

Meeting of African and Spanish think tanks on African Women's empowerment and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

On 7 and 8 April 2022, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation (MAUC), in collaboration with Casa África, organized the Meeting of African and Spanish think tanks on African Women's empowerment and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, which took place at the Ministry's headquarters in Madrid.

The Director-General for Africa, Alicia Rico Pérez del Pulgar, inaugurated the meeting and introduced its objective: to facilitate the relationship between Spanish and African think tanks, with the aim of promoting mutual collaboration and generating applied research for Spanish institutions in order to increase the effectiveness of their external action in Africa.

Assessment of European research funding in Africa

- Regarding the European usual funding schemes, several African participants stressed that European countries tend to colonize research through their calls for proposals, as they are "tailored to meet the North's expectations". Moreover, African centres have no control over research. One of them stated that, also in this area, "European money goes back to Europe".
- African researchers who participate in studies that have been designed and financed by Europe do not take part in the definition of the key concepts that are used. Therefore, there are different interpretations and misunderstandings about concepts such as "gender" or "empowerment".
- "Most policies designed to prevent and combat extremism rely on assumptions that research rarely confirms," said the ISS representative. For this reason, the policy design must start from the analysis of data, taking into account the particularities of each context. Research should feed policies by adopting a crosscutting gender approach.
- In terms of the existing misconceptions that Europe has regarding the African reality:
 - Research shows that a solid religious education reduces the probability of young people joining extremist groups.
 - From a development perspective, priority given to job creation for young people does not take into account the fact that, frequently, youth join armed groups in order to protect their own income-generating activities.

- Studies show that, in several contexts, violent groups become service providers to communities and respond to some of their demands. "They listen to us," said one of the African representatives.
- Research on conflicts in the Sahel, often biased by the dominant narrative focused on a military approach, must incorporate the diversity of motivations that exist.

Importance of applied research and areas for improvement

- The inclusion of social science research (e.g. anthropological research) is essential when conducting thematic research (climate change, health, rural development, peace and security, etc.).
- Capacity building through research. One way to promote it is through fellowships for young researchers, which could be enriched through training by women mentors.
- One glaring demand is the lack of data in Africa in relation to women's contributions to the areas addressed by the UNSC Resolution 1325.
- With regard to research and policy implementation in the various areas of UNSC Resolution 1325, a bottom-up approach should be applied. From civil society to institutions, and from a local to a national level for the implementation of national action plans.
- Promotion of in-depth research, with appropriate means to identify discriminatory social norms and effectively assess the empowerment of African women.
- There is a gap between early warning and reaction and conflict prevention. Insufficient early warning capacities lead to deficiencies in conflict prevention. These two dimensions have to be linked.
- While the national approach is important because it identifies the intrinsic characteristics of countries, the regional approach remains relevant since most of the problems are transboundary.
- Gaps with respect to the fulfilment of the WPS Agenda should be identified and guidance from a feminist perspective should be developed and provided.
- Think tanks should be open to collaboration with public institutions, NGOs, academia and the media. Moreover, as the director of OSSREA points out: "research serves to give voice to the voiceless", vindicating the rights of those who are most vulnerable.

Thematic proposals and areas of collaboration between think tanks

- AERC. The institutionalization of research is fundamental to influencing policy and it requires:
 - Investing in local research capacities.
 - Increasing the knowledge bases.

Also proposed to jointly address the dissemination of knowledge on the relationship between economic growth and poverty reduction. Another area of collaboration is women's economic and financial inclusion.

- ISS. Its geographic priority is the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin and West Africa Littoral states.

Possible research lines, in broader contexts, are:

- Gender and violent extremism, overcoming the simplistic woman = victim approach.
 - Women and transnational organized crime. What roles do women play in it.
 - Gender, political participation, and representation, the role of women in the implementation of peace agreements. Case study of Mali.
 - Gender in the maritime security sector.
- KAIPTC. Priority regions: West Africa and the Sahel. Interested in the best practices that Spain could share.
 - Emphasized the need to help women involved in armed groups to disengage from them.
 - Peacekeeping, peacebuilding and conflict management and resolution.
 - Gender mainstreaming in ECOWAS missions.
 - OSSREA. Recovery and rehabilitation of women in post-conflict situations.
 - Timbuktu Institute. Proposed to study endogenous strategies for building resilience in conflicts and mentioned the role of religion as an example.

Other areas that could be worked on are:

- Monitoring of social networks to look into the needs of African women.
- Analysing the relationship between humanitarian work and research.

Spanish centres are also encouraged to prepare joint proposals for submission to the EU, drawing on their experience and linguistic expertise.

- WANEP. Post-COVID-19 recovery in the Sahel. They take part in a coalition that provides recommendations in the areas of peacebuilding and post-conflict transitions.

Other subjects of interest:

- The experiences provided by research in Latin America.
 - Inclusion of applied research in the WPS agenda.
 - Identification of local actors in resilience.
- CIDOB. Advocated for the co-production and collaborative research approach to generate collaborative knowledge. Proposed two ways of contributing: sharing lessons learnt by Europeans; and training in post-conflict contexts.

