



**POLICY BRIEF**

JULY 2023

**YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER  
AND MASCULINITIES IN BURUNDI,  
THE DRC, MALI AND SOUTH SUDAN:**

PROMOTING EFFECTIVE TRANSITIONAL  
JUSTICE POLICIES IN AFRICA



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## Summary

The African Union's Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP), adopted by the AU Heads of State and Government in February 2019, calls for transitional justice (TJ) mechanisms that not only deliver justice, but also transform fundamental gender biases in societies. Whereas gender considerations are a staple of most TJ discussions on the continent, masculinity as a cause and consequence of violence is a relatively novel concept. This policy brief draws on youth voices in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali and South Sudan to provide a youth perspective on gender norms after mass violence and offers recommendations for gender transformative TJ policies.

## Introduction

Gender is now at the core of discussions on the development and implementation of transitional justice (TJ) policies. It is universally accepted that the credibility and impact of TJ mechanisms depends in large part on their approach to addressing the gendered nature of violence and its aftermath. This entails recognising the diverse experiences among and between men and women,<sup>1</sup> tackling the causes and consequences of violence and examining how inequalities are transposed into 'post-conflict' societies. It involves designing mechanisms to guarantee high levels of participation through understanding how diverse groups in society access TJ differently.

Broader international policy frameworks on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) have been crucial to this evolution in the TJ field, especially with regards to women's meaningful participation.<sup>2</sup>

In 2019, the African Union (AU) adopted its Policy on Transitional Justice (AUTJP), a guiding framework for member states emerging from violent conflicts or repression and establishing TJ processes to address past abuses and promote sustainable peace and inclusive development. Building on instruments such as the 2003 Maputo Protocol, the policy includes commitments to 'gender and generational dimensions of violations and transitional processes' among its nine foundational principles. The policy also enshrines a progressive gendered approach to TJ, outlining that:

*TJ mechanisms should strive not only to deliver justice for women, but also to transform fundamental gender biases in transitional societies that hinder women from claiming and enjoying their socio-economic and political rights. Gender-sensitive TJ processes should reveal patterns of gender abuse, improve access to justice for women, inform institutional reform to promote gender justice and create a space for women to inform sustainable peacebuilding.<sup>3</sup>*

The focus on transforming gender inequalities and tackling the structural causes of violence sets the AUTJP apart from other national and regional TJ policies. The European Union's (EU) 2015 Policy Framework on support to transitional justice, for example, includes integrating 'a gender dimension' among its guiding principles, linking this to pre-existing inequalities,<sup>4</sup> but does not outline a framework focused on transformation. The AUTJP by contrast is underpinned by a gender transformative approach to TJ, addressing the structures of gender inequality that create conditions for violence in the first place and which lead to impunity when left unaddressed. Notwithstanding the AUTJP's innovation and the

- 1 Throughout, reference is made to men and women when discussing 'gender', recognising that this excludes people identifying as gender non-binary. For diverse socio-cultural, legal and religious reasons, the data collected as part of this research did not include non-binary gender among its questions. The authors, Impunity Watch and the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV) recognise the gaps in understanding that this will inevitably lead to and that policy discussions on gendered considerations and participation in TJ will be necessarily exclusionary without such perspectives. Much more attention, empirical data, analysis and discussion is needed on gender non-binary identity within the field of TJ.
- 2 For more on this topic, see for example, UN Women's 2022 research report and policy brief, *Women's meaningful participation in transitional justice: Advancing gender equality and building sustainable peace*, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/03/research-paper-womens-meaningful-participation-in-transitional-justice>.
- 3 African Union (2019) *Transitional Justice Policy*, <https://au.int/en/documents/20190425/transitional-justice-policy>, p.11.
- 4 EU (2015) *Policy Framework on support to transitional justice*, [https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top\\_stories/pdf/the\\_eus\\_policy\\_framework\\_on\\_support\\_to\\_transitional\\_justice.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/the_eus_policy_framework_on_support_to_transitional_justice.pdf), p.11.

