one dares to challenge them. However, other ethnic groups, like the Balanta, Mancanha, Felupe, Baiote and Cassanga ethnic groups, even if they adhere to animist religions, are to a certain extent more tolerant when it comes to changing the traditional rules.

1.1. Women's responsibilities in the private domain limit their personal and professional development

The society of Guinea-Bissau, apart from the Bijagó ethnic group (see Box 1.1), has created an ideology, under the influence of the habits and customs of the local ethnic groups, in which the social participation of women is limited to the private social domain (the house), leaving all public and political aspects to men. The responsibilities of women for her house and her family are more important than any other task that she might take up in society. Women's responsibilities in the private social domain limits their political participation, a public domain reserved to men who act as breadwinners and heads of the family.

1.1.1. Being a housewife leaves little time to get into politics

The tasks and roles assigned to men and women are explicitly distinct and follow the rules of society. Men take up roles in the public domain that are more

or less professional and remunerated, while women fulfil non-remunerated caregiving roles in the private domain.

Women bear the exclusive responsibility for housekeeping, despite their participation in other social or professional activities. Therefore, a woman with a professional or political occupation has to reconcile this activity with her domestic duties. This causes her to get overloaded with work, as she, after a working day outside the home, still needs to perform other tasks, while the men can rest and relax, as was discussed during the consultations in Quinhámel:

> *"After leaving the rice field with my father, my mother used to perform all the domestic tasks (cleaning the house, doing the dishes, cooking and taking care of the children) while he was resting."* [16]

Women are busy with their duties and live under social pressure. They feel tired and discouraged to leave the comfort zones that are their houses in order to take up even more responsibilities and dedicate more time to activities in political parties and politics.

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16   Frei Carlos Tamba, Coordinator of the Schools of the Diocese of Bissau and Director of the Catholic School of Cumúra, consultation in Quinhamél, 30 March 2017.

1.1.2. At home, girls are taught to be obedient

From an early age, the family – the first structure for the individual –, raises children within a social pattern that mirrors the "interest" attributed to each of the sexes within the family and the community. Therefore, the sense of leadership and courage is instilled in boys, to allow them to overcome difficulties, while the qualities valued in girls are obedience, submission and diligence. This practice does not favour the development of self-esteem for girls and women, who learn to be submitted to men. The commonly used expression for this practice is: "*homem não chora; mulher é sofredora*" (men don't cry; women suffer).

The division of tasks and roles given to each sex within the family is explicitly distinct. Domestic tasks (which are poorly valued) are reserved to the girls, while boys are encouraged to refrain from them. Girls lose time as a result, which they cannot use for studying, participating in clubs or playing. These discriminatory attitudes favour the construction of the self-esteem of boys in detriment of the self-esteem of girls, as explained by this mother:

> "*Women are taught to be ruled by someone. At home, if the father is away, even a boy feels like he is the head of the family instead of his mother or his eldest sister.*" [17]

1.2. Schools do not offer an alternative framework to strengthen the self-esteem and self-confidence of girls

Schools are places of public socialization that could be used as an instrument to correct discrimination, but until today, they rather form an extension of the family practice through the tasks that children of each sex perform in the classroom and in the school canteens. The division of responsibilities in school reflects the household model: "girls are responsible for the hygiene, and boys are class representatives", as illustrated by the following quote:

> "*I am a female school director. After the meals in the canteen, it was me who was supervising the girls doing the dishes while the teachers and the boys were just watching, until the day I said "enough" and we started to share this task.*" [18]

These gender divisions can also be observed in the school textbooks, as women are being depicted performing housework, while men are in offices, with professional working equipment.

1.2.1. School is not a priority for girls

The discriminatory practices between sexes in education does not favour the growth and the academic development of girls. Few girls are encouraged to run for the position of class representative, and many who have potential are not being recognized by their parents, who play a key role in supporting children and their school performance. For example, during the consultation in Mansoa, the participants agreed with the statement made by Paulo Bodjam, who cited the example of a girl who was considered exemplary and very intelligent, but whose parents decided, in spite of the intervention by the school and many individuals from the community who believed in her potential, to interrupt her studies to marry her off.

> "*Boys are being taught to be a leader, to rule, while girls are being taught to be submissive, to accept and to comply.*" [19]

Despite a slight improvement mentioned by some participants during the consultation sessions in Gabú and Catió, who stressed that there are schools where a minority group of girls increasingly runs for positions of class representatives while some parents divide domestic tasks among boys and girls, the vast majority of the families of Guinea-Bissau still

17 Mariato Mané, member of the Guinea-Bissau chapter of the ECOWAS Women Peace and Security Network (REMPSECAO-GB), consultation in Bissau, 20 May 2017.
18 Beatriz dos Santos, Member of the Association of Economically Active Women (AMAE), consultation in Catió, 5 May 2017.
19 Infali Sani, teacher, consultation in São Domingos, 1 April 2017.

considers that the schooling of young girls is not as fundamental as it is for boys.[20]

Another topic discussed was that families with limited economic and financial resources prefer to invest in the schooling of boys, thus sacrificing the girl who is believed "not to belong to the family", as she will marry one day, leave the house to live with another family, and stop contributing to the wealth (material as well as human) of the family. In the same way, it can be explained why a woman is disinherited by her parents, and inherited (as if she were a piece of property) when her husband dies.

These examples underline the role of educators (parents and teachers) to break down traditional barriers and give the same importance to both sexes when it comes to access to education, equal sharing of housekeeping tasks, and promoting the participation and self-assertion of girls in different places within the community.

1.2.2. In case of early pregnancies, girls are held accountable and forced to abandon any opportunity for personal or professional development

Another aspect reported by the participants during the consultations was early pregnancies, which are considered a shame for the family, which has a negative effect on the upbringing and education of girls. In order to preserve the honour of the family, parents interrupt the education of their daughters to marry them off, even if they would prefer to see them obtain their diplomas.

During the consultations, many parents tried to explain this behaviour as the result of a lack of better alternatives for their daughters, highlighting that boys who made them pregnant rarely take

responsibility and therefore do not contribute to the maintenance and the education of the child to be born. Families who fear such a situation prefer to see their daughters married:

"I am afraid to see my daughter pregnant. For that reason, even if she is only ten years old, if she finds a man, I give her in marriage." [21]

The consultations also showed the unfair and discriminatory practice against girls who suffer alone when they get pregnant, as testified by the following statement of a participant:

"It is true that women get pregnant, because it's the woman who carries the child in her womb, but if men would get pregnant, many boys would be pregnant in their parents' houses, because girls do not get pregnant without the involvement of a man." [22]

This situation creates unfavourable circumstances for the emancipation of girls who do not feel skilled and qualified to confront the challenges of political and social life, like speaking in public and constructing speeches and convincing arguments during meetings and gatherings.

The education of girls highly depends on the importance the family gives to marriage, which can harm the education and emancipation of women. The more the family identifies with the dominant social idea that "the place of the woman is at home", the less probable it is that a girl can obtain schooling and take up advanced training. This occurs because it is believed that when girls get a higher level of education, they become less likely to accept a marriage that has been arranged by the family, and less submissive within their marriage.

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20   The litteracy levels of people aged 15 years or older is 38% for women and 66.3% for men, with a notable difference between the capital city of Bissau (69.8% of women and 89.8% of men able to read and write) and the other regions (26.2% of women and 56.7% of men able to read and write). Source: Republic of Guinea-Bissau, Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Integration, Inquérito Ligeiro para a Avaliação da Pobreza, National Institute for Statistics, 2011.

21   Aladje Lassana Baio, Chief of Tabanca, consultation in Farim, 8 April 2017.

22   Cida Na Tcharé, radio presenter for Radio Djalicunda and entertainer for Federação Kafo, member of the Regional Space for Dialogue, consultation in Farim, 8 April 2017.

1.3. The importance given to a woman's marriage is a stronghold for her participation in political life

The discriminatory practices that form a burden on women and that constrain them to a domestic role are fundamentally related to the importance given to marriage in the society of Guinea-Bissau, especially for women. Bissau-Guinean women are trained and prepared for marriage during their entire life, making this their primary goal in life. In order to correctly accomplish their roles, they are taught from an early age to be submissive and to believe that they need someone else to take care of them, as a participant during the consultation in Mansoa stated:

"Women are taught to see in marriage an escape to the future that they long for, that's why mothers thank their daughters with the words: "God willing you'll find a good husband."" [23]

Marriage gives women a certain status, which is seen as an honour to the family. For this reason, divorce is not accepted and avoided as much as possible, even if this results in many sacrifices for women.

1.3.1. The supremacy of men is necessary for the proper functioning of marriage

Men are considered to be the husband, the home's provider, taught to be the leader and head of the family. Men hold the power to decide upon agreements that women can accept or not, but with the risk of ending the marriage that is so important for women. It is with this power of decision that many husbands restrain the participation of their wives as a way of assuring their submission and preserving the male supremacy in the household. Therefore, if

a woman gets involved in political activity, before anything else she needs to show respect to the traditional norms and obtain the consent of her husband, under penalty of having to choose between her political activity and her marriage.

"We often hear that a woman may be influential and skilled, but she needs to know how to cook because one day her husband wants to eat what she cooks." [24]

As women feel pressure to be valued within their marriage, they see the need to accept the superiority of men for the proper functioning of her marriage.

1.3.2. The fear of divorce creates conformism

Because of the value given to marriage and the honour that it represents for women, anything that might lead to problems in her marriage could dishonour her and her parents, who have invested in the marriage of their daughter and have tried hard to preserve it.

The fear of divorce – described as an undesirable situation for women during the consultations – impairs their political participation. Women are taught to give much importance to their marriage and to regard divorce as a failure or a loss. As they are stuck with this idea, they are willing to accept many sacrifices and concessions in order to preserve their marriage.

"A woman sells her clothes, her jewellery in order to help her husband construct fields or houses. But afterwards, her husband finds someone else, a distant stranger, who takes possession of all that. Or when her husband dies, she is sent away from the home, the fields etc., to make place for relatives or next of kin of her husband." [25]

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23 Abna Embana, political activist, school director in Bissorã and member of the Regional Space for Dialogue, consultation in Mansoa, 7 April 2017.

24 Aua Queta, responsible for gender issues in the Association for the Promotion of Local Development APRODEL, consultation in Bafatá, 29 April 2017.

25 Justino Aliu Canté, civil society representative, consultation in Catió, 5 May 2017.

Women, fearful of divorce, generally do not assume any political responsibility or activity that could jeopardize their marriage. The more fearful they are of divorce, the more they accept the importance of the male superiority for the proper functioning of the household, and the less likely it is that the marriage will fail. All this makes a woman's political participation dependent on her husband, as illustrated by the following statement during the consultations in Canchungo:

"All women, regardless of their level of education, are trying hard to please their husbands and accept to be submissive, because they are afraid of divorce." [26]

1.4. The ideal Bissau-Guinean woman: a stepping stone or a pitfall for her political participation?

The idealization of the Bissau-Guinean woman highlights the role given to her by society and the qualities that a woman needs to showcase within her family and community. It is clear that women are valued by society for fulfilling these expectations, including within their marriage, as all the preparation that girls receive are to become an exemplary wife and mother.

