



Our feminist futures

PRESENTATION OF THE DEMANDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND FEMINISTS IN WEST AFRICA FOR THE POST-2030 AGENDA



WHO WE ARE

Dear authorities, decision makers, stakeholders and participants of the Summit of the Future 2024,

We are youth and feminist representatives of civil society organizations and human rights activists from 8 French-speaking West African countries (Burkina Faso, Benin, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal).

As young people and feminists from French-speaking West Africa, we would like to highlight some key messages and recommendations that deserve your particular attention. Those latter ones have been elaborated by around thirty of us and represent both, the result of a collective effort and several virtual meetings.

These messages and recommendations were co-constructed in partnership with Equipop, in preparation for our side-event during the Action Days (September 20-21, 2024) and our participation in the Summit of the Future (September 22-23, 2024).



WHY ARE WE PARTICIPATING IN THE SUMMIT OF THE FUTURE?

STRENGTHENING THE VOICES OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND FEMINISTS

Our participation in the Summit of the Future in New York is essential to strengthen and amplify the voices of young people and feminists from West Africa in global debates on gender equality, women's and young people's rights. By building strong links and partnerships with regional activists and experts, we strengthen our collective capacity to promote equality and to work together for meaningful change in our region. This will be an opportunity to share best practices in favor of all young people and women, for a better, more inclusive, peaceful and rights-transforming future.

ADVOCACY FOR INCLUSIVE, INTERSECTIONAL AND FEMINIST POLICIES, AS WELL AS FOR THE MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH AND WOMEN

We will be at the Summit of the Future to voice our demands and actively contribute to the development of inclusive policies. We are best placed to understand the specific realities and needs of our region, and our voice is crucial to ensuring that the Pact of the Future and the Declaration on Future Generations take these aspects into account. Participating in the Summit of the Future and its Action Days provides us with a platform to share our experiences, research and expertise, which then contributes to a better understanding of our region's specific challenges and the development of appropriate solutions.

STRENGTHENING LINGUISTIC JUSTICE

In line with commitment number twenty-six of the third version of the Declaration on Future Generations, our presence at the Summit of the Future is crucial to the goal of honoring, promoting and preserving cultural diversity, as well as languages, knowledge systems and traditions. It is of crucial importance to include young people and women from French-speaking West Africa in global debates on the future, and to promote linguistic justice at all levels of negotiation.



THE MESSAGES WE CONVEY

With this document, we are making a strong appeal and are asking You to make concrete commitments to combat the violence and inequalities faced by young people and women.

▶ We are counting on You to make this Summit a moment of mobilization and concrete action for a better future.

▶ We are counting on You to make the Summit of the Future a decisive turning point in the fight for women's and young people's rights.

▶ We are counting on You to reiterate and go beyond the commitments made by us, civil society and politicians, in the Agenda 2030 and the ICPD+30.

Significant and inclusive youth participation is more than just a slogan: We are the agents of positive transformative¹ change ! We are ready to make significant contributions to the development of our countries !

*"It is at the end of the old rope that we weave the new"*². This quote, written almost four decades ago, is a strong call to prepare the next generation.

In our diversity, with our different backgrounds, knowledge and experiences, we bring a unique and open perspective to the future. We want governments to intentionally involve young people in defining policies and improving public services.

Youth participation is more than just a slogan ; it is a commitment to ensuring that responses are adapted to the needs and expectations of new and future generations. Indeed, it is an opportunity to make intergenerational solidarity, justice and equity a reality³, and to train young people for greater involvement.



¹ [Declaration on Future Generations Rev3](#)

² Jean Pliya, 1987, *Les Tresseurs de Cordes*

³ [Declaration on Future Generations Rev3](#)

The meaningful participation of young people and feminists in peace and security processes is inevitable. Through the deconstruction of existing power relations, we build a better future and a solid foundation for human rights⁴.

In 2000, **United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325** marked a major step forward, being the first to recognize the disproportionate and singular impact of armed conflict on women and girls, and to acknowledge the essential contribution of women and girls in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The resolution also stresses the importance of their full and equal participation as actors in peace and security. In 2015, **the historic UNSC Resolution 2250** recognized the enormous potential of young people for the success of the peace and security agenda, as well as for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. **Since then, despite numerous regional and international commitments⁵, we still fall short⁶.**

While our involvement in the decision-making processes that affect our future is of proven and recognized importance, young people and women are today increasingly marginalized.

In a global context marked by the rise of authoritarian regimes, attacks on freedom of expression, the use of rape as a weapon of war⁷, and a general decline in human rights and individual freedoms, it is crucial to strengthen the protection and participation of young people and women in the various decision-making bodies.