policy benchmark it represents for gendered approaches to TJ, the nitty-gritty of much TJ practice remains conservative. In most contexts, simplistic understandings of gender as a synonym for ‘women’ remain the norm, relying on reductionist approaches that perpetuate traditional stereotypes. Given the relative infancy of the AUTJP and national policies designed in its image, it is understandable that more transformative approaches to TJ on the continent are not yet altogether visible. But narrow conceptions of gender are by no means unique to African contexts, nor are the challenges of moving gender transformation from the periphery to the centre of TJ practice. Like elsewhere, the AUTJP also suffers a policy blind spot through a lack of attention to masculinities.

Much has been written and debated on these phenomena, including the intertwined socio-cultural, political, religious and legal factors at play. Youth voices from Africa are, by contrast, rarely heard. This reflects the broader exclusion of African youth from national TJ policymaking spaces despite being the most populous age group and the most affected by conflict.<sup>5</sup> This policy brief offers a modest contribution to correcting this disparity. It highlights youth perspectives on gender norms after mass violence with recommendations for gender transformative TJ policies.

## Youth Perspectives on Gender, Masculinities and Transitional Justice

The research to understand youth perspectives on gender, masculinities and TJ was conducted as part of a joint Impunity Watch and Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV) project, aiming to bridge the gap between communities and TJ policymaking. The project focused on three core issues: (1) the participation of African youth, especially young women, in policymaking; (2)

gender and masculinities; and (3) mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS). A policy brief examining youth participation was published in February 2022.<sup>6</sup>

Key to the design of the research was to shift focus from policy experts to youth and youth activists. The three core issues were discussed with young people in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan and Mali. Separate guides were developed for each core issue, though the data collection was conducted in one visit per country. Questions on gender and masculinities focused on participants’ understanding of concepts of gender, masculinity and inequality; perceptions of gendered experiences of violence; gender and TJ; and finally, awareness of the AUTJP.

Between October and December 2021, a total of 132 youth participated in focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews, 68% of whom identified as female and 32% as male. Youth between the ages of 18 and 35 were identified, with 41% of participants aged 25–30, 35% aged 18–24 and 24% aged 31–35. The non-probability sampling led to socio-economic and geographic diversity of participants, as well as diversity in terms of rural and urban locations, and different conflict experiences.<sup>7</sup>

The remainder of this policy brief presents the key overarching themes that emerged from the research.

## Gender Identity in Burundi, the DRC, Mali and South Sudan

Across the board, youth in our study had a good understanding of the differences between ‘sex’ as the biological and physiological characteristics of being female and male, and ‘gender’ as the socially constructed attributes and roles associated with being a woman and a man in their respective

5 Impunity Watch and CSV (2022) *Youth inclusion in transitional justice policy in Africa: Youth contribute to shaping the way forward*, <https://www.impunitywatch.org/africa-youth-inclusion-transitional-justice/>.

6 Ibid. To watch the webinar launching the policy brief, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5kLb0BHKLY&t=2014s>.

7 In Burundi, the research was conducted in the provinces of Bururi, Muyinga and Mwaro. In the DRC, youth from Goma (North Kivu) and Bukavu (South Kivu) participated in the research. In Mali, young people from Bamako participated, specifically in Kalabancoro and Ségou in the Koulikoro region, and questionnaires were sent to youth in Sikasso, Ségou and Kidal. In South Sudan, youth from Upper Nile, Bahr el Ghazal, Jongolei and Equatoria based in Juba shared their views.

societies. Participants referred to dominant characteristics and expected behaviours, with striking similarities across the four contexts. Whereas youth themselves were critical of gendered norms, they referred to traditional societal expectations that women should undertake domestic chores, including housework, childcare and cooking. The youth defined femininity by traits including submissiveness, passivity, weakness and inferiority, as the following responses demonstrate:

*In the community when we talk about a woman we see motherhood, housekeeping, child rearing, cooking.*  
(FGD, DRC)

*In our communities, the woman must cook, the colour pink for the girls, the housework, the laundry.*  
(FGD, Mali)

*The main roles that are considered for females in South Sudan in the community are chores like cleaning the house, doing domestic work...[they] have special roles different from the ones of men.*  
(FGD, South Sudan)

Societal expectations of men were similarly traditional and informed by patriarchal understandings of men as leaders, as protectors and as providers. Participants commonly referred to traits including strength, determination, bravery and virility as associated with being a man.