1.4.1. Women represent an idealized figure that is valued by society

Bissau-Guinean women, according to the consultations that took place, are associated to a moral figure of reference, based on the integrity of their character and other subjective characteristics that are valued by society. The Bissau-Guinean society has developed a figure of the ideal woman, giving her certain qualities that are considered to be inherent to her female identity and an added value for her role in any social activity. However, this picture is rather an expression of social conventionalism regarding the role of women in Bissau-Guinean society. This idealization of the female figure could have served as a stepping stone for the rise of women, but turns out to be a pitfall for her emancipation and participation in political life.

The qualities ascribed to women are numerous and can be considered *intrinsic* to her person and associated to words like hard-working, managing, persistent, honest, intelligent, sweet, careful and orderly. There are also *extrinsic* qualities, which result from her social interactions and are associated to words like reconciling, influential, counselling, ambitious (an ambitious woman wants to see her husband and children thrive), altruistic, responsible, suffering and educating.

"If you train a woman, you train society." [27]

These qualities ascribed to women are not characteristics that are inherent to women (not all women possess all these qualities), they are a mixture of expectations that were created under the influence of culture and tradition, considering women in their usual roles of good housewives, mothers and wives (obedient and submissive).

1.4.2. The figure of the ideal woman reinforces her place in the household, away from political life

In the logic of perpetuating the existing social practices, women, under the influence of society, generally use their potential for the advancement of men, and it is for this purpose that their qualities are being valued. The qualities ascribed to women in the field of reconciliation (*women are peaceful and sentimental*) are rarely dissociated from those that encourage her, despite personal sacrifices, to abandon a contest or give up a position for a man, for whom the feelings of accomplishment and victory are very important.

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26   Simão Hugaior, teacher, consultation in Canchungo, 31 March 2017.
27   Dam Ialá, Second Secretary of the National People's Assembly, consultation in Bissau, 20 May 2017.

Such qualities, when used outside the private sphere (the home), can turn out to be a trap for women who may claim a position in public life. In most cases, these qualities cause women to reject opportunities that present themselves in public life, especially if there is competition or if a position is being disputed. In such cases, a woman tends to think about the expectations and exigencies from society before she accepts to assume a position of responsibility. She may decline when she analyses the challenges that she might face:

"Many times, when an opportunity is given to a woman, she does not accept it, but says: put my husband." [28]

The figure of the ideal woman, considered also to be the guardian of social values and the first person responsible for the transmission of values through the education of the children, reinforces the obstacles that she encounters when she changes her field of action from the private to the public domain.

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28 Adulai Baldé, teacher and member of the Regional Space for Dialogue, consultation in Gabú, 28 April 2017.

Box 1.2 | The idea of women as being altruistic

The consultations revealed the existence of a myth around the Bissau-Guinean woman – an idealized being that mirrors positive values promoted by society. The characteristics and the behaviour ascribed to this female figure reflect the presence of strong prejudices and stereotypes that dominate the society and the culture of the country. This observation is the reflection of social evolution, influenced by the dictates of the patriarchal and traditional society of Guinea-Bissau, which created a feminine figure of reference that is inaccessible, but which many women aspire to be.

This idealized figure was described with various adjectives associated to the values that show her **goodness, dedication**, ability to **manage** (her home and the goods of the family), her **peaceful** nature and her **ambition**.

Apart from the specific characteristics of each of the abovementioned qualities, there is one main underlying feature that shows the very essence of the ideal female figure: her **altruistic character**. This supposes that the woman is *good*, *ambitious* and *reconciling* for others, such as her husband, children or relatives, and not for herself. She would never be *good*, *ambitious* and *reconciling* for her own benefit. In the contrary, if a woman would show ambition in her own life, like for her professional growth, she would be seen as selfish and would lose the essence of the "wife and mother" figure.

This altruistic feature is central for understanding the issue of women's participation in political decision-making, as it shows that any act or attempt to divert from the dominant social pattern, i.e. the idealized female figure, would be interpreted as a threat to society.

1.5. The high social expectations put pressure on women to abandon a political career

1.5.1. The demands made on women are unfair and unobjective

Women face many demands to prove that they deserve a certain position or promotion, a situation that does not apply to men. In order to be recognized, a woman with the same level and position of a man needs to demonstrate a higher performance. Moreover, requirements have been proved to be higher for women than for men, and it can be observed that for certain positions, the required profile is not the same, including for the highest decision-making jobs.

This argument was illustrated during the consultations, when the need to have an academic degree to obtain a Minister's post in Guinea-Bissau was discussed. While the participants did mention the low level of education among women as an obstacle for their participation in politics,[29] many of the consulted participants noted that there are male Ministers and politicians without university education who occupy high-level political positions:

> *"There are many men who cannot even recognize a letter if it's the size of a house. But they can rule the country."* [30]

> *"There are illiterate men in Parliament. Illiterate Ministers, but they are Ministers! Men without a high level of education, but occupying high-level positions. But if it's a woman they quickly say: ah, she doesn't have a good education, she cannot rule the country. But the day a woman takes office in this country... ah... many men will be hiding in the forests."* [31]

Therefore, it can be concluded that the norm of having university education is not a valid reason to explain the limited participation of women in high-level decision-making.

This unequal treatment was explained by factors linked to the social expectations that have been created around women. The Guinea-Bissauan woman, as was confirmed during the consultation event, is seen as a figure of decency and altruism, and is treasured as a success model. Despite the inaccessible character of this idealized woman, all women refer to this model and aspire to become it. The constellation of qualities that are ascribed to them causes society to have higher expectations for women than for men.

1.5.2. The weight of stigmas and prejudices discourage women from politics

In the stakeholders' opinion, the weight of these demands has serious consequences, as they provoke a feeling of not being qualified and a fear of failure in women, which ultimately lead to their self-exclusion. The fear to challenge these demands causes many women to refuse a position of institutional responsibility where they would have been able to hold decision-making power, even if they know that the same position has already been held by less qualified men.

The higher the demands, the more probable it is that women will not accept the position, which leads to further doubts regarding their capacities, which again reinforces a feeling of not being qualified. The weight of the exigencies creates a certain inertia or conformism among women, who are happy with the guarantees of a stable employment, rather than to fight and aspire to positions with more influence at the level of State structures.

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29 The net rate of primary schooling is 49.8% for women and 51.2% for men, according to the last available statistics (2009). Source: Estatísticas básicas da Guiné-Bissau 2014. National Institute for Statistics (INE), Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Integration, Republic of Guinea-Bissau, 2014.

30 Justino Aliu Canté, civil society representative, consultation in Catió, 5 May 2017.

31 Paula Pereira, teacher, consultation in São Domingos, 1 April 2017.

Moreover, women are worried about preserving their family life and upholding the honour of their families, so for them the invasion of their private life is much more sensitive than for men. And the fact that politics does not spare any aspect of people's personal lives, especially not at the highest levels of decision-making, makes women even more reluctant to take up positions that could expose them.

"The shame of women is not limited to herself, but spreads over her entire family (husband and children) and her community." [32]

"A woman would not accept getting into certain situations under any circumstances, because she is a mother and quickly embarrassed." [33]

1.5.3. The weight of stigmas and prejudices discourage women from politics

The consultations revealed that the few female politicians who managed to reach decision-making positions are not valued or seen as success models. On the contrary, when a woman chooses to confront the difficulties and the demands in order to pursue her political ascension, the weight of stigmas and prejudice eventually affects her.

The elements identified by the critique are rarely related to the intellectual or technical capacities of women involved. They are the result of subjective comments about the personal situation of a woman, such as the fact that she is a single woman or a concubine, or about her private life. To be accepted and considered to deserve a position, a woman should not only fulfil all the criteria of competence and responsibility, but also have an exemplary behaviour as expected according to the model of the ideal woman.

"Men belittle the capacities of women, also when it comes to getting promoted. Even within organizations, women do not occupy high positions: men get invited to occupy them." [34]

It can be observed that a female politician, regardless of her qualifications, will always be seen as a woman and associated with the gender stereotypes and the ideal figure of the Bissau-Guinean woman as created by traditional society. The female politician represents a double contradiction with the prevailing model. On the one hand, she does not fulfil the role that is expected of her as care-taker of the household, and on the other hand, she is getting into the domain that is normally reserved to men, thus creating discomfort for being active in the political arena. The example of the first candidacy of a woman for the position of President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau since the first democratic elections in 1994, who was publicly defamed, was often cited as an example during the consultations to illustrate the subjectivity of the demands made on women.

Even women who have achieved a certain ascension in politics denounce these practices of defamation, insult and slander:

"There are people with bad intentions who claim that all women who are active in politics are outlaws and that they haven't achieved their position on their own merits." [35]

Many also mention that the high demands and the many injustices create frustrations, which discourage women to continue with their careers.

"I got tired, the people with whom I work and my family tell me that I need to think more about my children." [36]

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32 Quintino Manga, traditional power, chief of Caió and member of the Regional Space for Dialogue, consultation in Canchungo, 31 March 2017.

33 Ana Maria Duarte, entertainer, consultation in São Domingos, 1 April 2017.

34 Sana Cassamá, teacher and member of the Regional Space for Dialogue, consultation in Buba, 6 May 2017.

35 Munira Jauad, leader of the Network of Women Entrepreneurs and Businesswomen of Guinea-Bissau and UEMOA, consultation event in Bissau, 20 May 2017.

36 Carmelita Pires, legal consultant, consultation event in Bissau, 20 May 2017.

Systems circle A: Sociocultural dynamics that limit the political ambitions of women – read the instructions in the box below

Lack of successful role models *of women in politics*

Defamation of women with political ambitions

Valuing of the "ideal women" who stays at home

Expectation from society that women follow the traditional model

Rule of the traditional model (the woman at home)

Attachment to the traditional model (women stay at home and out of politics)

Fear and pressure felt by women for abandoning their political ambitions

Self-reinforcing circle

Reluctance among women to take up positions with political responsibility

more/less

Lack of opportunities for women to demonstrate their political capacities

more/less

Confidence (from men and women) in women's political capacities

more/less

Perception that women lack the level of formal education that is required for political responsibilities

Women occupy **positions of political responsibility**

more/less

Opportunity to show that women are able to carry political responsibilities

Equilibrium circle

Instructions for reading the systems analysis:

- We suggest you to start reading the systems analysis with the factor written in big letters, which is the starting point of the circle.
- Each factor has to be read starting with the word "more" or "less".
- Each arrow intensifies the word "more" or "less".

For example: The *more* "fear and pressure felt by women for abandoning their political ambitions" there is, the *more* "attachment to the traditional model (women stay at home and out of politics)" there will be.

