Experts' Meeting: Sexual Violence in Conflict and the UK's Women, Peace and Security Agenda

Chairs' Summary

One year after the conclusions of the UN's High Level Review on Women, Peace and Security, the LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security, Women for Women International (UK), and the UK Gender Action for Peace and Security network (GAPS) held a series of roundtables on 31 October 2016.

The UK Government has prioritised addressing Sexual Violence in Conflict (SVC) as an issue through the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) launched in 2012. The PSVI focused on addressing impunity for SVC and was the subject of a parliamentary inquiry which reported in March 2016. The UK Government has emphasised the importance of tackling stigma experienced by survivors of SVC and places broader emphasis on ending violence against women and girls (VAWG) and working in fragile and conflict-affected states through the UK Aid strategy.

The UK's current National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security will conclude at the end of 2017 and these roundtables therefore provided a timely opportunity to review progress since the High Level Review, consider conclusions from the parliamentary inquiry and develop recommendations for the UK Women, Peace and Security (WPS) policy and practice.

These sessions sought to bring together expertise, experience and evidence to focus on SVC as an area which has received unparalleled attention within the WPS agenda, through legal standards and cases as well as state policy and practice. This document provides a summary of the discussions in the three sessions as well as recommendations for the UK's next NAP.

About the organisers:

The **LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security** is a leading academic space for scholars, practitioners, activists, policy-makers and students to develop strategies to promote justice, human rights and participation for women in conflict-affected situations around the world. Through innovative research, teaching, and multi-sectoral engagement, the Centre aims to promote gender equality and enhance women's economic, social and political participation and security. www.lse.ac.uk/wps

Since 1993, **Women for Women International** has supported more than 447,000 marginalised women in eight countries affected by war and conflict. We offer women support, tools, and access to life-changing skills to move from crisis and poverty to stability and economic self-sufficiency. We bring women together in a safe space to learn life, business, and vocational skills through our combined social and economic 12-month programme. We also deliver a men's engagement programme that trains male leaders and male community members in gender equality and women's rights. www.womenforwomen.org.uk

Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) is the UK's only Women, Peace and Security civil society network. GAPS is a membership organisation of 17 NGOs and experts in the field of development, women and human rights, humanitarian and peacebuilding. We were founded to progress the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Our role is to promote and hold the UK Government to account on its international commitments to women in conflict areas worldwide. www.gaps-uk.org

Session 1: Integration of Sexual Violence in Conflict and PSVI into the UK National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security

Recommendations:
- All WPS policy and practice, including SVC, should be founded on strong gender conflict analysis.
- Working with civil society and women's rights organisations to determine context specific programmatic approaches in the design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of WPS policy and practice is vital.
- The voices of grassroots women and girls are essential when developing SVC programming as well as national level policy, such as NAPs.
- The UK NAP should integrate PSVI. The development of the next UK NAP provides an opportunity to more systematically address areas which are notable gaps within PSVI currently, notably participation and conflict prevention.
- Establish clear objectives for the UK NAP based on consultation, analysis and a forward-looking approach are essential to achieving progress on WPS and conflict prevention.

The **discussants** for this session were Irina Bratosin D'Almeida (Senior Associate, European Peacebuilding Liaison Office) and Dr Zeynep Kaya (Research Fellow at the LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security and LSE Middle East Centre) and the session was chaired by Hannah Bond (Director, GAPS). Irina Bratosin D'Almeida opened the session by presenting the findings and examples from ELPO's UNSCR 1325 implementation in Europe case studies which demonstrated a focus on SVC within NAPs and the importance of a comprehensive approach. Dr Kaya presenting the findings of her research on Iraq's NAP which was not developed with extensive CSO consultation and does not have a focus on SVC. The sessions varied in the depth of each of the issues they discussed. The following is a summary of the overarching points discussed and agreed upon.

Current Focus on SVC within Women, Peace and Security:
UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and its related resolutions are founded on four pillars: protection; prevention; participation; and relief and recovery. Whilst SVC spans all these pillars, there has been a greater international focus on SVC than other forms of VAWG in conflict and other key areas of the WPS agenda. Yet there often remains a narrow protection focus within SVC approaches which targets prosecutions and stigma. Experts at the workshop agreed that to make strides in preventing SVC, it is important that it be integrated into the NAP as an existing mechanism for driving forward progress, accountability and resources.