It is worrying that women and young people, who are both key agents of change and the first victims of conflict, do not yet fully benefit from their right to equal participation in all peace and security mechanisms⁸.

As feminist youth, we claim our place in governance bodies and peace negotiation spaces, where our voices can have a direct impact on the creation of lasting solutions.

Our involvement in peace and security processes in French-speaking West Africa ensures equitable representation of women and young people, helps to address the specific impact of conflict on them, reinforces the legitimacy of peace agreements, and promotes gender equality as a foundation for long-term stability.

By providing essential perspectives, innovative solutions and taking into account the needs of women and young people in conflict contexts, **we contribute to a more sustainable peace, a reduction in human suffering, and the realization of human rights. We combat impunity for violations of women's rights, and support the accountability of perpetrators of violence of all kinds, particularly gender-based and sexual violence (SGBV).** Finally, our involvement **reinforces social justice** and the diversity of voices involved in conflict resolution, which **enhances the legitimacy** of peace agreements and improves their effectiveness by encouraging fuller implementation and wider respect by all stakeholders.

⁴ Cf. [Declaration on Future Generations Rev3](#), 2024, Engagements no.22-24

⁵ The emergence of the agendas 1/Women, Peace and Security and 2/Youth, Peace and Security

⁶ [UN Women, 2021, Facts and Figures: Women, Peace and Security](#): "None of the ceasefire agreements reached between 2018-2020 included provisions relating to gender issues or the prohibition of sexual violence."

⁷ [UNIFEM, Rape as a tactic of war](#): "Rape in conflict situations, when widespread and systematic, is now recognized as a crime against humanity and a war crime. However, it still goes massively unpunished, perpetuating impunity. Sexual violence is commonly ignored in peace negotiations. In post-conflict situations, it is more likely that perpetrators will be rewarded under disarmament and peacebuilding agreements than that victims will be listened to and receive justice or reparation. Survivors, on the other hand, are often rejected by their families and communities."

⁸ [UN Women, 2021, Facts and Figures: Women, Peace and Security](#): "Between 1992 and 2019, women represented, on average, only 13% of negotiators, 6% of mediators and 6% of signatories in the world's major peace processes. Around 7 out of 10 peace processes included no female mediators or signatories. In 2020, women accounted for 23% of delegations to conflicts in UN-supported country processes, a share that would have been lower without the measures consistently taken by the UN."

Our bodies, our rights, our choices ! The right to dispose over one's own body is not a privilege; it is an inalienable human right. Any transformative agenda will bring a feminist and intersectional approach to SRHR.

We call on You today to remind You of the importance of combating sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), which is a consequence of existing relationships of power and domination.

Those forms of violence are a daily reality for many women and girls in our region. Beyond this, we are here to defend sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), an essential lever for sustainable, equitable and inclusive social transformation, also in areas affected by conflict.

We, young people and feminists from West Africa, encourage an intersectional approach to SRHR, as we believe no agenda for SRHR can be transformative if it is not rooted in this feminist and intersectional foundation.

From educating boys to empowering girls, from strengthening the legal framework to providing holistic support for survivors, we, civil society and politicians, must act now, together !

Indeed, the concept of intersectionality helps ensure that no one is left behind, as it highlights “ *how different identities such as race, gender, class, disability, sexuality and others intersect with each other - how lived identities are experienced as interlocked with systems of oppression that are mutually constitutive and reinforcing.*”⁹

The right to dispose over one's own body is not a privilege; it is an inalienable human right. Denying this right means denying someone's fundamental rights, their humanity and their dignity. Decisions concerning the body of each individual should not be dictated by beliefs or ideologies, but based on the notion of individual choice.



At every stage of life, every individual has the right to benefit from a continuum of sexual and reproductive health care, in order to live well, understand their sexuality, and make better, free and enthusiastic choices that meet their needs.

Effective intersectional policies are urgently needed to guarantee reproductive justice (RJ)⁹, i.e. equality for all in health, by eliminating all kinds of barriers, discrimination and violence.

Abortion is a matter of human rights, not just public health. By guaranteeing safe and legal access to this medical intervention, we contribute to reducing maternal deaths, infections and complications linked to unsafe abortions¹¹. We

call on our African states, which have ratified, without reservation, international conventions on sexual and reproductive health, such as the Maputo Protocol¹², to honor their commitment by implementing these texts.

The life-cycle approach, promoted by international institutions since the Cairo conference in 1994, enables us to understand sexuality, menstruation and menopause on a continuum, and to develop multi-generational analyses of the patriarchal oppressions that continually limit people's choices. Thus, a cross-cutting approach to sexuality must include the fields of education and health services, as well as water, hygiene and sanitation infrastructures¹³.