- Reading the circle goes by the same logic.
- If an arrow is accompanied by the words "more/less", this means that the relation between the first and the second factor changes.

For example: The *more* "reluctance among women to take up positions with political responsibility" there is, the *less* "women occupy positions of political responsibility".

- The reading of the circle continues with the same logic, so the same proportional relation (more => more, less => less), until indicated otherwise.

NB: The factors written in italics are external factors influencing the factor in question.

For more details to read the systemic analysis, see Annex 1.

1.6. The lack of feminine solidarity puts women at the forefront of their own exclusion in the political domain

The consultations revealed that the different sociocultural obstacles impeding the political rise of women in decision-making have also been created by women themselves. Even if they suffer from this issue, they actively participate in their self-exclusion and play an important role in the reproduction of such beliefs and behaviour in society, firstly at the level of the family unit through the way they raise their children, and secondly in the professional environment, as well as in politics.

1.6.1. Negative behaviour among women reinforces their exclusion and self-exclusion

The lack of solidarity among women was described during the consultations as a constant, systemic and cross-sectoral factor in all locations. This behaviour stems from a feeling of inferiority among women, who feel frustrated when one of them manages to overcome social barriers and go beyond the social role attributed to women. This frustration often translates into feelings of envy and criticism, feeling that because most women did not manage to reach the position that one woman reached, that woman should not deserve the support of other women.

As a result, a woman who is successful in political life becomes the object of defamation, insults and slander by other women who, by doing this, think of themselves as defenders of the idealized image of women, who don't allow their political ambitions to take precedence over her obligations as a mother, wife and housewife. There is also a belief that women are not meant to govern.

Furthermore, there is also an increase in the rumours about a successful figure, as people pay more attention to their personal lives and their public visibility increases. This is not only true for women, but for all people who stand out in their fields, as people will start interfering with their public and private lives.

The hostility against other women becomes very strong if the social environment where a woman came from knows few examples of women who managed to be successful, and if the feeling of inferiority is very strong. It is also necessary to stress that this feeling can be the result of the education that women receive, in which it is not usual to see women taking up positions of leadership or prominence in society.

> *"Women are jealous of their fellow women, because from an early age they were brought up with the idea that it's the man who's in charge. Therefore, when they see their fellow woman be successful, they feel bad."* [37]

Women do not give the necessary support to other women because they often lack the information that would allow them to make a better judgement and to be more comprehensive and collaborative. When confronted with the facts and with the embarrassment caused by them, they take refuge in negative criticism and defamations, in order to give expression to the confusion and frustration that the events provoked in them.

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37   Aissatu Injai, chairwoman of the National Network to Combat Sexual Violence (RENLUV-GB), consultation in Bissau, 20 May 2017.

Systems circle B: Depreciation of the political success of women – read the instructions in the box below

Support from the family
and relatives for political success

Women are **self-confident** and want to start or continue a political career

Rumours and defamation against female politicians, by ordinary women

more/less

The jealousy of other women when a woman is successful

Feelings of **frustration, of failure** and/or of **jealousy** among ordinary women

Perception among ordinary women that the female politician is **more intelligent and important than they are**

Public visibility of the female politician

Equilibrium circle I

more/less **Rumours and defamation** against female politicians, by ordinary women

Women have political **responsibility**

Perception among ordinary women that political success runs contrary to the image of **womanhood**

The defence of the image of the "housewife"

more/less

Value given to marriage, synonymous to the success model

more/less

Culture of merit

Equilibrium circle II

Pathways to solutions

The sociocultural dynamics that influence the participation of women in decision-making are deeply rooted in the specific cultural practices of the ethnic groups, which govern the social order within a certain community. These practices are respected and valued, and form the essence of the Bissau-Guinean identity, where the roles of men and women are clearly defined.

The pressure exerted by society weighs considerably on women, and impedes the construction of their self-esteem and self-confidence, which are necessary elements to overcome obstacles. Not all women react in the same way to this pressure, depending on their personal history and the opportunities they receive in life. Women thus constitute a heterogeneous group that suffer from the consequences of social exclusion and respond to obstacles with multiple strategies.

A more inclusive society, where the voices of women are heard and where women exert power in decision-making processes, still seems distant. There are, however, some *concrete pathways to solutions*, proposed by the consulted populations, that aim to contribute to address this issue.[38]

1. Create an intergenerational dialogue framework in order to define a vision for a more inclusive society

It is necessary to involve women and men, young and old, in defining a vision for a more inclusive society, through a national dialogue. Given the importance of ethnic differences and the local anchoring of the social order, it is important to create a gradual framework, where the dialogue starts at the community level, in the form of *djumbai*[39] in all regions of the country, to transform itself into a broader process. A dialogue framework can encourage discussion and the exchange of ideas, contributing to the rooting of a culture of peace.

2. Value the role of traditional chiefs and legitimate leaders in the search for solutions

To raise the discussion about the place of women and men in society, it is crucial to identify and involve legitimate leaders who play a role in the definition of social and political rules and practices. It is important to work with people who are influential at the local level, such as traditional chiefs and leaders of political parties, as they have the potential to influence and provoke the behavioural changes that are necessary for a better acceptance of the role of women in decision-making. By empowering them, conditions are created for greater ownership over the problem and its solutions.

3. Establish a dissemination system to spread information about how the inclusion of women can help create a more peaceful society

Because of the limited access to information about the exclusion of women from decision-making and its implications to build a more peaceful society, it is necessary to establish a dissemination system that is comprehensive. Past experiences have shown that media communication, such as radio, has the potential to break taboos and to raise awareness among the population. Civil society organizations producing national or community radio programmes are therefore key for the dissemination of information.

4. Value, as part of the formal education system, the role models of successful women in politics and the DSF

Because of the low value given to political, military and security careers for women, it is important to start a reflection with a view to redefine and create new female success models. This can be done through a research and dialogue process in

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38 The consulted populations gave several *pathways to solutions* as synthesized in this section. It was decided to use the word "pathways" in order to recognize that the opinions expressed during the consultations are elements of solutions, and not solutions by *themselves*. Needless to say, the elaboration of concrete solutions would need the help of specialists and experts able to transform these approaches into concrete actions for change.

39 Djumbai is a Guinea-Bissau Creole word often used to express the idea of "being together" for a moment of discussion.

the communities, in order to identify and value the existing success models at the local and the national levels.

The social interactions and the deficiencies in the formal and informal education systems impede the dissemination and the appreciation of such models, for which reason it is suggested to attribute this mission to the public powers. The integration of positive female figures in school textbooks is a concrete example that could influence future generations and demonstrate that women can be successful in a political, military or security career. Besides the revision of the school curriculum, it has also been suggested to disseminate examples of pathways to success through the existing audio-visual media, like radio and social media.

5. Develop and encourage initiatives for artistic expression valuing the role of women in decision-making

Besides the necessity to disseminate success models through oral means, it is also important to think about other forms of communication, like artistic expression. The variety of cultural traditions in Guinea-Bissau offers the perfect stage to communicate key messages regarding the advancement of women in decision-making. The dissemination of success stories featuring women can also serve as a source of inspiration to be used in theatre or in other traditional forms of art, such as songs or dance.

6. Encourage the population to take responsibility for the promotion of gender equality in the context of peacebuilding

Currently, the populations have limited capacity to take ownership and responsibility for the promotion of gender in the context of peacebuilding. However, training the populations and the key actors to obtain basic notions of gender and peacebuilding is not enough. A real transfer of responsibilities would need a continuous follow-up with the populations and adequate strategies and structures.

7. Learn from the best practices on the transformation of the role of women in West Africa

The issue of the role of women in decision-making is not limited to Guinea-Bissau. Other countries, especially in the West African sub region, can be credible sources of information to put the practices used and the challenges encountered in perspective with regard to the transformation of the role of women. A comparative analysis of the best practices could serve as the basis for a more comprehensive debate within Bissau-Guinean society.

8. Ensure follow-up and community support for women

Many women decide not to take up positions with responsibilities because of the lack of support structures and care-taking facilities available, but also because the members of their family units, including their children, husbands, parents and other people living within the household, are reluctant to accept their absence from the home. Apart from the need for better childcare structures, it is also essential, among other things, to support and engage families in a more comprehensive way, in order to allow women to preserve their social and affective networks.

CHAPTER II: IN THE POLITICAL GAME, WOMEN PLAY A LIMITED ROLE, FAR AWAY FROM DECISION-MAKING

A group of female politicians and civil society representatives during the consultation in Bissau, 20 May 2017. Copyright Voz di Paz.

Chapter II: In the political game, women play a limited role, far away from decision-making

2.1. Women play a rewarding and highly valued role in the mobilization of the electorate

Apart from the existence of dynamics limiting the participation of women in the political domain, which can be explained by factors linked to the distortion of the political game, it can also be observed that women have a catalytic influence, especially in times of mobilization around elections, when the participation and support of women are critical.

Electoral campaigns in Guinea-Bissau are moments of great political and social fervour, with candidates of all political parties presenting their programmes in a festive atmosphere. The campaigns are also marked by the wealth of parties, which try to win votes by handing out gifts and other material goods, and a fierce competition between candidates, which use their grassroot activists to convince undecided voters.

In the entire country, the consulted participants unanimously said that women massively participate and have an immeasurable influence on political mobilization, and therefore on the outcome of the elections.

"During campaigns, women are called upon to mobilize the people, including men." [40]

2.1.1. The influence of women starts at the grassroot level, with women's associations

Guinea-Bissau has a long tradition of solidarity among women, who organize themselves at the local level in women's associations. Today, these women's associations are a replica of the *mandjuandades*, traditional organizations where women play a role that is socially accepted and valued by society.

Women's associations, apart from being meant to contribute to the social and economic emancipation of women, represent an advantage in the political sphere, especially during election campaigns.[41] The associations are well organized and diverse groups with recognized leadership and power because of their membership numbers. The power of the association networks represents an advantage because of their efficacy and potential for communication.

"During the election campaigns they give women a voice and say: women, speak, because you are being listened to." [42]

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40 Beatriz Cabral, teacher, consultation in São Domingos, 1 April 2017.
41 The associations, regardless of their nature, are also escape valves for women. Here, they can freely move, without having to ask permission from their husbands. For example, they do not ask for permission to work in the gardens or to sell products that they made in the framework of the associations.
42 Beatriz Cabral, teacher, consultation in São Domingos, 1 April 2017.

The fact that women are the majority in demographic terms makes them a target during campaigns.[43] Women also represent higher rates of illiteracy, which makes them easier to manipulate and more likely to follow their leaders or husbands.

According to the gender stereotypes that are present in the society of Guinea-Bissau, women are considered to be more honest. From a woman, it is expected that she wants the best for everyone, which makes it easier for her to be listened to and accepted.