*In Burundi, society teaches the boy to be strong, to be dominant, or even sometimes to wage war, and the girl to be docile.*  
(Key informant interview, Burundi)

*Men are responsible for security of the family in African contexts; a woman is voiceless, and they are not allowed to put orders in the family. There are some works that women are not allowed to do.*  
(FGD, South Sudan)

*If you don't provide, then you are not considered a man here in South Sudan.*  
(FGD, South Sudan)

*Everything that fits with physical strength concerns a man. The man is the guardian of the household, he must protect his wife and all his family.*  
(FGD, DRC)

Participants provided important insights into dominant masculinities and femininities in their respective countries when explaining how women and men are valued differently based on the contributions they are expected to make to their community and to society. Power in particular emerged as a central theme, reinforcing the core tenet of hegemonic masculinity as power over women and over social, economic and political affairs.<sup>8</sup> Men setting the rules of marriage (Mali), men taking decisions for the family (Burundi), men being 'kings with all of the privileges' (DRC), and masculinity as depriving vulnerable groups (South Sudan) were cited by the youth. Tellingly, two examples of power dynamics organically emerged from the discussions in each of the four countries.

### **Power in particular emerged as a central theme, reinforcing the core tenet of hegemonic masculinity as power over women and over social, economic and political affairs**

At the familial level, participants explained that a young woman is not valued to the same degree as a young man because she inhabits a fragile, transient status within the family; she is expected to eventually leave her home to join another family. In Burundian culture, young women learn the proverb *Buca ngenda, Nyamwarama ishanga* (tomorrow I will go and live elsewhere) from an early age. Participants explained that young men therefore understand that their power over women is inextricable from traditional dowry payments, reinforcing the value of women in monetised, commodified terms. Boys consequently derive pride from 'being able to get a girl to leave her home'.

8 For more on masculinity and power dynamics, see UN Women (2020) *Self-learning booklet: Understanding masculinities and violence against women and girls*, <https://trainingcentre.unwomen.org/mod/data/view.php?id=6&rid=4171>.



*It is the man who gives the dowry, it is he who is above the woman and the latter depends on the man. According to our society, children belong to men. Men are decision makers. Traditions and customs place the man above.*

(FGD, DRC)

*In the context of South Sudan, from an early age the female is considered a weak person that cannot contribute to the family; they are considered as income when they get married in our tradition. But a boy is given absolute power because his contribution in the house is much better than the girl; the girl will get married to another family. It is those days that create the differences between a male child and female child.*

(FGD, South Sudan)

Power reflected in economic and materials terms was also mentioned in the challenges women face regarding inheritance.

At the societal level, youth referred to power dynamics associated with men and women's

expected contributions to society. Two powerfully similar viewpoints from Burundi and the DRC explain the dominant themes that emerged from the research:

*The socialisation process teaches boys that one day they will be in charge of productive work and girls that they will be in charge of reproductive work.*

(Key informant interview, Burundi)

*A woman is an instrument of reproduction.*

(FGD, DRC)

The youth made clear their disapproval of these gendered norms, particularly their manifestation in violent expressions of power and domination. They regretted the consequences that gendered norms produce for the perceived future prospects associated with femininity (moving to another house) and masculinity (opportunity, ambition). For participants, this situation in large part explains why many young boys grow up with pride, knowing their life trajectory is to become a head of household, and why girls are associated with low self-esteem.



