The Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction (GP)'s Signature Initiative to Mitigate Biological Threats in Africa (SIMBA) supports coordinated action by GP and African partners to address emerging and ongoing biothreats on the African continent. Practical implementation of the Signature Initiative's threat reduction programs prioritizes gender equity and robust engagement of local women champions as a critical contributor to sustainable health security in Africa. As such, the GP and its supporting partners have initiated the formation of a dedicated Women's Network of African health security professionals to operationalize Signature Initiative objectives and further define the unique contributions and perspectives of women professionals across African regions.

This project will formally establish the Women's Network, built around a core team tasked with facilitating its development through a step-wise approach. It begins with carefully defining the strategy, establishing a tangible set of objectives and priority activities and defining the governance structure and operational framework. The mitigation of biological threats and meaningful participation of women in assessing and responding to those threats require shared awareness and responsibility across professional sectors and geographic regions. This will be achieved by promoting multisectoral engagement, as well as locally driven approaches and region-to-region knowledge exchange in collaboration with regional organizations active in the biosafety and biosecurity landscape across Africa and globally.

Expected Outcomes

The overarching, short-term goal of the Women's Network is embedding gender equality and empowering women in the creation and delivery of the GP Signature Initiative programmatic activities in Africa. Longer-term goals include ensuring women have decision-making power and leadership opportunities in biosafety and biosecurity across Africa, ASEAN, LAC, and beyond. Promoting the network’s self-actualization through African women leading and organizing other African women is a cornerstone of its sustainable development and structure, and will serve as a model for these other regions as clear and actionable steps towards gender equity in global biosafety and biosecurity workforces and decision-making.

Project Tasks and Events

- Establishment of a core working group balanced across geographic regions and professional sectors;
- Hosting 2 virtual preparatory workshops with Network Members and observers from ASEAN and LAC regions;
- African representatives presenting lessons learned from preparatory workshops in ASEAN region at A-PBA conference in Bangkok, Thailand;
- Planning and hosting a side event at ASLM conference in Capetown, South Africa to outline Network structure and activities; and;
- Hosting a follow-up Women’s Network Meeting and international workshop in Arusha, Tanzania in 2025, Embracing DEI in Global Biosafety & Biosecurity in collaboration with the Tanzanian Biological Safety Association and other partners.