2.1.2. Women have responsibilities for campaigns at the local level

Political campaigns are marked by a larger participation of women in election rallies. In parallel to the big rallies that normally take place in the regional centres, or even in the centres of the 39 sectors of the country, which are normally organized by the larger parties, there are also mobilization campaigns occurring in the neighbourhoods and in villages in rural regions. The main agents of these campaigns are the leaders of the women's associations. They often cooperate with the leaders of the political parties, who are trying to attract more votes.

"If you are called upon to be responsible for the campaign of your party by the leader of your community, you feel valued and happy." [44]

Women are also an important element in the search for votes, especially through the awareness-raising *djumbais* in the women's associations. This mechanism for mobilization is considered to be effective, since the woman who leads the association gets involved in the campaign and mobilizes other colleagues in favour of her candidate or party. For this purpose, *djumbai*-like meetings are being organized, where women peacefully debate in different places, such as their homes, the seats of

the associations or otherwise in the communitarian *bantabás* of the women.[45]

2.1.3. The female mobilizers play a traditional role that is valued by society

"Women have no ambition to be candidates, they only want to dance and to cook." [46]

The influence of women during electoral campaigns reveals itself through different actions that are decisive to win votes for a party or a candidate.

Traditionally, women are responsible for the logistics of campaigns, which is a fundamental aspect of an election rally. The logistic preparations for these events include the preparation of food and clothing, the decoration of the stage, and the transfers and lodging of the candidates.

Women are also made responsible for the cultural entertainment, to brighten and give colour to the festivities, so that these are also attractive for voters without a culture of political activism. The cultural groups are almost entirely composed of women. During the election campaigns, these groups entertain the audience before the election rallies, while people are waiting for the speeches of the politicians.

It should be stressed that in the past, the cultural groups were composed of men and women according to their age groups. They aimed to support the workers in the fields and the communities during the traditional ceremonies. Today, the groups are composed of people who identify with a common objective. They can be recruited to provide services and have a certain dose of affinity with the party.

Dance is also widely used as an instrument for

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43   The population of Guinea-Bissau consists for 52.9% of women (2013). Source: "*Estatísticas Básicas da Guiné-Bissau 2014*", National Institute for Statistics (INE), Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Integration, Republic of Guinea-Bissau, 2014.

44   Adja Mata Sauané, former assemblywoman and member of the Regional Space for Dialogue, consultation in Gabú, 28 April 2017.

45   A bantabá is an open-air location within a hamlet or village, meant for conversations, dialogues and debates. The *djumbais* are usually held in a *bantabá*.

46   Mamadú Silá, merchant and member of the Regional Space for Dialogue, consultation in Farim, 8 April 2017.

mobilization. Dance groups aim to distract and influence the audience, creating a big gathering of people and giving the impression that the candidate enjoys broad support. This normally gives the impression of power.

Given the importance of dance and song in African tradition, and especially in Guinea-Bissau where the key agents are women, this aspect becomes crucial and fundamental for the entertainment during election campaigns and the securing of votes, but above all to give an impression of power, of magnificence and victory.

2.2. Multiple barriers block the access to decision-making positions

Apart from the appreciation for women during election campaigns, these efforts do not lead to more participation in decision-making. The consultations revealed that this mobilization only strengthens the power and supremacy of men in the field of decision-making.

2.2.1. The lack of financial resources limits women in politics

The need to have financial resources to enter politics and continue with this political involvement was mentioned many times by the consulted participants as a barrier for the participation of women in decision-making. This aspect becomes visible especially during the election campaigns, when resources need to be mobilized and large sums of money need to be available to solve the highly varying concerns of the electorate (like medical prescriptions and school fees) and to pay for the expenses of the campaigns:

"Women lack the means to mobilize other women and even to form parties." [47]

In this context, fundraising becomes a critical exercise, in which women do not actively participate. The low capacity of women to mobilize money for election campaigns has been explained by various factors, including the limited influence of women to mobilize financial resources (as patronage networks are dominated by men).

Moreover, the poverty and the inequality between women and men regarding access to funding in Guinea-Bissau have been used to illustrate the difficulties that women face to become involved in politics and obtain decision-making positions.[48] According to the participants consulted, women have less financial resources than men and are largely dependent on men financially. They prefer to spend the little money they have on basic necessities for their family, instead of using it in the exercise of party politics.

Women's sense of responsibility for the family was mentioned as a key factor for the difference between the behaviour of men and women in politics. It is also used to stigmatize women who stray from this pattern:

"In my case, my family has only told me: Ita, don't forget that you are taking the bread from the mouths of your children." [49]

2.2.2. The benefits of election campaigns are generally given to men

During the consultation process, participants talked about the inequalities between men and women when it comes to receiving benefits during election campaigns. According to the stereotypes of Guinea-

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47 Beatriz Soares da Gama, chairwoman of the Associação Mers-Bodjar, consultation event in Quinhámel, 30 March 2017.

48 The statistics regarding the poverty situation in Guinea-Bissau show a slight difference between women and men, as women represent 51.6% of the poor, and men 48.4%. There were no data available regarding the question of access to financial resources. Source: "*Inquérito Ligeiro para a Avaliação da Pobreza*", National Institute for Statistics (INE), Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Integration, Republic of Guinea-Bissau, 2011.

49 Carmelita Pires, legal consultant, consultation in Bissau, 20 May 2017.

Bissauan society, a woman does not need many material assets, while men, as heads of the family, need more.

Therefore, it can be observed that the benefits of election campaigns are more often than not given to men, particularly motorcycles, bicycles and zinc plates, while women should be content with fabrics to make skirts or T-shirts to be used during the election rallies.

Some women consulted said that they took the leftovers from the kitchen to feed their families. It was also said that the leaders of the women associations sometimes negotiate with the candidates to obtain working equipment, such as hoes, buckets, fencings, watering pots, husking machines and other materials, according to the needs of the community.

It can be concluded that these benefits are never given to women themselves, but always to people around them, be it their family or their colleagues in the associations, reflecting the altruistic character of their ideal figure.

2.2.3. The criteria for selecting election candidates discriminates against women

Mobilization takes place during election campaigns, which are preceded by an internal process of selection of candidates for the voting lists of the parties. The selection process varies from party to party, but sometimes it happens through a vote, by nomination from the central authority of the party, or a combination of the two models. Then, the lists are sent to the Supreme Court of Justice for validation.

> *"The countless times that I was chosen, this happened through the ballot box, but when they started with the nomination of the head of list in Bissau, I was never chosen again." [50]*

The criteria used for the composition of the lists does not consider the aspect of gender parity. They do consider candidates' economic power and influence in the area (having connections with influential people, being a traditional chief, a religious leader, or having the economic means to finance small initiatives with young people and women). This puts men in a privileged position. Apart from these criteria, the position of the candidate within the party structure is also considered to be important.

When all these circumstances are added up, together with patronage, flattery and buying of favours, it becomes clear that women remain at the margin of voting lists. They are not voted upon because they are not candidates, and the only job left for them is to help men get elected to the top positions in the Republic. The consultations revealed that the more difficult it is to mobilize the electorate, the greater is the tendency to not include women on the lists, as men have more economic power to obtain votes.

2.2.4. For women, mobilization leads to confusion and feelings of inequality

The exclusion of women after the political campaigns, apart from being the result of the improper functioning of the political game influenced by a social prejudice that discriminates against them, also creates confusion and consternation among women, who feel undervalued.

Aside from the frustrations created by this situation, some women are afraid to create conflicts in their marriage and prefer to continue with the mobilization work and abandon their ambition to enter politics as candidates. These women unwittingly take up the tasks that directly lead to their own exclusion, given the limited participation of women in the meetings where important decisions are being made.

> *"We help the men seize power, but afterwards, when we get invited to occupy positions, we retreat." [51]*

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50 Adja Mata Sawane, former assemblywoman and member of the Regional Space for Dialogue, consultation in Gabú, 28 April 2017.
51 Marcelina Manuel Lopes, teacher and political activist, consultation in Buba, 6 May 2017.

The distortion of the political game has been a dominant feature in the evolution of the political apparatus and exercise, including within political parties. This distortion has various recurring forms that modify the proper functioning of the political game, and can be observed at all levels of government, including in the party structures, positions in public administration, and all political functions.

It shows itself mainly through the failure to apply established rules and criteria, creating inequalities and discrimination in the access to political decision-making positions. These shifts, or denials to apply the rules, were cited as important obstacles to the advancement of women.

2.3. Women are not part of the political game

2.3.1. The networks of influence do not benefit women

The participants in different panels at the national level pointed at the application of subjective criteria for women's access to the top political positions. Even if the criteria for promotion, like competence or long experience as an activist, are defined in the statutes and the regulations of the political party, it can be observed that these criteria are consistently not applied.

Instead, politicians use their clientelist networks for their promotion, to the detriment of women. This means that they use women in all platforms of the country, at the political level as well as the economic or social level. These practices do not help women get access to key positions within the party structures or in administration. This is also because women have not yet managed to create a network of influence in their favour and because of the social practices themselves, as was repeatedly mentioned during the consultations.

"When it's the time of chasing votes women are being used, but afterwards they are dismissed, they are put aside." [52]

2.3.2. Are women's political and social obligations incompatible with each other?

Another factor that was repeatedly mentioned during the consultations was the incompatibility of the political obligations in a top position with the social obligations imposed on women by society. In other words, participants mentioned that the organization of political meetings late at night impedes the participation of women, given their obligations in the household. As society has given women the responsibility to take care of the household and family and this is deeply entrenched in their minds, they do not allow themselves to leave their homes to participate in political meetings that are often decisive for decision-making. [53]

"Women do not show their availability to participate, they don't make themselves available. When they are called upon, they do not participate." [54]

There seems to exist an imbalance between the political obligations that require the availability to stay all days and hours in the party headquarters or to frequently travel to visit party structures, and the responsibilities in the household. Considering the constant and unbridled competition over the top positions in all party and government structures, the political games have never been worried about the situation of women, which is imposed upon them from the family base.

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52 Patrícia Sanhá, chairwoman of the Confederation of Fisherwomen of Cacheu, consultation in Canchungo, 31 March 2017.
53 In fact, it is during these meetings that the voting lists are being put together and that decisions about the members of the party agencies are being made.
54 Mariato Mané, member of the Guinea-Bissau chapter of the ECOWAS Women Peace and Security Network (REMPSECAO-GB), consultation in Bissau, 20 May 2017.

2.4. The social domination of men continues in politics

Apart from the obscure functioning of the political game, an interference between sociocultural and political practices can be observed. If regulations are not being applied, the political domain replicates social dynamics that value men to the detriment of women.

2.4.1. Men on the voting lists are socially preferred

It can be observed that it is socially preferred to have men on the voting lists and in the governing bodies of the parties, because it is believed that men are more capable and better prepared to assume leadership positions than women.