Although not directly raised in the research, the youth perspectives point to power dynamics *within* hegemonic masculinities, including its inherent hierarchies. The idealised masculinity sets unrealistic expectations on men and boys who compete to demonstrate their power and status regardless of economic, political or social status. Negative consequences for both men and women very often include different expressions of violence and abuse against those in weaker positions of power.

## Youth Perceptions of Gender Inequality

The youth participants were asked to share their perspectives on gender inequality in their communities. This included defining 'gender inequality', identifying where inequalities are most visible and sharing their views on its causes.

**An important perspective shared across the four contexts was a distinct contrast between what youth believe *should* be the case, and what *is* the reality in their countries**

An important perspective shared across the four contexts was a distinct contrast between what youth believe *should* be the case, and what *is* the reality in their countries. In Burundi, the majority of youth stated that there should be no difference in the way that children are treated given the universality of human rights. This is remarkable in a highly patriarchal, traditional culture where women are routinely discriminated against and subjected to daily violence, sexism and micro-aggressions. The perspective was shared by youth in the DRC, Mali and South Sudan.

*A woman can manage a family, a community and a country with her ideas.*

(FGD, Mali)

*It is us men who side-line women and prevent them from progressing. Women are traumatised*

*and psychologically injured. A woman is capable of doing all that a man can do, and to this is added the ability of giving birth. I support positive discrimination in favour of women because habits and customs continue to hold them back.*

(FGD, DRC)

But the youth were nevertheless well aware of the inequalities and injustices that women and girls face. Low access to decision making and lack of political power were among the most cited examples used to define gender inequality, coupled with the perceived lack of equality before the law. Even in contexts like South Sudan and Burundi, where constitutional quotas exist to guarantee women's representation at the political and institutional levels, participants regretted that the quotas themselves are an injustice, stymieing women's participation rather than safeguarding it. Youth referred to quotas having a role in discrimination against women. This perspective reflects the findings of research conducted by Impunity Watch examining the role of masculinities in curtailing Burundian women's political participation, with the 30% constitutional quota treated as a ceiling rather than a platform.<sup>9</sup>

*Politically women do not hold decision-making positions like men.*

(FGD, DRC)

*Gender inequality can be seen in the community, especially where we are staying, during the election of chiefs up to youth leaders whereby women are less represented; even in the list of community activist men are more represented, occupying top seats.*

(FGD, South Sudan)

Participants highlighted other examples of gender inequality resulting from traditional gender norms. Among the most common were in education, where priority is given to boys; at work, where women occupy positions considered less important; and within the family, where inheritance was again cited by youth in

9 Impunity Watch (2018) *Masculinities and the continuum of violence against women in societies in transition. Case study on the peace processes in Burundi*. Please contact Impunity Watch for more information.

Mali and in Burundi as a reflection of deeply held cultural (Burundi) and religious (Mali) values discriminating against women and girls.

*Gender inequality means putting children of different genders on a different footing in terms of rights to family and community property. For example, in Burundi, boys and girls do not have the same inheritance rights. When parents die, boys receive equal shares of the property bequeathed by their parents; girls receive only a small portion of land to use while they are still living in their parents' home.*

(Key informant interview, Burundi)

Beyond identifying the distinct markers of gender identity, the youth provided crucial insights into how this socialisation occurs, is reinforced, and the inequalities consequently perpetuated in their respective societies. Unpacking their perspectives, we find what it means to be a woman and a man is deeply rooted in embedded customs and ancestral rites. Youth discussed how cultural practices and customs are passed down from generation to generation without being questioned or deconstructed.

*The biggest cause of gender inequality is culture. The culture we have here in South Sudan is the problem, because even in traditional courts most men are in high positions and women are less valued because they believe men are the one to defend the country down to the villages*

(FGD, South Sudan)

*Women are unproductive in the society according to the elders.*

(Key informant interview, South Sudan)

*In the man and woman of today, there is always the man and woman of yesterday.*

(FGD, Burundi)

Central to these inherited customs, youth noted that patrilineal descent shapes the construction of gender identity and naturally reproduces gender inequalities. Participants explained how this instils in children their role and place in the family, which later become dominant social forces structuring society at large. As

one of the key informants in Burundi put it, 'Inequality begins within the biological family and extends into other areas of the management of the country's affairs.' Participants spoke of how girls and boys are educated differently, preparing them for social roles predetermined by parents and reinforced by schools, religious institutions and the state.

