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A Continental Response to an Underappreciated Issue: The Mental Health of (African) Peacekeepers.

“...I am delighted to know that personnel of MNJTF are the first beneficiaries of this unique mobile training initiative for personnel on the field in the whole of Africa. This is commendable... as we have to prepare troops that are mentally fit and psychosocially stable...I know that this training has provided personnel with some useful skills and capacity to prevent and respond to mental health and psychosocial issues”

Major General Abdul-Khalifah Ibrahim (Force Commander, Multi-National Joint Task Force).

Over 22 % of people living in conflict-affected environments suffer from mental health conditions which is almost triple compared to non-conflict environments¹. Taking this into consideration, too little attention has been paid to mental and psychosocial impacts on individual and community well-being in conflict contexts. This evidence is further supported by a United Nations (UN) mental health survey run between 2015 and 2016. The survey reveals that within eleven UN entities, 20 % of respondents flagged positive for symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD).²

To date, little is known about the mental health of UN peacekeepers despite the scarce evidence and larger surveys on peacekeepers' mental health are almost inexistent. Likewise, the African-led Peace Support Operations (PSOs) suffer from lack of available data, guidelines and regulations from ECOWAS and African Union (AU) for mission personnel on matters such as staff care, psychosocial support for deployed personnel or indeed how Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) challenges impact on post-conflict reconstruction efforts.

To counter both the lack of evidence and action regarding peacekeepers' mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) with support from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) through its implementing agency GIZ developed the first MHPSS course for PSO personnel in Africa in 2020. Since the roll-out of this course, GIZ has supported the KAIPTC to successfully run the MHPSS course for PSOs in the classroom two times in 2021.

Despite the huge demand for in-house MHPSS course at the KAIPTC, high demand to scale up the course beyond the classroom to the mission field distilled. This led to the first in-mission “MHPSS Training” for African-led PSOs which took place with the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in N'Djamena, Chad from 25th to 29th April 2022. Offering this in-mission MHPSS mobile training, the KAIPTC with support from GIZ, brought awareness of and skills related to MHPSS to the doorstep of personnel in missions. This is expected to fill the gap of limited attention to MHPSS in Africa-led PSOs

1. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140673619309341>

² [Mental Health in UN Peace Operations: Addressing Stress, Trauma, and PTSD among Field Personnel \(ipinst.org\)](#)

and meet the critical needs of mission personnel on how to prevent and respond effectively and efficiently to mental health concerns and psychosocial challenges.

A participant testified,

“The course has helped me understand the realities of mental ill-health and how it can affect myself and subordinates. It has equipped me with the necessary skills needed to provide support to myself, colleagues and subordinates dealing with mental health issues.... As I go back, I would certainly do things differently, not just professionally but also in my personal life.” **Major Eric S Kpamber (MNJTF).**

Through this MHPSS mobile training, KAIPTC, GIZ, AU, MNJTF and other relevant stakeholders are contributing to reaffirm and better operationalize MHPSS within African-led PSOs. This is essential to the implementation and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 and SDG 16, as well as the affirmation of the AU Agenda 2063.