Integration into the NAP:
There are consistent calls for global work on SVC, including PSVI, to better reflect all pillars of Women, Peace and Security and be more systematically and comprehensively reflected in NAPs. Experts at the roundtable agreed that PSVI should be integrated into the UK NAP. Whilst attempts had been made at this in the current UK NAP, a more systematic and coordinated approach which looked at the breath of PSVI work and took the opportunity to develop forward looking strategic objectives of SVC, should be included. The experts judged that such inclusion during the drafting would likely highlight the disproportionate focus on SVC and therefore demonstrate areas of WPS where there are gaps in policy, programming and commitment which should be addressed in the NAP. There were some areas of PSVI which attendees agreed should not be included in the NAP, including SVC against men and boys.

Gender Conflict Analysis:
Experts asserted that SVC is part of a continuum of Gender Based Violence and efforts to prevent it should be founded in gender conflict analysis. This gender conflict analysis must assess both the gendered nature of SVC as well as the gendered impacts and programmatic and policy responses designed accordingly. The experts acknowledged that women, girls, men and boys are survivors of SVC, but that the causes and impact are grounded in gender norms which overwhelmingly discriminate against women and girls. Strong gender analysis is an essential foundation for response. The NAP should therefore be explicit in its own gender analysis as well as advocate for responses with strong gender analysis. Experts agreed that a survivor centred approaches which systematically address SVC both in terms of support to survivors as well as a comprehensive approach to prevention should be developed in the UK NAP. Experts believed that whilst integrating PSVI into the NAP, efforts

should be made to ensure it addresses SVC in a comprehensive manner. Integration into the NAP would help drive forward work on PSVI in addition to displaying the imbalance between SVC and other forms of VAWG; and SVC and other areas of the WPS agenda.

Objective-Driven Consultation-Based NAP:
Experts outlined the importance of setting clear objectives across the NAP, particularly but not only in relation to preventing SVC. The groups believed that objectives needed to be founded on input from conflict-affected countries through consultation with civil society and women's rights organisations to ensure women and girls voices are included when policy and programmes are designed. They should be developed in an inclusive manner to ensure that impact is achievable and can be monitored. Objectives for the NAP should be a driver for work on WPS, and encompass the range of commitments the UK has made under the WPS agenda.

Vital Role of Civil Society and Women's Rights Organisations:
Groups highlighted the essential role of civil society and women's rights organisations in delivering and designing programming and policy to prevent violence. As first responders and long-term agents, these grassroots organisations play an essential role in the delivery of services, including for SVC. Their work and continuing, systematic support for their vital role should be acknowledged in the UK NAP to ensure that progress on prevention is possible. Such support must be resourced through long-term funding and consultation.

Session 2: Understanding gender norms and SVC

<div style="border:1px solid">

Recommendations:
- A stronger, more gendered analysis is needed in responding to SVC, as well as wider efforts in fragile and conflicted-affected states. Such analysis needs to work at different levels: from small, local norm changes to high-profile, international efforts. It also needs to work across different actors: affected individuals and groups; perpetrators including armed groups; external actors (international NGOs, HMG departments, etc.). We must take a more critical and reflective approach regarding our own gender norms.
  - o The new UK NAP would therefore be strengthened by a more nuanced understanding of SVC and 'gender'.
- The 'tyranny of urgency' of responding to pressing needs must be balanced with efforts for long-term, sustainable change. In responding to crises, international NGOs and HMG should ensure long-term efforts are put in place to support sustainable positive gender norm change to promote equality, peace and prevent all forms of gender-based violence (including sexual).
  - o The new UK NAP would therefore be strengthened by a more aligned approach between development, humanitarian and security (which includes a gendered analysis).
- More research is needed to understand how and why SVC is perpetrated against men, boys and LGBTI persons to more fully understand how dominant gender norms make certain individuals vulnerable and makes certain kinds of perpetrators.

</div>

The **discussants** for this session were Dr Paul Kirby (Research Fellow, LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security) and Dr Henri Myrttinen (Head of Gender, International Alert) and the session was chaired by Carron Mann (Policy Manager, Women for Women International UK). Dr Kirby opened the session with a presentation, building on the work of Elisabeth Jean Wood,[1] which mapped the influence of gender norms on the forms of SVC, the motivations for perpetrators, and the consequences for survivors. Dr Myrttinen presented some practical case studies of gendered analysis of SVC in practice from International Alert's work with refugees in Syria and Lebanon. Given the complexity and sometimes abstract concept of gender, each group's discussions were different.