⁹ Gouws, Amanda. 2017. Feminist intersectionality and the matrix of domination in South Africa. *Agenda*. 31(1): 19-27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2017.1338871>

May, Vivian M. 2015. *Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries*. New York, USA: Routledge.

¹⁰ According to the [SisterSong Collective](#), the concept of RJ defends the fundamental human right of every person to retain the right to dispose over their own bodies, and to make their own decisions in regards to : 1) having children, 2) not having children, 3) and raising their children in safe and sustainable communities, free from violence and discrimination. It also sheds light on how access to SRHR is hampered by intersectional structures of domination, encompassing dimensions of gender, race and class.

¹¹ Médecin du monde, 2022, [La Planification familiale, composante essentielle de la couverture santé universelle](#) (Family planning, an essential component of universal health coverage) : "270 million women in the world do not have access to the contraception they need. There are 121 million unplanned pregnancies every year, i.e. half of all pregnancies. Restrictive policies in terms of access to abortion are the cause of millions of unsafe abortions every year. According to the WHO, these abortions result in 39,000 deaths a year, and over 7 million hospitalizations. All are preventable."

¹² [Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa](#)

¹³ Equipop and Mounia El-Kotni, 2024, [Report Symposium 2024, « A space of our own, between activism and research : Let's talk about a feminist approach to SRHR ! »](#)

Every person has the right to information and to make free, enthusiastic and informed choices. Comprehensive sexuality education, menstrual dignity, safe abortion and mental health are all essential components of human development. Beyond being public health issues, they are human rights issues.

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) through the prism of the life cycle fosters individual and collective quality of life. Everyone has the right to information and to make free, enthusiastic and informed choice.

Accessibility to health care and services is a fundamental right. This will eliminate the relatively high risk of teenagers and young people contracting pregnancy and/or infection due to lack of financial means and/or lack of knowledge about their evolving bodies.

Menstrual dignity is a human right. Girls and women have the right to be taken fully into account as whole human beings before menarche¹⁴, throughout menstruation and after menopause.

We advocate the introduction and effective adoption of national laws on Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH), and encourage the establishment of national policies enabling menstruating people to benefit from menstrual leave (extra days off, home office, etc.) according to their individual needs, in all sectors of activity.

We encourage the implementation of national policies that **recognize menstrual protection as a basic element and make it accessible, affordable and diversified** for all menstruating people. We are convinced that menstruation should never again be an obstacle to the education or career of a young girl in French-speaking West Africa or any other region of the world.

We also encourage the construction and improvement of sanitary infrastructures in schools and training centers, incorporating facilities adapted to the specific needs of girls, such as clean and safe toilets, menstrual management devices and accessible water points. Access to sanitary infrastructures is also of enormous importance in the context of the security crisis in West Africa and the Sahel, particularly in camps for displaced people and refugees, where it is important to maintain menstrual dignity.

We, young people and feminists, make a powerful appeal to states, technical and financial partners and international organizations: **it is important that we strengthen and finance our public mental health systems, including in security crisis zones** where populations are increasingly affected by mental disorders due to the horrors experienced on a daily basis. Setting up educational programs to raise young people's awareness of mental health issues, enabling them to recognize signs of distress and provide support for their peers, helps create a supportive environment where everyone feels comfortable talking about their health, emotions and experiences without fear of judgment.

¹⁴ Gynecology: First occurrence of menstruation in a woman's ovulatory cycle. In other words, the first time she menstruates.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONCRETE ACTIONS IN THE RUN-UP TO THE 2024 SUMMIT OF THE FUTURE

1 POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 For Authorities

- **Develop intergenerational policies** that take into account the needs and aspirations of women, young people and future generations ;
- **Promote intergenerational and intersectional dialogue** to strengthen understanding and cooperation ;
- **Encourage the political participation of women and young people** through the establishment of strong mechanisms ;
- **Make effective representation quotas** for young people and women in decision-making bodies ;
- **Organize regular consultations** with youth, women's and/or feminist organizations to gather their opinion on public policies ;
- **Protect and enhance the status of** human rights defenders.

1.2 For technical and financial partners

- **Support awareness-raising campaigns** to promote the political participation of women and young people ;
- **Fund leadership and mentoring programs** to support the inclusion of young people and women in decision-making bodies.