> *"Women in general are not at the top of the lists, only men [are]."* [55]

This preference can be explained by various historical and cultural factors, particularly the fact that men are and always have been more dominant and present in political life, from the beginning of the establishment of the State of Guinea-Bissau, with the single-party system. With the democratic opening and the increase of political pluralism, when all the parties needed to recruit more activists in a game of obtaining access to power, they were aiming at both men and women, without gender discrimination. However, in most cases, the integration of women in the party structures was merely based on activism, without claims to positions at the party structure or government level. Another factor for this was the poor academic background of the few women who were more active within the parties.

Being at a top position within a party enables a person to influence governance and have decision-making power, prestige, economic power and social status, especially when there are so few opportunities outside of the public sphere, which accelerates and deepens the competition to attain these positions

within the party structures. As a result, women in political life are confronted with men being reluctant to accept women's ambitions to be represented at various levels for reasons of social justice, or to adopt measures to correct the asymmetries between men and women in politics.

Finally, the preference for men can be explained to a certain extent by sociocultural factors and patterns of male domination, as discussed in the first chapter of this report.

2.4.2. Male politicians mutually support each other

The solidarity among men in politics was unanimously mentioned as a strong factor for the exclusion of women from decision-making. This solidarity was mentioned in different ways and at different levels, as illustrated below:

> *"There are illiterate men in politics because they support each other."* [56]

The strong solidarity among men was explained by the fact that men have more trust in a person of the same sex, but also because men very much underestimate the capacities of women. This underestimation is the result of gender stereotypes and sociocultural patterns regulating society, which have always relegated women to inferior and submissive positions. For this reason, when a woman stands up to compete with a man, she is in turn confronted with the solidarity of the masculine block which feels threatened and invaded in a terrain they consider is exclusive to men. On this basis, anything can be done to withstand the intruder.

Men's capacity to close the ranks to defend their domain is antagonistic to women's well-known weak feminine solidarity, reinforcing the idea that the woman who strays from the traditional roles is an impostor.

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55 Siré Fico, teacher, consultation in Canchungo, 31 March 2017.
56 Ensign Naldina Sanca Djassi, Ensign in the National Guard, Human Resource Officer in the Brigade for the Protection of Nature and the Environment, consultation in Bissau, 19 May 2017.

Pathways to solutions

The perceptions around the role of women in politics are deeply influenced by the sociocultural values in place, which leave little space for their development and socio-political rise. Social practices are transposed into the political domain, shedding light on the weakness of institutions and the incapacity of the State to ensure equal treatment for all its citizens. The inequalities created by a system considered to be unfair represent a source of frustration for many women.

Despite these obstacles and the fact that women are normally kept away from decision-making, there are rare cases where women are present and have a valued role in political institutions. These examples constitute, among other *pathways to solutions* mentioned below, a working base to improve the role of women in decision-making in the formal institutions of power.[57]

1. Use advocacy to engage policy-makers in the endeavour to increase women's participation in decision-making

The underrepresentation of women in top positions of political decision-making represents an impediment to their inclusion in decision-making. The implementation of a gender policy, including the adoption and implementation of a gender equality law and the revision of the framework laws on political parties and, therefore, the internal rules within political parties, could be a concrete solution to increase the number of women in key positions within the institutions of power.[58] To make such a law possible, advocacy should be used to convince policy-makers, particularly with the use of lobbying tools.

2. Establish a monitoring system for political progress favouring the participation of women in decision-making

The creation of a follow-up platform is being proposed, to ensure that the Bissau-Guinean authorities will take responsibility of addressing gender issues, particularly the participation of women in decision-making. This platform will be composed of key actors of civil society and government, and will be in charge of establishing monitoring mechanisms, including advocacy activities, to ensure the correct implementation and the continuous efforts to promote the participation of women in decision-making.

3. Strengthen the capacities of political leaders with regard to gender for peacebuilding

Several political actors, especially at the regional level, have not yet been able to benefit from capacity-building on issues related to gender and peacebuilding, particularly around the effective and efficient implementation of a gender policy. It is necessary to train the key actors on the regional level to reach a common understanding among all leaders and other political actors about the issue, and to ensure the creation of synergies and common frameworks for discussion.

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57 The consulted populations gave several *pathways* to solutions as synthesized in this section. It was decided to use the word "pathways" in order to recognize that the opinions expressed during the consultations are elements of solutions, and not solutions *by themselves*. Needless to say, the elaboration of concrete solutions would need the help of specialists and experts able to transform these approaches into concrete actions for change.

58 A gender policy and particularly a gender equality law have been widely discussed during the last few years. While some have raised their voices to defend this proposal, considering it a concrete measure to correct structural social asymmetries, others argue that a gender equality law is not an inclusive and sustainable strategy, as it does not cover all regional, socioprofessional, cultural, ethnic and religious particularities that affect women.

CHAPTER III:
THE DEFENCE AND SECURITY FORCES, A MASCULINE TERRAIN WHERE FEW WOMEN CAN ENTER AND PURSUE A CAREER

Consultation with representatives from the Quinará region, in Buba, 6 May 2017. Copyright Voz di Paz

Chapter III: The Defence and Security Forces, a masculine terrain where few women can enter and pursue a career

The Defence and Security Forces (DSF) are part of the political landscape of Guinea-Bissau. According to many citizens, they represent an impediment for governance and for the stabilization of the country. While the situation of the DSF is constantly evolving, it is essential to learn from its functioning in relation to the role of women in decision-making positions to obtain a better understanding of the socio-political dynamics governing the role of women in decision-making in Guinea-Bissau.

The roles played by women in the DSF vary considerably, depending on the sectors and the hierarchical levels where they are found. If on the one hand a satisfactory representation of women in decision-making positions can be observed in the Security Forces, on the other, it can also be determined that the Armed Forces have a weak participation of women in leadership and decision-making positions, a situation that has worsened over the past decades.[59]

Box 3.1. | Women in the Armed Forces: a historical evolution

The role of women during the struggle for independence is widely recognized and forms the subject of several studies. It was also mentioned by the consulted populations as an example and an honour for all Bissau-Guinean women, but stands in sharp contrast with the reality in the 21st century.

The struggle for independence | It is widely recognized that women have played an important role during the struggle for independence, as they occupied various positions of responsibility in the operational and logistic domains. They joined the struggle when it was still an underground movement, but already in that stage their presence and contributions were notorious. The integration of women within the liberation forces is generally considered to be the result of the insights of Amílcar Cabral, who saw the need to educate women and transform them into key elements for the struggle for independence.[60]

After the struggle came desertion | During the two following decades, the presence of women in the Armed Forces decreased, and many cases of desertion were recorded. The bad sanitary conditions,

60   GODINHO GOMES Patrícia (2013), *Na senda da luta pela paz e igualdade. O contributo das mulheres guineenses*, Buala.

59   Across positions, women represented 3.93% of the workforce of the Armed Forces (179 women), while men represented 96.07% (3,482 men). Source: Military census (2008), Republic of Guinea-Bissau.

the weak infrastructure and the increasing lack of credibility of the DFS during this time, marked by internal conflicts and military intervention in the public sphere, were mentioned by the consulted populations as reasons for these cases of desertion.

"They were so demotivated that many of them deserted and went to their villages, only to come back during the conflict of 7 June 1998."[61]

7 June, the comeback of women? | This situation drastically changed during and after the war, when both men and women volunteered to fight the adversary. Women occupied positions in the social and logistic domains within the DSF, far away from the barracks. It should be noted, however, that over the decades women had lost their emancipatory role and their influence. This observation raises questions about the underlying reasons that impeded a true rooting of the participation of women in these areas and the continuity of their emancipation.

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61   Samuel Fernandes, Commander in the National Guard, Bissau.

3.1. Women's ingress in the DSF is not influenced by their capabilities, but by negative perceptions about women and a lack of inclusiveness

3.1.1. Perceptions around the volunteer system, linking women to illegality, decrease respect for their stature

The Armed Forces (AF) of Guinea-Bissau have a tradition of volunteers. Until 2010, compulsory military service only existed for men, giving women the freedom to join the FA or not, precisely because the Defence Forces were considered a purely masculine environment. In 2010, a new law regarding military service was approved by the National People's Assembly (ANP), calling upon all men and women alike to serve in the Armed Forces.[62] Until today, the new law has not yet been implemented.[63]

The long tradition of compulsory military service for men is an essential factor to explain the low number of women in the ranks of the AF, but it does not suffice to give a comprehensive overview of the exclusion of women in this field. In fact, apart from the limitations for women in the formal recruitment processes and apart from the existence of informal clientelist practices that form an alternative route to enter the DSF for both men and women, the participants in the consultations stated that it is the **perceptions** around volunteerism and the right way to enter the DSF that are prejudicial for women.

In reality, even if informal practices linked to patronage and nepotism can be equally observed to occur among men and women in the AF, there is a strong perception that depicts anything that deviates from the formal process (and the military service that is represented as inherently a male process) as automatically related to women, who only "manage" to enter through informal processes.

The link between formal processes and men on the one hand, and informality and women on the other, strengthens the social belief that women in the DSF

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62   Law on Military Service, Article 2: "Without prejudice to paragraph 8, all citizens of Guinea-Bissau between 18 and 35 years of age are subject to compulsory military service and the fulfilment of their military obligations arising from the present Law."
63   At the time of writing of this report, the last trimester of 2017.

do not comply with their duties of exemplarity as expected from them by society, which is based on a logic that women should represent a social ideal that does not violate any rules. Women in the DSF, and particularly those who occupy leading positions, are therefore seen as undeserving of the respect and the trust of men and other women in society, for having deviated from the stereotype of the ideal woman.

> *"Most of the women we have in the DSF entered at the height of the political-military conflict. Those who entered afterwards do not respect the hierarchy and the laws, given the way in which they entered. Not even their subordinates respect them."* [64]

The direct consequences of this phenomenon include the dissemination of defamatory criticism about women, and even worse, the lack of respect and the depreciation of their orders by their subordinates. In this way, the relation of uniformed women with their subordinates is largely influenced by negative perceptions around the role of women in the DSF. As their subordinates and superiors have little respect for them, women in the higher ranks are seen as having little authority or ability to command respect, which reinforces again the idea that they would not be able to be in command. This latter idea is then used as a justification to, once more, exclude women from decision-making positions in the DSF.

> *Some women in the DSF, such as the nurses or the cooks, immediately pull out if their orders are not respected, instead of looking for other ways to assert their position. They do not understand that an order that was given, considering their authority and the responsibility that comes with it, has to be complied with. And that is where the difference resides: in the power of decision."* [65]

3.1.2. The lack of infrastructure adapted to women is a source of demotivation

According to the consultations, the lack of inclusive infrastructure appropriate for men as well as for women is a factor causing women to be reticent to enter the DSF. The barracks and other infrastructures, being inherited from colonial times and designed with the idea that they would be used by men, are not adapted to the necessities of women, and this situation does not create favourable conditions for women to enter the military field, especially not in operational positions.