The role of religion was consistently highlighted by the youth in the social construction of gender identities. Reference in Mali was made to religious leaders blocking a law related to gender-based violence, while in Burundi, DRC and South Sudan, the norm-setting function of religion was frequently mentioned among the causes of continuing inequalities.

*According to the Bible, a woman was made to help a man, to work for the family, to be submissive to her husband.*

(FGD, DRC)

*The man always say he is the whole body, woman is only the rib. They have already adapted this to their minds. Even if there are equal rights, it is not equal within us; it is like God created men with that thing in their heart which cannot be removed.*

(FGD, South Sudan)

*According to religion, the man is the master of the home who must make all the decisions necessary for the proper functioning of his home.*

(FGD, Mali)

## Gendered Experiences of Conflict

The youth participants recognised that women and men experience post-conflict situations differently. After conflict, women were identified as suffering gender-based violence including rape, sexual exploitation and gender discrimination.

For women and girls, this reflects a continuum of violence traced from pre-conflict gender inequalities to violence suffered by women and girls during conflict, through to the legacies of these abuses in ostensive post-conflict contexts and peacetime. Inequality is at the root of the violence women face and is later



exacerbated by conflict, including at the economic (poverty) and political level (marginalisation and disenfranchisement). Participants commonly referred to trauma and the long-term deterioration of mental health among women.

*Yes, women and men do not experience the post-conflict period the same way. For women, the consequences can last for a long time.*  
(FGD, DRC)

There was consensus among youth that women and men therefore experience violence and violent conflict differently. Men were mainly described as suffering physical violence, forcible recruitment into armed groups and to be more likely to die on the battlefield. The most common forms of violence that the youth associated with women and girls during conflict were rape, sexual violence and forced disappearances. While avoiding simplistic conclusions that sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is an inevitable part of conflict, having a

direct causal relationship with gender identity and inequality, the latter are undeniably important factors in the perpetration of this type of violence. Participants spoke of power when describing SGBV which, as we saw earlier, are key elements of their understanding of gender, gender identity and inequality.

*The common thing we experienced was rape. Someone will just rape you innocently, like they raped ladies during the war.*  
(FGD, South Sudan)

*Women suffer sexual violations and are impacted differently than men.*  
(Key informant interview, Mali)

*Women are doubly victims compared to men in the event of wars. These are women who lose their husbands on the battlefield. They are the ones who suffer from gender-based violence.*  
(FGD, DRC)





Alongside notions of power and its role in predominant gender identities, patriarchal structures and hegemonic masculinity were at the core of the youth's explanations of the prevalence of SGBV. In Burundi, youth referred to rape being used in the perpetration of genocidal violence. Women of one ethnicity were forced to give birth to children that would take the ethnicity of the perpetrator. Youth in Mali referred to the weakness of women and girls in the face of such violence with reference to their social status. In South Sudan, unlike in the other four contexts, youth referred to the rape of men during conflict. Violence of this nature is still chronically underreported, and little understood on the continent and worldwide. Greater insight into what male rape reveals about the interplay between alternative and dominant masculinities, gender identity, sexuality and power would help to prevent this violence from occurring and would deepen our comprehension of gender identity and masculinities.

### Youth in Mali referred to the weakness of women and girls in the face of such violence with reference to their social status

Powerlessness was similarly a theme that emerged when the youth described women's other experiences during and after conflict. Many respondents described the difficulties women face to provide for their families after the death of their husbands. Numerous responses referred to women being forced into prostitution. Here, the youth demonstrated how women's lack of economic power and their confinement to household activities create a precarious situation pre-conflict and exacerbate their post-conflict suffering.