2

WOMEN, YOUTH, PEACE AND SECURITY

2.1 For Authorities

- **Strengthen Participation Mechanisms :**
Establish inclusive platforms enabling the participation of youth and women in peace and security processes at all levels. Create national and international mechanisms that facilitate the access of young people and women to decision-making and governance bodies ;
- **Promote Training and Support :**
Promote training programs dedicated to young women and feminists to strengthen their leadership capacities and understanding of peace and security dynamics ;
- **Implement Transparent Monitoring and Evaluation :** Institute rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems to measure the impact of youth and women's participation in peace processes. Ensure that commitments made by states and international organizations are effectively implemented and that they report back on the impact of their actions on the ground ;
- **Value the expertise and experiential knowledge** of women and young people, who are both key change agents and first victims ;
- **Strengthen protection mechanisms** to accompany the meaningful and inclusive participation of feminists and young human rights defenders ;
- **Maintain and intensify the fight against SGBV in times of crisis ;**
- **Strengthen the empowerment and employability** of women and young people in crisis zones.

2.2 For technical and financial partners

- **Strengthen partnerships** with institutions that actively support the involvement of youth and women in conflict resolution ;
- **Strengthening Funding Mechanisms for Feminist and Youth Initiatives :** Set up specific, accessible and flexible funds reserved for feminist organizations and youth movements working for peace and security, in order to guarantee sustainable financial support for their projects ;
- **Facilitate funding procedures :** Simplify funding application processes for small local youth and women's organizations, making them more inclusive and tailored to their administrative capacities. This includes reducing bureaucratic requirements and developing microfinance mechanisms ;
- **Guarantee a multi-year, sustainable funding :** Ensure that funds allocated to peace and security projects are not limited to short-term funding cycles, but enable long-term actions, thus offering young people and women the stability they need to plan and implement projects with lasting impact ;
- **Maintain or set up mechanisms to compensate for financial support** to youth and feminist organizations and activists in the event of political and/or diplomatic crises.

3 FIGHTING SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (SGBV)



3.1 For Authorities

- **Make effective, Strengthen and, if necessary, Develop the Legislative and Policy Framework :** Ensure the implementation and effective enforcement of specific and rigorous laws against SGBV, including protective measures for victims and sanctions for perpetrators, at all levels of society ;
- **Formulate Integrated Policies and foster Institutional Strengthening :** Integrate prevention and response to SGBV into national health, education, security, and economic development policies, and build the capacity of these public institutions ;
- **Set up specialized units** within police and justice departments to deal with cases of SGBV ;
- **Create Support Services :** establish and fund reception and support centers for victims, offering comprehensive services including medical, psychological, legal assistance, and economic support ;
- **Strengthen and fund women’s and feminist organizations** for the holistic management of SGBV cases in crisis areas ;
- **Set up free, confidential hotlines,** accessible 24/7, for victims of SGBV ;
- **Guarantee Access to Justice :** guarantee free access to legal services for victims and create specialized courts to speed up the processing of SGBV cases.

3.2 For technical and financial partners

- **Allocate Specific Funds :** Release specific funds to support initiatives to combat SGBV, particularly for prevention programs, victim support services, and awareness-raising campaigns ;
- **Ensure equitable distribution of resources,** particularly targeting rural areas, crisis areas and marginalized groups ;
- **Facilitate access to funding** for small NGOs and community initiatives ;
- **Strategic Cooperation and Partnership:** Collaborate with national authorities, local NGOs, and international organizations to develop coordinated programs and avoid duplication of efforts ;
- **Support research and the collection of disaggregated data on SGBV,** including in areas of security crisis ;
- **Support the structural development of grassroots organizations.**

4

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS (SRHR)

4.1 For Authorities

- **Recognize by national laws accessibility to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) care and services as a fundamental right** and make this right effective by eliminating cultural, political, and legal barriers ;
- **Recognize by national laws the fundamental right of every person to information and to free, enthusiastic and informed choice in SRH matters** by promoting Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) through the prism of the life cycle ;
- **Recognize by national laws menstrual dignity as a human right** and introduce menstrual leave ;
- **Recognize by national laws hygienic protections as basic elements** and their accessibility as a fundamental right ;
- **End menstrual inequalities and guarantee access** to affordable and diversified sanitary protection for all menstruating people ;
- **Put menstrual rights and health at the heart** of our priorities to combat school dropout ;
- **Implement mental health and psychological support policies** accessible to all ;
- **Support health infrastructures** in rural areas, crisis areas and underserved zones.

4.2 For technical and financial partners

- **Fund awareness-raising and training programs** in reproductive and mental health ;
- **Remedy the mismatch between community needs and proposed projects by adopting an intersectional and inclusive approach** in the search for solutions, and by promoting solidarity and collective mobilization in the fight for the right to dispose of one's own body ;
- **Fund the construction and improvement of sanitary infrastructures in schools, training centers and camps for displaced persons and refugees**, by incorporating facilities adapted to the specific needs of girls and women, such as clean and safe toilets, menstrual management devices and accessible water points ;
- **Fund public mental health systems, including in security crisis zones.**



Our feminist futures

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