> *"We don't have separate barracks for women, or toilets, or uniforms... The food is precarious. Imagine in the northern zone between Varela and Sitato, East of Bóe – Dandu-Beli, in the South in Candembel, Guiledje... there is not one vehicle for the personnel and the state of the infrastructure is shockingly bad! In such conditions, it is not possible to put a woman there."* [66]

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64 José Buam, Major and Political Officer of the CIFMC, discussion group in Bissau, 21 September 2017.
65 Inhasse Cabato, Deputy Militar Commander of the Mansoa Batallion, consultation event in Farim, 8 April 2017.
66 Colonel Samuel Fernandes, Commander in the National Guard, National Conference in Bissau, 10 October 2017.

Systems circle C: Perceptions of women entering the DSF – please read the instructions in the box below

Adapting the DSF infrastructure
to the needs of women

Ineffectiveness of the 2010 law
on gender equality
in military service

Dominant idea that
the army is a
men's business

Men are favoured
during the formal
recruitment process

Idea that **a woman in**
the DSF cannot
command respect in
a leadership role

Perceptions of the role
of women in the DSF

Idea that women who have
entered the DSF without
following the formal
procedure **are illegal**

Lack of respect for women in the
DSF (criticism and discrimination)
from superiors and subordinates

Self-reinforcing circle

3.2. The culture of masculinity in the DSF is stigmatizing for women

3.2.1. Gender stereotypes that link *rigour* and *strength* to men leave women discredited

The consultations revealed that the culture of masculinity is at the centre of the social constructions linked to the DSF. The participants stressed that within the culture of Guinea-Bissau, if the political domain is already dominated by men, the DSF is the incarnation of masculinity itself. This reveals the depth of the perceptions of the DSF, and the close link between informal social practices and formalized practices that are influenced by the sociocultural patterns in place.

Apart from the simple association of the DSF with masculinity, the consultations also revealed that decision-making positions within the DSF are widely seen as the domain of men. For this reason, there are many examples of uniformed women in the high ranks being associated with male figures or with masculinity. This fact reveals another phenomenon anchored in the sociocultural traditions of Guinea-Bissau, and also in the DSF, which associates the figure of the chief or the leader with men. This initial observation allows for a better understanding of how the dynamics around the role of women in the DSF are influenced by deep factors that produce these current practices.

> *"When we wear the uniform, they don't call us women. They call us men."* [67]

The participants highlighted the considerable reluctance among men in the DSF to include women in various sectors of the security and military bodies, particularly in decision-making positions. It can also be observed that this reluctance extends to a larger segment of the population outside the DSF, which does not accept or promote the role of women in this area, considered to be the domain of men.

The best illustration of this reluctance is the stigmatization of women in the DSF, who are being called names like "chatterboxes", particularly to justify their exclusion from decision-making.

> *"The men have meetings and don't invite the women. They say that women talk too much and cannot keep secrets."* [68]

Another stereotype used to justify the exclusion of women from decision-making positions in the DSF is the alleged weakness of women. Women are considered to be delicate and weak, and therefore unable to engage in activities that require physical strength (such as heavy lifting or engaging in combat). As women are considered unable to perform operational tasks, they are consequently unable to show their abilities and are naturally excluded (along with men who are unable to perform such tasks), as they are considered not to deserve their stature or high rank.

> *"Given the physical activities within the Armed Forces, women do not participate a lot in the big actions, but more in administration. Men are more operational and women are less operational."* [69]

These perceptions and stereotypes end up determining the roles that women should play within the DSF and ultimately impair their participation in them. Proof of this is the notorious presence of women at the subaltern levels performing secondary tasks – as secretaries, nurses, receptionists, photographers, or radio broadcasters – while men dominate all the command structures.

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67   Cadija Djalo, First Lieutenant in the Navy, consultation in Bissau, 19 May 2017.
68   Tete Vensa Gomes, First Sergeant in the National Guard, consultation in Bissau, 19 May 2017.
69   Djariatu, soldier, consultation in São Domingos, 1 April 2017.

3.2.2. The prejudices about women being mothers and housekeepers impede their professional rise

Apart from the stereotypes according to which women are weak and talk too much, women in the DSF are also associated with their traditional role as mothers and housekeepers. Like in the political domain, it was observed that the professional tasks of women in the DSF, and particularly in decision-making positions, are seen as incompatible with their responsibilities at home, which are considered to be paramount for a woman. Factors linked to the weakness of women during maternity and the postpartum period, and their unavailability during pregnancy and after giving birth, were often mentioned as reasons for this incompatibility.

In a domain where transfers and mobility are conditions for professional growth, many cases can be found of women who are unavailable to be transferred to another location due to their responsibilities at home, and because of the lack of appropriate support infrastructure. This unavailability, even if it is the result of perceptions and generalizations, ends up being a pitfall for the professional development of uniformed women, or an impediment for women in the security or military sectors to reach decision-making positions.

> *"Women don't accept to be transferred and they give all kinds of explanations, and this has impaired their graduation."* [70]

3.3. The fierce competition impedes women from competing over high positions

3.3.1. The lack of opportunities marginalizes women in the operational sectors of the DSF

Another central element brought up during the consultations is the lack of opportunities for women to train and practice in the operational sections of the DSF. The fact that there have been no regular trainings, military routine exercises and missions over the past years makes it impossible for women to show their capabilities and competences, while this is normally one of the criteria of merit to be promoted in the defence and security career.

To prove this point, it should be noted that during the entire trajectory of Bissau-Guinean troops participating in international missions, the absence of women was evident. This was the case during observation missions in Angola, Mozambique and Haiti, but also in observation and peacekeeping missions, such as the one in Liberia in 2003.[71]

The fact that there have not been any lawful recruitments since 1992, along with the lack of participation in missions and operational activities, have provided women with limited opportunities to show their abilities to engage in operations. According to the consultations, these factors have directed women to positions in non-operational segments and services, especially supporting services in administration, logistics and protocol. Moreover, it has been noted that fast promotions are not likely to occur in these areas, which is also the reason why they are less appealing to male colleagues, in a context of constant competition.

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70 Ensign Naldina Sanca Djassi, Ensign in the National Guard, Human Resource Officer in the Brigade for the Protection of Nature and the Environment, consultation in Bissau, 19 May 2017.

71 It is worthwhile to stress, however, that in the past women have participated in various police missions, even if in small numbers, in Mozambique and Haiti for example. One female figure was mentioned, who today is the National Commander of the Traffic Police, who was previously admired and envied in her group of Presidential Escort in Algeria.

3.3.2 The highly competitive environment impairs the promotion of women in the DSF

The consultations revealed that most promotions within the Armed Forces occurred after military coups: times of turmoil in which the structures and positions within the DSF are redefined, but women are excluded. The reorganizations and promotions in such times are peculiar, because they are not necessarily based on competence or merit, but rather on allegiances and membership of groups.

The exclusion of women from these processes was explained by the participants as being the result of women not participating in the preparations for military coups, which results from their stigmatization as "chatterboxes":

> *"They don't invite us to the small conspiracy meetings, because they say we talk too much."* [72]

This logic of restructuring the DSF after military coups finds its origin in the failure of the various reforms that were meant to regulate the composition of the Army, particularly in the field of compulsory retirement, which created severe problems of demographic imbalances within the Armed Forces.[73] In fact, the return of retired military to the barracks after military coups has led, over the course of the years, to an excess of seniors in comparison to the small dimensions of the AF.[74]

The top-heavy structure of the AF, an inverted pyramid – with a small base made up of few soldiers, and a heavy top filled with senior officers and generals – causes a high competition over promotions. There are little or almost no vacancies to be filled, and when an opportunity opens up, the competition is so fierce that the promotion of a woman to a decision-making position is almost impossible.

It can be noted that in this environment where subjectivity reigns and where no clear criteria for promotions exist, women are systematically excluded from competing for promotions, which results in a widespread gender asymmetry among the high military ranks.

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72 Lieutenant Elsa Monteiro, Information and Security Services (SIS), consultation in Bissau, 19 May 2017.

73 The repeated attempts at reform, from the 1980s to the beginning of 2000s, have had little effect. The goal of these reforms – to encourage elderly military to take compulsory retirement – was not met. This failure can be explained by factors such as the instability of politics and governance, the negative ideas about the Reform within the DSF, the Combatants for National Liberation and other groups, the insufficiency of financial and material resources, as well as general poverty and precariousness.

74 The result of this situation is that, four decades into independence, the DSF still count the protagonists of the struggle for independence among their ranks, combined with a small number of younger military.

Systems circle D: The advancement of women within the DSF – please read the instructions in the box below

Image of women as being **weak and inapt** for operations

more/less

Marginalization of women in the DSF to non-operational sectors

Women are directed to **non-operational services** (secretary, logistics, administration, protocol)

more/less

Possibilities for women to **train and improve** their operational work

Opportunities for women to **show their capacities** in operations

Equilibrium circle I

Association of the **figure of the leader** with masculinity

more/less

Marginalization of women in the DSF in terms of promotions

more/less

Opportunities for women to show their **ability to lead**

Chances for women to reach **decision-making positions** in the operational field

Equilibrium circle II

Obscure practices of patronage favour men

Intensity of the competition *over promotions (to decision-making positions) in the operational sector*

Instructions for reading the systemic analysis:

- We suggest you to start reading the systemic analysis with the factor written in big letters, which is the starting point of the circle.
- Each factor has to be read starting with the word "more" or "less".
- Each arrow intensifies the word "more" or "less".

For example: The *more* "chances for women to reach decision-making positions in the operational field" there are, the *more* "opportunities for women to show their ability to lead" there will be.

- Reading the circle goes by the same logic.
- If an arrow is accompanied by the words "*more/less*", this means that the relation between the first and the second factor changes.

For example: The *more* "women are directed to non-operational services (secretary, logistics, administration, protocol)", the *fewer* "possibilities for women to train and improve their operational work" there will be.

- The reading of the circle continues with the same logic, so the same proportional relation (more => more, less => less), until indicated otherwise.

NB: The factors written in italics are external factors influencing the factor in question.

For more details to read the systemic analysis, see Annex 1.

Pathways to solutions

The Defence and Security Forces are, like politics, strongly influenced by the cultural traditions of Guinea-Bissau, which offer little opportunity for the political and social rise of women. Moreover, the DSF are featured by a strong macho culture which depreciates the role of women in these areas and impairs the transfer of responsibilities to them in decision-making positions.

In order to meet the specific requirements identified by the consulted groups, the participants proposed several *pathways to solutions* with regard to the DSF. These are principally meant for the political leaders and main decision-makers responsible for DSF-related issues.[75]

1. Define a clear and inclusive juridical framework, taking into account the concerns of women within the DSF regarding their inclusion in decision-making

The concerns of women regarding their rise within the DSF are numerous and have so far not been recognized in a clear juridical framework. The problems related to the objective recruitment of both men and women, the penalization of practices that discriminate against women, or women's entitlement to adapted and specific infrastructure, among others, are considered unimportant.