The **first group** discussed 'prevention' both in terms of conflict and SVC (and other forms of VAWG through a WPS lens). The group concluded that not enough work was being done on prevention that focused on preventing abuse through transforming the gender norms that influence SVC (forms, prominence, motivations, consequences,

---

[1] http://campuspress.yale.edu/elisabethwood/

etc.). Current prevention work tends to focus on deterrence and/or norm change through prosecutions, an assumption with which the group did not agree. The group also acknowledged the narrowing of definition of conflict related sexual violence to 'rape as a weapon of war' within existing international standards and how that restriction has been incorporated into national laws and policies, thereby omitting other forms of SVC.

The group also discussed the multilevel and intersectional nature of stigma (i.e. stigma as a survivor combining with stigma/vulnerability/discrimination from other characteristics e.g. ethnic, age, sex, LGBTI, etc.). Vulnerability should be tied to the context and dominant discriminatory and unequal gender norms, not the individual (not inherent). This led to a discussion on the importance of survivor choice and participation across sectors and levels (e.g. decision-making around peace processes, SVC prosecutions, in communities, etc.).

The **second group**'s discussions started with unpacking why SVC is such an effective control over affected individuals and groups, working within patriarchal and heteronormative systems that commoditise women's sexual purity or 'feminising' or 'homosexualising' men. The group also noted that the (very limited) research on male SVC survivors suggests that it usually happens in displacement, detention or recruitment contexts. These norms can be reinforced in conflict/fragility. Patriarchy can be a useful explanation for multiple and systemic forms of SVC, but some in the group felt that this was true only when supplemented by close analysis of armed group institutions. But there are also opportunities for promoting equality and so a strong, gendered analysis is needed even in the most difficult situations. However, humanitarian and other actors working in conflict must accept that their understanding of gender norms and dynamics in a context will never by fully complete. Gendered analysis of conflict situations is key (of both affected populations and armed groups) and there are ways of codifying it.

External actors also need to be aware of their own, internalised gender norms and power dynamics and the influence that they have on response. We all need to be asking ourselves more and better questions. The group discussed 'the tyranny of urgency' in trying to deliver effective, sustainable, long-term support in unstable and insecure contexts.   This group also discussed the micro vs. macro level i.e. gender norms at an individual/community level as well as international/foreign responders, influence of global political economy, etc. There was a discussion on the threats that women's and girls' service providers face within a broader gendered framework (e.g. to include LGBTI) as the conversation broadens rather than improves service provision and sufficient funding undermines a more inclusive approach (same pots of funding for both).

The **third group** discussed the influence of different types or intensity of conflicts on SVC. Whether a protracted (e.g. Syria) or a short/intense (e.g. Rwanda) conflict, SVC is still common but there has been very little research onto the impact on gender norms from different kinds of conflict or the social trauma that follows. The group also discussed the absence of aggregation for age (children) and recognised the largely arbitrary nature of '18 years' as a line for aggregation. Little research has also been done to look at the impact of civilian sexual violence (relating to conflict), including intimate partner violence. Recognise that SVC happens on a continuum and that abuse can make individuals even more vulnerable to future abuse in and post-conflict. Not only due to stigma but also from reliving the abuse through testimony.

The group felt that UK NAP would be more effective with a more nuanced definition of SVC and how intersections of vulnerability increase risk. We know that SVC happens against men, boys and LGBTI persons as well as women and girls. Research is lacking for LGBTI survivors, particularly as another vulnerable group and highlighted the recent report on the targeting of LGBTI persons for SVC.[2] There is also a forthcoming report by International Alert on this issue, based on research conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Lebanon and Nepal. International Alert has also published work on Syrian, Iraqi, and Palestinian LGBTI refugees in Lebanon.[3] How people are seen by others in terms of identity is important as are 'traditional moral orders' when working as an outsider. The group also recognised the importance to respect individuals' decisions and privacy and to 'do no harm' by being cautious when reaching out to people. The group also considered the need for external actors to

---

[2] http://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/countries/colombia/
[3] https://www.routledge.com/A-Gendered-Approach-to-the-Syrian-Refugee-Crisis/Freedman-Kivilcim-Baklacioglu/p/book/9781138693722

understand and be aware of their own gender norms, this includes the capacity building work of the MOD under the NAP's fifth pillar as well as the work of international NGOs.