*As in most cases men were providing the income for the household; after they were killed some women were forced into prostitution to support their children.*

(Key informant interview, Burundi)

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the perspectives we have already discovered, youth mostly described women's participation in conflict by referring to passive and

indirect participation. Women were associated with roles such as lookouts, serving as informants and hiding weapons; youth also referred euphemistically to women 'providing rest' for combatants. In the post-conflict context, the perspective of South Sudanese women reinforced women's feelings of powerlessness:

*We women, we have been neglected, we don't have voice. So we need to be part of the peace process, our voices as women of this country should be heard.*

(FGD, South Sudan)

## Youth Perspectives on the Way Forward

Awareness of TJ was very limited among the youth in our study. The majority of participants had not previously come across the concept, and those that had were only able to provide a superficial explanation of what it means. Exceptions to this included a key informant in the DRC referring to military trials as contributing to victims' sense of justice and to the prevention of future violence. Other young people were able to speak TJ language without necessarily being familiar with the concept,<sup>10</sup> such as the following key informant in Burundi:

*We need to know the real truth in order to learn from it. In addition, the victims of all these adverse events experienced by the country need to have their rights restored.*

(Key informant interview, Burundi)

Youth participants also struggled to describe initiatives for tackling gender inequality and for promoting positive masculinities. Similarly, they were mostly unaware of the AUTJP and its recommendation for measures to address the structural patterns of gender bias, discrimination and inequality in social and public spheres. The youth nevertheless agreed unanimously with this recommendation. They referred to potential benefits such as greater participation of women in TJ processes, young women feeling more valued and

<sup>10</sup> This finding reinforces the conclusion of the February 2022 policy brief published by Impunity Watch and CSVR. See, Impunity Watch and CSVR (2022) *Youth inclusion in transitional justice policy in Africa: Youth contribute to shaping the way forward*, <https://www.impunitywatch.org/africa-youth-inclusion-transitional-justice/>.

motivated to contribute to policymaking, and the eradication of gender inequalities.

*TJ must address the structural basis of all these ills that have plagued our communities in order to eradicate them permanently.*

(Key informant interview, Burundi)

Yet, youth expressed scepticism about the political will of their governments for its implementation. As noted in our February 2022 policy brief on youth participation in TJ policymaking, the participants were conscious of many policies being ‘carefully written documents, full of good intentions, which are often not realised’. Low levels of civic trust or faith in their government’s intentions characterised many of the youth’s responses.

*Commitments made to eradicate gender discrimination must be fulfilled once and for all. This requires political will.*

(Key informant interview, Burundi)

*Lack of political will. A lot of policies have not been implemented. Secondly, the government fears that their secrets will be known.*

(Key informant interview, South Sudan)

*The main roadblock to policymaking is the government. When the government is not involved it prevents anything concerning the law; insecurity, economic problems also affected implementation.*

(FGD, South Sudan)

*Popularise this policy and hold the state accountable while fighting corruption.*

(Key informant interview, DRC)

Other obstacles towards implementation of the AUTJP’s recommendation cited by the youth were the lack of efforts to involve young people and the generalised unfamiliarity with TJ. As we saw when examining gender inequality, participants also raise the spectre of certain groups in society acting as spoilers. The negative influence of religion on debates about gender inequality was again brought back into the discussion, as was the idea of entrenched interests among political actors with a stake in ensuring the status quo. Youth also highlighted the obstacles that men could potentially create.

*As transitional justice measures should address the structural basis of patterns of gender bias,*



*discrimination and inequality, it is likely to be frowned upon by some, especially men who would see it as reducing their power over women in the household.*

(Key informant interview, Burundi)

When asked about which actors should be involved as allies to promote gender transformation and TJ, youth spoke about community engagement, civil society activism and religious actors. Despite their scepticism with regard to political will, youth still considered state institutions and the government as important actors, referring to the state's responsibilities to guarantee rights for all and to implement measures of TJ and for gender equality.