A clear and inclusive juridical framework can only be defined and established through advocacy efforts and the creation of a specific working group dealing with the needs of women in the DSF. These efforts cannot only engender an improvement of the conditions for women in the DSF, but also serve as a lever to encourage more women to join the DSF.

2. Improve the communication around the inclusion of women in the DSF

The image of the DSF, closely linked to the culture of masculinity, is not helpful for making a career in the military or security appealing to women. Improving the external communication about careers for women within the DSF, showing that it is possible and positive to be successful as a woman within the Defence and Security Forces, would be a first step to attract a broader audience, to change the image of the DSF and possibly to recruit women.

A potential opportunity for disseminating success stories is to capitalize on the strong appreciation for the female veterans of the struggle for independence. A communication campaign to promote the examples of successful pathways of military women is another example that could contribute to the improvement of the communication around the inclusion of women in the DSF.

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75 The consulted populations gave several *pathways to solutions* as synthesized in this section. It was decided to use the word "pathways" in order to recognize that the opinions expressed during the consultations are elements of solutions, and not solutions *by themselves*. Needless to say, the elaboration of concrete solutions would need the help of specialists and experts able to transform these approaches into concrete actions for change.

CONCLUSION

Discussing the outcomes of the consultations during the National Conference organized by Voz di Paz and Interpeace, 11 October 2017. Copyright Interpeace.

Conclusion

The main elements of this report are, for many citizens of Guinea-Bissau and for keen observers, already known. Debates and discussions about the participation of women in governance have attracted a growing interest over the past years. This research, developed by Voz di Paz and Interpeace and financed by the Gender Promotion Initiative of the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, however, aims to shed light on new perspectives, to relativize the importance of certain factors and, above all, to deepen the understanding of this subject, looking at it from a peacebuilding perspective. This report differs from earlier research, mainly because it establishes a common understanding that is consensual and shared by a representative group of Bissau-Guinean society.

The sociocultural and political pressure upon women was confirmed to be a real barrier to their emancipation in the field of decision-making. The illustrative quotes that have been cited in the whole report reveal a deep appreciation for the traditional social norms, which endanger women's ability to play a role in decision-making in Guinea-Bissau. The transposition of these values to formal and informal institutions of power makes the rise of women difficult and discouraging.

This report – *Fala di Mindjer* – also gives perspectives about the existing potential and the capacities that could serve as catalysts for change, such as women's networks or, at a higher level, the recognition of the central role that women play in society. The best practices and recommendations presented in this report also provide ideas to improve the practices in this domain. In a context of instability, in which long-term change is needed but fragile, these opportunities and recommendations form a basis on which one could start building, as of today, a new balance for Guinea-Bissau.

ANNEXES AND REFERENCES

Annexes

Annex 1: How to read a systems analysis

In order to deepen the analysis of the data collected during the consultations, the researchers from Voz di Paz used a systemic-thinking approach.

Systems analysis wants to go beyond the simplistic logic of cause and effect and of linearity as suggested by certain types of analysis, such as the problem-tree approach. **It aims to make the complexity of dynamics that structure a certain phenomenon more explicit.** Instead of focusing only on some root causes of a problem, it intends to identify the structuring dynamics linking all causes and consequences.

To do this, it is necessary to identify the main factors that influence a phenomenon ("the causes and effects" of the classical analysis) and to subsequently identify the interactions and interdependencies between them. The central aspect of the systems analysis is the identification of certain groups of factors that influence the entire system, thus shaping the structuring dynamics of a phenomenon. Some of these structuring dynamics are presented in this report.

How to read the visualization of systems analysis?

The different factors ("causes and effects") of the structuring dynamic are formulated in such a manner that they can increase/intensify or decrease according to the situation and the scenario under investigation.

In the analyses presented in this report, two types of structuring dynamics are shown, in the form of circles: self-reinforcing circles (in blue) and equilibrium circles (in yellow).

Self-reinforcing circles

The factors are linked by arrows. An arrow **without a particular indication** linking factor A to factor B suggests a relation between these two factors that is more or less **proportional**. That is to say that if factor A increases, factor B will also increase. This can be read in two ways: "the more A increases, the more B will increase", or also: "the more A decreases, the more B will decrease".

A series of factors linked by arrows with indication, forming a circle, is called a "**self-reinforcing circle**". A self-reinforcing circle is characterized by a positive or negative dynamic that increasingly augments, in the same way as a vicious circle or a virtuous circle.

Example of a self-reinforcing circle
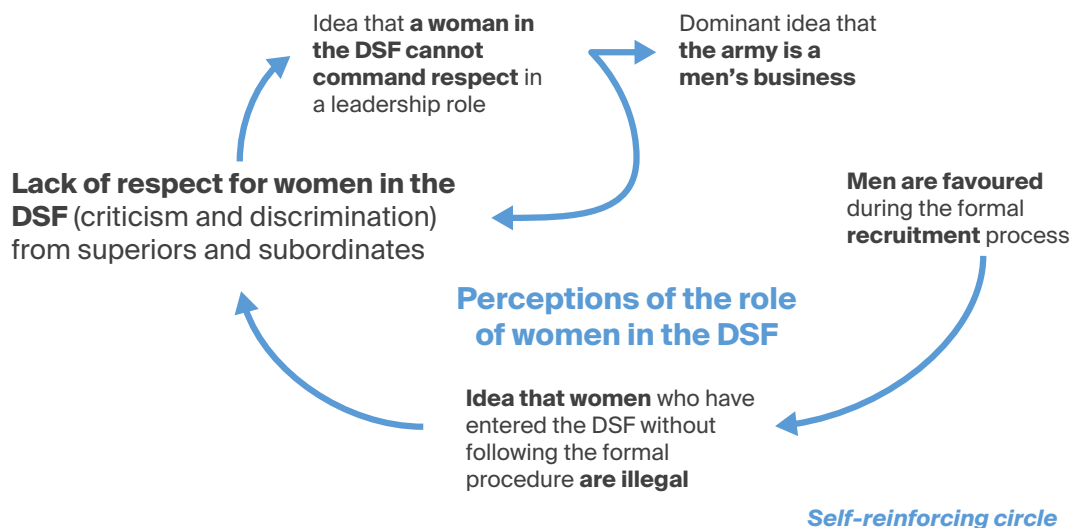
Idea that **a woman in the DSF cannot command respect** in a leadership role

Dominant idea that **the army is a men's business**

Lack of respect for women in the DSF (criticism and discrimination) from superiors and subordinates

Men are favoured during the formal **recruitment** process

Perceptions of the role of women in the DSF

Idea that women who have entered the DSF without following the formal procedure **are illegal**

Self-reinforcing circle

Reading instructions

We suggest you to start reading the systems analysis with the factor written in big letters, which is the starting point of the circle.

- The *bigger* "the lack of respect for women in the DSF from superiors and subordinates" is, the *bigger* will be "the idea that a woman in the DSF cannot command respect in a leadership role";

- The *bigger* "the idea that a woman in the DSF cannot command respect in a leadership role" is, the *bigger* will be "the dominant idea that the army is a men's business";

- The *bigger* "the dominant idea that the army is a men's business" is, the *more* it will occur that "men are favoured during the formal recruitment process";

- The *more* it occurs that "men are favoured during the formal recruitment process"; the *bigger* will be "the idea that the women who have entered the DSF without following the formal procedure are illegal";

- The *bigger* "the idea that women who have entered the DSF without following the formal procedures are illegal" is, the *bigger* will be "the lack of respect for women in the DSF from superiors and subordinates".

Equilibrium circle

When you see an arrow linking factor A to factor B with the **indication "more/less"**, this means that there is a relation between the two that is more or less inversely proportional. In other words, when factor A increases, factor B decreases. This can be read in two ways: "the more A increases, the more B will decrease", or also: "the more A decreases, the more B will increase".

A series of factors forming a circle with one indication being "*more/less*" is called a "**equilibrium circle**". An equilibrium circle is characterized by a trend that is maintained in a certain equilibrium. If factor A in the circle increases, at least one of the other factors in the circle will come in action to reduce factor A and bring it back, more or less, to its initial level. In this way, equilibrium is maintained to a certain extent.

Example of an equilibrium circle:
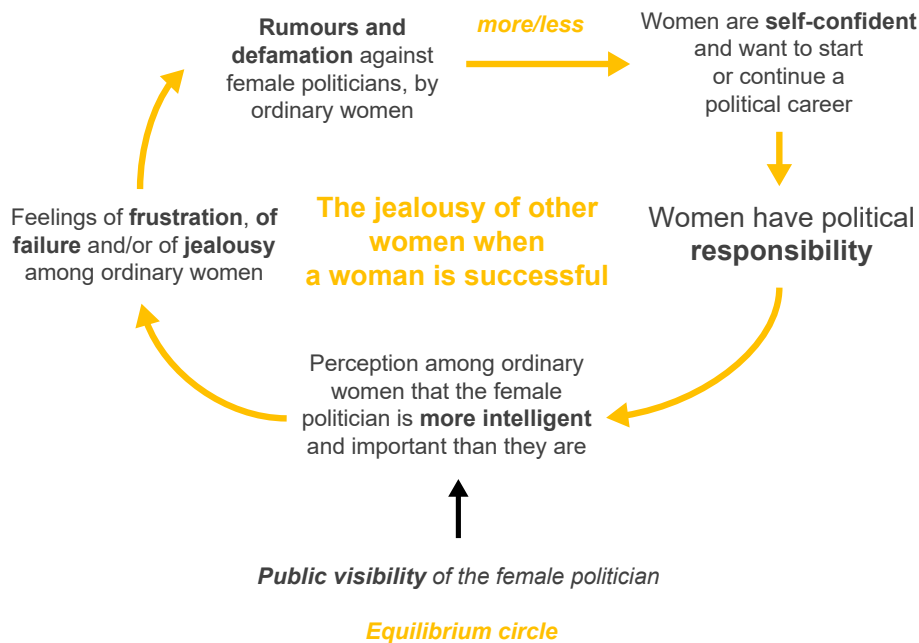
Equilibrium circle

Reading instructions

We suggest you to start reading the systems analysis with the factor written in big letters, which is the starting point of the circle.

- The *more* "women have political responsibility", the *bigger* will be "the perception among ordinary women that the female politician is more intelligent and important than they are";

- The *bigger* "the perception among ordinary women that the female politician is more intelligent and important than they are", the *bigger* will be the "feelings of frustration, of failure and/or of jealousy among ordinary women";

- The *bigger* the "feelings of frustration, of failure and/or of jealousy among ordinary women", the *more* "rumours and defamation against female politicians from ordinary women" there will be;

- The *more* "rumours and defamation against female politicians from ordinary women" there are, the *less* will it be the case that "women are self-confident and want to start or continue a political career";

- The *less* it is the case that "women are self-confident and want to start or continue a political career", the *less* will it be the case that "women will have political responsibility".