Session 3: Comprehensive Approach to SVC

Recommendations:
- In line with the UN Women Global Study on Women, Peace and Security (2015) the UK Government should incorporate a women's rights-based approach to all its Women, Peace and Security work. This would particularly facilitate greater integration of sexual violence policy and programmes into prevention and relief and recovery work.
- The UK Government should support a comprehensive package of services in response to conflict-related sexual violence including safe and sustainable healthcare services, psychosocial support, shelters and longer term livelihoods opportunity. These should be both short-term immediate service provision and longer term programmatic work. Funding for SVC should be multi-sectoral and cross departmental to avoid the current siloed approached requiring multiple funding applications for the same work, reducing efficiency and promoting short termism.
- The UK Government should ensure consistency in policies and practices across all departments, particularly between the MOD and Home Office, as well as integration of policies and practices of international and regional organisations, including NATO and the EU.
- The UK should use a comprehensive approach, one which specifically ensures that all the principles of Women, Peace and Security are 'at the centre' of the conversations on Countering Violent Extremism and that women and girls are not instrumentalised.
- The UK Government should connect top-down and bottom up approaches more effectively, to ensure that local voices and experiences are directly influencing SVC programming, funding and policy. This should incorporate gender budgeting which assesses how and on whom money was spent as well as assessing the outcomes of any spend.

The **discussants** were Antoinette Uwimana, Rwanda Country Director, Women for Women International and Rainatou Sow, Executive Director, Make Every Woman Count. Antoinette Uwimana focused on Women for Women International programming and provided a perspective directly from women's experiences of conflict and survivors of SVC. Antoinette emphasised five interconnected issues that confront survivors: health (physical and psycho-social); stigma; trauma (including HIV and AIDS); women's silence; and the continuing sexual violence despite criminal laws. Rainatou spoke of the policies developed by the African Union to address a comprehensive approach to SVC. She outlined the importance of prevention of violence through mapping; facilitating women's participation; promotion of centres of excellence for training and capacity building; and service provision for relief and recovery with focus on local service providers.

The groups agreed that the UK NAP should be based on strong gender analysis, which incorporates a gender perspective throughout the NAP and all conflict-related policy and programmes connecting events in fragile and conflict-affected countries with top-down policies and practices. A gender analysis must include men, boys, LGBTI persons but importantly this inclusivity must not drown out the voices of women and girls, who remain fundamental to gender analysis. Women's and girls' voices must be listened to and reflected in the NAP. The groups discussed women's and girls' access to information about their rights and the role different actors within the international community play in supporting access to SVC and VAWG information to enable women and girls to advocate for their rights and protection.

The groups discussed the importance of connecting the understanding of gender norms and gender inequality during peacetime with what happens during conflict. It is important not to allow a focus on SVC to make invisible the risks and forms of VAWG that occur outside conflict, perhaps at an even higher rate. Analysis requires looking past conflicts to consider peoples' day-to-day lives and how forms of VAWG that occur in non-conflict situations

carry over and are exacerbated during conflict. This is all also relevant to funding where this is dependent on programmes addressing conflict-affected sexual and gender-based violence.

The UK needs to develop a coordinated, comprehensive and objective driven approach to the NAP. This could be facilitated by:

- Increasing the participation of outside experts and institutions in the NAP development process.
- Increasing discussion and coordination between sections within HMG, including the PSVI Team, Women, Peace and Security Team, and DFID's Violence Against Women and Girls Team. This would also provide the opportunity for department and sections within HMG to learn from each other.
- Encouraging a comprehensive, coordinated approach from international and regional institutions. For instance, currently the office of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict operates separately from UN Women, the OHCHR and CEDAW.
- Assessing how the UK approaches SVC domestically to women survivors of conflict with its international approach.

The groups discussed how the UK could develop a more comprehensive approach, i.e. that all policy, political and programme approaches are integrated and coherent. Fundamentally, this means that all HMG policy should actively support and not undermine or contradict efforts to prevent VAWG and SVC. While development, foreign affairs and defence policies are most relevant, the groups agreed that ending VAWG requires a multi-sectoral approach that necessitates policy and practice coherence across all of government, including from departments leading on immigration, international trade, education and health. The groups agreed that an effective way to ensure coherence would be to scale up capacity to consult with women's rights organisations and networks in target countries.

Going forward, the UK Government needs to address potential future challenges. This includes the potential for the countering violent extremism (CVE) agenda to engulf or displace the WPS agenda. It is important that a multi-stakeholder discussion forms the foundation for this, including cross-Whitehall, NGO and academic colleagues. As this discussion is taken forward, the Government should ensure that SVC is not only seen through a CVE lens, and that women and girls are not instrumentalised as agents who can 'deradicalise'.

Next steps:

These recommendations will inform the work of GAPS as it works with the UK Government to strengthen UK WPS policy and practice, such as publishing a shadow report to the UK's annual report to parliament on its WPS work as well as the development of the new UK NAP.

For more information about this work please visit http://gaps-uk.org/resources/.