Other topics to be jointly developed:

- The implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 in European operations in Africa.
 - Democratic transitions and the role of women in political protests (e.g. Sudan); the role of women in democratic and electoral processes.
 - The importance of women in peace processes.
 - The cross-border dimension in the African context, including gender and transnational crime.
 - The role of women in climate change resilience.
- Fundación Alternativas pointed out:
- Gender violence.
 - Migration and refugees.
 - Green transition in the framework of Spain's and the EU's relations with Africa.
 - Institutional representation of women and their effective political participation.
- GEA-UAM. Identified the Sahel and Northern Mozambique as possible areas for joint research.
- Offered to enhance capacity building and co-production of knowledge.
 - Willingness to collaborate in a project it is developing on the WPS agenda in the Sahel.
- OXFAM. Highlighted the Sahel as a priority region. Given its experience implementing projects in the field, it offered to provide information and data. Interest in collaborating with other entities to develop their public information and advocacy work.

The proposed areas of work are:

- Development, humanitarian action and peacekeeping.
- The relationship between the WPS Agenda and women's empowerment from the inequalities point of view.
- The link between women, climate change and conflict to develop resilience-building programmes.
- The relationship between security, development and social cohesion.

- Civic spaces and the role of women and youth.
- Real Instituto Elcano. Did not set a priority region. It is currently focusing on the work of Spanish private companies in Africa and their potential relationship with NGOs. Also proposed the possibility of organizing exchanges of gender specialized researchers.

Casa África offered the possibility of translating and publishing the studies of the think tanks, on its website and in paper. They also have an essay contest. On their website, they offer profiles of African and Spanish researchers, which should be enriched. They have an online library. They already have a platform that is open to researchers.

In the last session of the meeting, the representatives of the Spanish International Development Cooperation Agency (AECID), the Office of Strategy and Prospective, the Office of Human Rights, and the Ministry of Science and Innovation explained the Spanish and European programs and channels for financing research that could be carried out by Afro-Spanish pairs or, in some cases, only by African organizations:

- The AECID presented three funding options:
 - [Ellas+ Programme](#): call for proposals for local NGOs, think tanks, local governments and international organisations for the promotion of women's political participation. Proposals should be submitted to AECID offices abroad.
 - [Africa-MED Grants \(Modality 2\)](#): for African researchers with basic Spanish language knowledge. The research must be related to the 2030 Agenda and the research period is 6 to 10 months in universities, CSIC or other public or private research centres.
 - [Inequalities Research Facility \(AFD/European Commission\)](#): call for proposals addressed to African researchers with expertise in the field to be researched. Applications from institutions in low and middle-income countries are encouraged.
- [Grants for activities aimed at the dissemination, promotion and protection of Human Rights \(ODH-MAUC\)](#).
- [Grants to private non-profit organisations for the study, analysis and implementation of the Spanish foreign policy priorities \(OEP-MAUC\)](#).
- [Africa Initiative](#); [Horizon Europe](#); [Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions](#); and [European Research Council](#).

Conclusions

- The meeting has fulfilled the objective of enabling seven African and six Spanish think tanks to get to know each other better and to exchange views and information on their research (completed, ongoing or planned).
- The establishment of bilateral contacts opens ways for exploring future collaborations.
- Interest in establishing an Afro-Spanish platform or network of think tanks has been identified, and Casa África already has capacities and tools that can be used as a basis for this.
- Critical frankness characterised the exchanges during the meeting and highlighted the need for this attitude in order to overcome deficiencies that hinder the relationship between Europeans and Africans in the field of research. It became clear the need to establish a relationship based on a new paradigm of equality, mutual respect and co-creation of knowledge. This new paradigm will better contribute to the effectiveness of Spanish and European action in Africa.
- There are several Spanish and EU channels for funding research in Africa by/with African centres. However, some of them are hardly being used. There is a lack of information and dissemination. It is also advisable to adapt the existing instruments so that they accompany and respond better to the proposals and the demand that this meeting will foreseeably generate.

Way forward

- Preparation by the Directorate General for Africa of an initial proposal for an Afro-Spanish platform or network of think tanks to be submitted to Casa África.
- The Directorate General for Africa will propose to the Spanish entities that have presented the available funding channels improvements in their dissemination and possible adaptations of their contents to meet the demand driven by this meeting.
- To pursue the goal of establishing an ecosystem of Afro-Spanish thought.

Annex:

Item 1: List of participant think tanks

African think tanks

1. Institute for Security Studies (ISS).
2. Timbuktu Institute.
3. Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA).
4. Groupe de Recherche et d'Analyse appliquées pour le développement (GRAAD).
5. African Economic Research Consortium (AERC).
6. WANEP. West African Network for Peacebuilding.
7. Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC).

Spanish think tanks

1. Fundación Alternativas.
2. Real Instituto Elcano.
3. CIDOB.
4. OXFAM-Intermon.
5. African Studies Group (GEA-UAM).
6. Spanish Institute for Security Studies (IEEE).