Annex 2: Statistical data about the activities

Table 1: National consultations (focus group discussions)

Region	Locality	Composition	Date	Number of participants per locality	Total number of participants
Bafatá	Bafatá	Mixed*	29 April 2017	36	**36**
Biombo	Biombo	Mixed*	30 March 2017	47	**47**
Bolama-Bijagós	Bubaque	Mixed*	13 May 2018	43	**43**
Cacheu	Canchungo	Mixed*	31 March 2017	57	110
	São Domingos	Mixed*	1 April 2017	53	
Gabú	Gabú	Mixed*	28 April 2017	51	**51**
Oio	Mansoa	Mixed*	7 April 2017	50	99
	Farim	Mixed*	8 April 2017	49	
Quinará	Quinará	Mixed*	6 May 2017	60	**60**
Bissau autonomous sector	Bissau	Political parties and civil society	20 May 2017	53	105
	Bissau	Defence and Security Forces	19 May 2017	52	
Tombali	Catió	Mixed*	5 May 2017	40	**40**
TOTAL	**12 discussion groups**				**544 participants**

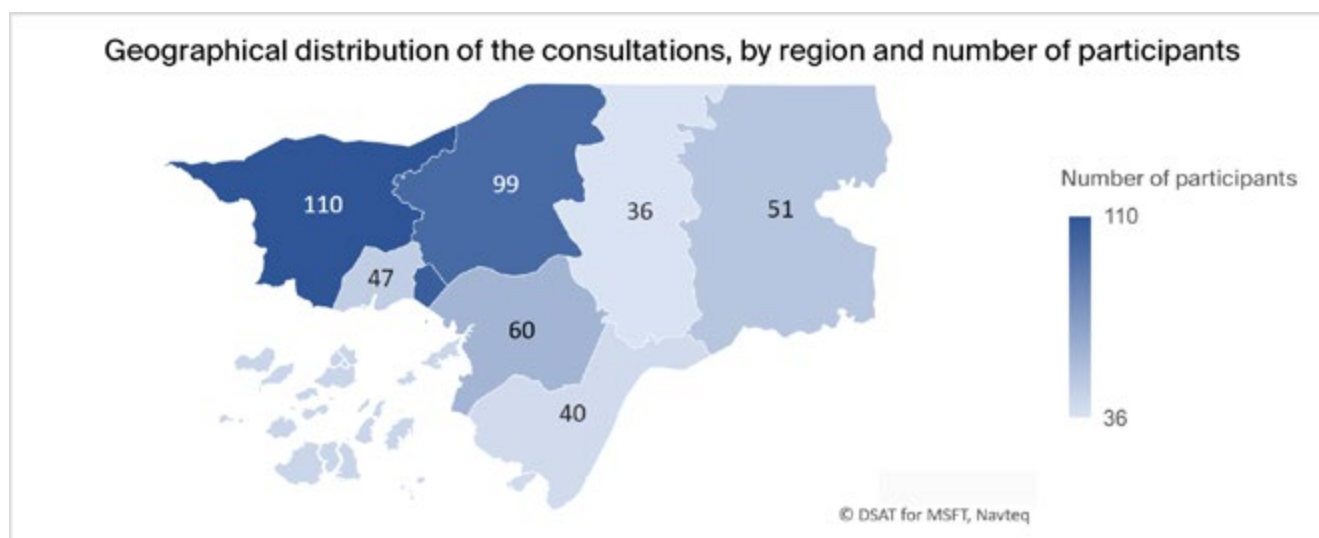*Civil society, traditional leaders, political parties and DSF at the regional level

Geographical distribution of the consultations, by region and number of participants

Table 2: Workshops to validate the results

Activity	Number	Number of participants
Validation event I – Workshops with specialists and experts (1 day)	5	63
Validation event II – National Conference with national and regional leaders (2 days)	1	57
Total	6	120

Table 3: Activities performed

Activity	Number
Focus group discussions	12
Validation events	6
Total number of participants	664

Figure 1: Sociodemographic distribution of the participants in the activities, by gender
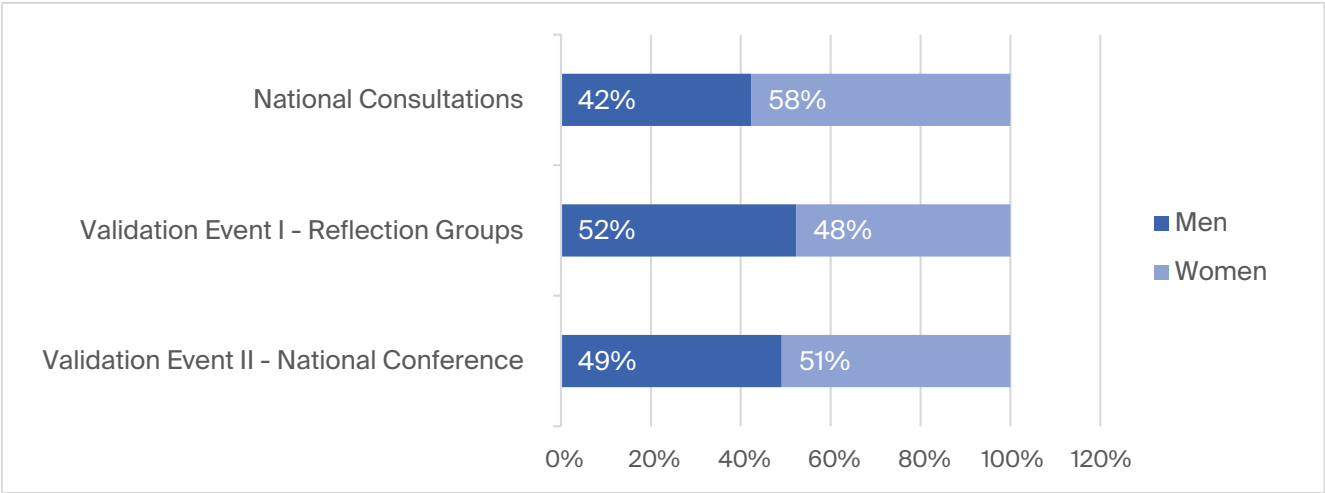
Figure 2: Sociodemographic distribution of the participants in the activities, by age groups
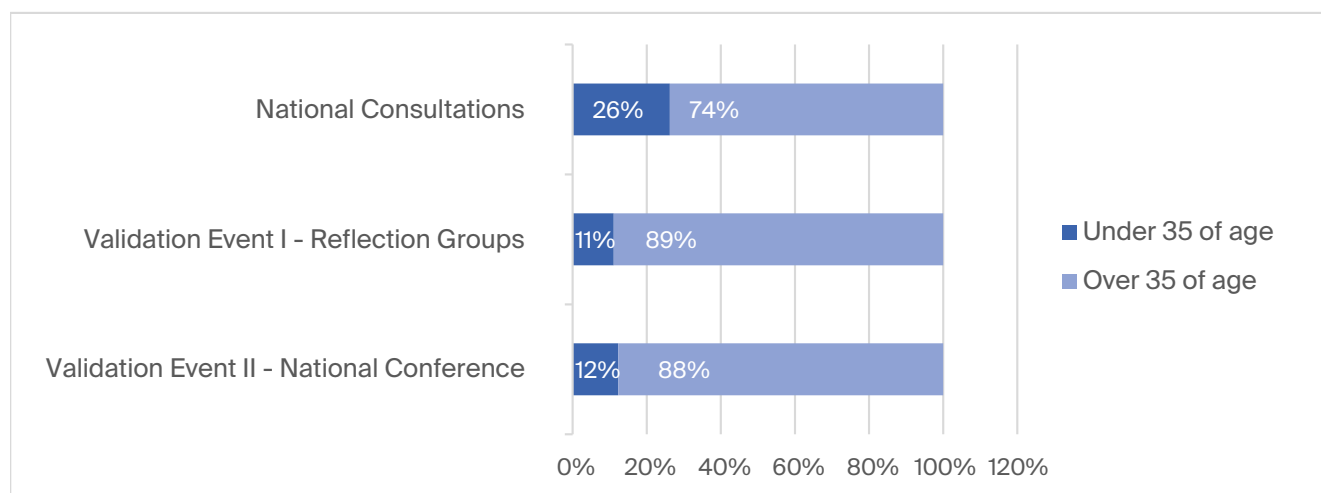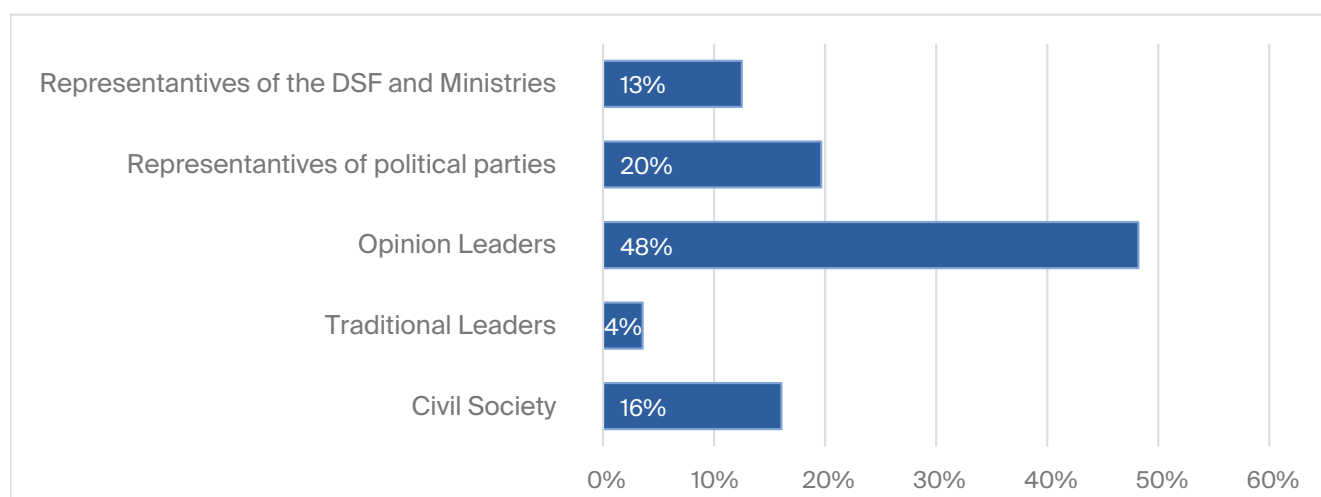

	Under 35 of age	Over 35 of age
National Consultations	26%	74%
Validation Event I - Reflection Groups	11%	89%
Validation Event II - National Conference	12%	88%

Figure 3: Socioprofessional distribution of the participants in the National Conference, 10–11 October 2017

Representantives of the DSF and Ministries	13%
Representantives of political parties	20%
Opinion Leaders	48%
Traditional Leaders	4%
Civil Society	16%

Annex 3: Map of Guinea-Bissau

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