*There must be a transitional justice policy, and we must support our government to have its transitional justice policy in an appropriate format.*

(Key informant interview, DRC)

The role of young people in the implementation of this recommendation and in shaping the way forward highlighted several key issues facing young people. Youth felt that they had an invaluable role to play, but were habitually excluded from making a contribution. The causes and consequences of this youth exclusion from policymaking were discussed in our February 2022 policy brief.

**The feeling of powerlessness that the youth expressed was evident in the way they analysed not only policymaking, but also whether gender inequality can and is changing over time**

The feeling of powerlessness that the youth expressed was evident in the way they analysed not only policymaking, but also whether gender inequality can and is changing over time. As we saw earlier, youth held progressive views on gender equality in contrast to the prevailing realities of their societies. They expressed strong approval of the need to tackle structural inequalities, including through TJ. However, the combination of entrenched cultural values, political

marginalisation and their lower social status – factors doubly damaging for young women's activism – leads youth to a sense of relative powerlessness. As a result, a tacit acceptance of the status quo underlay many of their responses, with some youth exposing a degree of passiveness, seemingly waiting for permission to act or a framework for action. Absent the authority, the space to mobilise and greater involvement of influential actors to guarantee and safeguard youth participation, but also in the absence of greater commitment among youth to challenge their disenfranchisement and gender inequality, change remains slow.

*Men and women prisoners of a culture that they do not dare to change.*

(FGD, Burundi)

*Since the ancestral conception man has been regarded as the one who must make decisions and occupy decision-making positions. But today, with the mixing of cultures and globalisation, changes can be observed, albeit small.*

(Key informant interview, DRC)

Youth nevertheless pointed to evidence that change is possible. Among the most commonly cited examples were women holding positions within the government and state institutions.

*Women are participating in political forums equally to men, not as compared to those days where they are deprived of a lot of rights. In the government the positions have changed; we now have female minister of defence for the first time in South Sudan, so there are changes.*

(FGD, South Sudan)

The participants pointed to capacity-building trainings among women, education of young girls, and awareness-raising among men to challenge gender roles as contributing to this gradual change. Youth also highlighted the importance of inheritance laws and prosecuting gender-based violence for tackling the causes and consequences of violence and inequality.

## Conclusion

This policy brief brought forward youth voices from Burundi, the DRC, Mali and South Sudan to examine gender, masculinities and TJ. The brief demonstrated how gender identities are constructed and reinforced, and how they are part of the very fabric of society and the organisational structures of state institutions and government, according to young people. The brief examined the role and the wide-ranging impact of inequalities, including the continuum of violence connecting pre-conflict inequalities to violence and women's post-conflict experiences. It highlighted the place of TJ in uprooting entrenched inequalities.

Power was a central theme running through the youth perspectives. It is here that we can loop back to the AUTJP's focus on transforming gender inequalities and tackling the causes of violence.

The youth in this study provided clarity on the need for approaches addressing structural inequalities that create conditions for violence and which sustain post-conflict inequality and impunity when left unaddressed. Youth in effect are advocates for gender transformative TJ and lay out key pillars of what an AUTJP-inspired approach would look like.

First, transformation requires tackling the continuum of violence and inequality, creating new social, political, economic and institutional frameworks based on equality between men and women. In other terms, violence is a product of inequality and unequal power. Second, transformation means confronting gendered stereotypes and opening space for non-traditional gender identities. Positive masculinities and redefining the role of women in societies is crucial, especially for challenging traditional ideas of power and promoting women's agency. Finally, the youth demonstrated the importance of intersectionality for transformative TJ. This means addressing hierarchies of power (including among men) and other structures of oppression produced by social class, political status, ethnicity, religion and geographic location, and ensuring that mechanisms are put in place to connect gender-based violence with approaches promoting economic empowerment and psycho-social support.

## Recommendations

The youth proposed key recommendations for promoting gender equality and for tackling structural violence. Those most widely shared have been included, alongside selected additional recommendations drawn from the analysis of their perspectives.

1. **Publicise and popularise TJ and the AUTJP.** The youth were unfamiliar with the concept of TJ and the AUTJP. Governments and regional actors should undertake greater efforts to raise awareness around these documents and processes. Awareness-raising is especially needed among young women. It could take place over platforms such as radio stations, social media, community events (workshops, arts, sport and cultural events), as well as through school curricula. Awareness-raising needs to draw on youth expertise and local knowledge regarding new and creative platforms for reaching younger audiences.
2. **Develop an AU-level policy on masculinities.** The AUTJP is innovative and promotes a gender transformative approach to TJ. But it does not refer to masculinities. The youth participants have shown that understanding masculinities is crucial to deconstructing violence and inequality in their societies. The AU should urgently develop a policy or guidance note on masculinities to be used by states when designing national policies based on the AUTJP.
3. **Address gendered obstacles to participation in TJ policy processes.** Participants noted that the types of spaces, times allocated to policy processes, and hostile attitudes can exclude young women. Policy processes need to address these factors more directly to ensure full and free participation of young women in the design and development of TJ policies.
4. **Establish structures to promote women's participation and youth engagement.** Although a staple of much TJ policy, women and youth still encounter obstacles to their participation. Women's political agency is recognised by youth as an important driver for change, as is their own political agency. Local, national and regional structures must



be established with political clout to influence policymaking. Men also need to be engaged in processes for increasing women's participation through training and awareness-raising, and by exposure to positive role models through public education campaigns.

**5. Challenge cultural, religious, political and institutional norms that perpetuate inequality.**

The AU, governments, civil society and African youth should work together to promote gender equality and multiple gender identities. Governments should repeal discriminatory laws and legislate on equality (e.g. guaranteeing women's inheritance), develop education programmes, guarantee young girls' right to education, and examine the real impact of quotas and other measures aimed at women's political participation. Awareness-raising on alternative masculinities should be promoted by civil society and youth in collaboration with governments.

**6. Deliver justice for victims of SGBV.** Governments should redouble efforts to prosecute SGBV. This involves the proper application of laws and sentences, legislating for the prosecution of

conflict-era and post-conflict violence, ensuring that the justice system is properly resourced and trained, and guaranteeing access through protective measures and legal aid. Prosecuting SGBV contributes to guaranteeing non-recurrence and to norm-setting where accountability becomes the rule rather than impunity.

**7. Promote positive masculinities.** The youth were unable to cite examples of programmes tackling violent masculinities. Civil society and young people should promote non-violent, co-responsible masculinities to challenge hegemonic masculinities associated with violence. Religious leaders should be brought on board as allies.

**8. Mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS).** MHPSS is crucial for tackling the consequences of violence, as well as its causes. Youth raised the importance of MHPSS to promote women's agency, to support post-conflict redress and reintegration, and to tackle deeply embedded socio-cultural gender norms affecting men and women. Governments should be supported to develop, fund and implement cross-cutting MHPSS policies with the collaboration of civil society.

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## ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF VIOLENCE AND RECONCILIATION

The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV) is a non-governmental organisation which envisions societies that are peaceful, equal and free from violence. CSV aims to understand and prevent violence, heal its effects and build sustainable peace at the community, national and regional levels. We do this through collaboration with and learning from the lived and diverse experiences of communities affected by violence and conflict to inform innovative interventions, generate knowledge, shape public discourse, influence policy, hold states accountable and promote gender equality, social cohesion and active citizenship.

## ABOUT IMPUNITY WATCH

Impunity Watch is an international non-profit organisation working with victims of violence to uproot deeply ingrained structures of impunity, deliver redress for grave human rights violations and promote justice and peace. We gather and share knowledge on priority themes, build partnerships and coalitions, and conduct international advocacy work to overcome impunity and transform justice. Impunity Watch currently works in Central America, North Africa and the Great Lakes region of Africa, the Middle East and the Western Balkans. We have presence in Guatemala and Burundi, and our headquarters are in The Hague, The Netherlands. Our work takes place at local, as well as national, regional and international levels.

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