

UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security Six Months In

This paper sets out GAPS' key reflections of the UK Government's 2018-2022 National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (NAP) and its initial implementation.

Background:

In January 2018 GAPS welcomed the [UK Government's latest, fourth, NAP](#). GAPS worked closely with the UK Government in the development of the NAP and appreciates the openness with which the Government approached its consultation with civil society and the continuing dialogue on its implementation and monitoring of its impact. GAPS is grateful for the UK Government's recognition of our expertise and convening power and for the opportunity for our Chair, Brita Fernandez Schmidt, to speak at the launch.

Summary:

Six months into the new UK NAP, GAPS is reflecting both on the NAP itself and implementation, including ongoing development of the UK Government's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) plan. GAPS remains encouraged by the process in developing the NAP, particularly the consultative nature of it. We welcome the cross-government approach, senior support and dedication of the team developing the NAP. GAPS believes that the omission of an MEL framework during drafting of the NAP was a missed opportunity, but is encouraged by discussions on its development since the launch and is looking forward to a robust NAP MEL framework.

GAPS will continue to encourage the UK Government to increase funding for Women, Peace and Security and to support Women's Rights Organisations (WROs), Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs), peacebuilders and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Fragile and Conflict Affected States (FCAS). GAPS will also continue to support the UK Government in strengthening its focus on the prevention pillar of Women, Peace and Security to move towards a comprehensive approach to conflict prevention. GAPS looks forward to continuing to work with the UK Government – specifically the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Department for International Development (DFID) and Ministry of Defence (MOD) – as the NAP is implemented, monitored and evaluated.

GAPS's Key Reflections:

1. Outcome Driven:

GAPS welcomes that the new UK NAP is, for the first time, driven by strategic outcomes. The seven strategic outcomes outline what the UK Government aims to achieve in its NAP. This outcome driven framework marks a significant step forward in the UK Government's ambition for its work on Women, Peace and Security and we hope – in line with discussions during its development and inception – provides an important resource for UK Government officials who are delivering the UK's policies and programmes on peace, security and justice, stability, women and girls' rights, and gender equality in and for FCAS.

2. Five-year NAP:

Similarly unprecedented, the new UK NAP is a five-year plan (previous NAPs have been three years). GAPS has previously advocated that this, alongside overarching thematic priorities grounded in gender and conflict analysis, would enable the UK Government to take a longer-term strategic approach and thus deliver more effective and sustainable changes in the lives of women and girls. *"This will enable the UK to take a longer term strategic approach to systemic issues and demonstrate progress in addressing gender-related root causes of fragility and conflict, and the gender inequalities that most directly inhibit the Women Peace and Security agenda."*¹

¹ Informing the new UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security [GAPS written submission](#), page 8.

3. Consultation and Analysis:

For the first time, the UK Government prioritised and adequately funded consultation and analysis of the views of civil society in NAP focus countries. GAPS and our members: Amnesty International UK; Saferworld; the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom; and Women for Women International, led [consultations with civil society organisations from](#) Afghanistan, Myanmar, Somalia, and Syria: Gender Development Institute (Myanmar); Medica; Somali Women Development Centre; Somali Women Solidarity Organisation; and Women for Development Now. The consultations included Focus Group Discussions, Key Informant Interviews, and workshops that took place in capital cities and non-capital city locations. The consultations' findings provided an opportunity for the UK Government to learn directly from women and organisations implementing Women, Peace and Security activities at national and local level. The consultations outlined what the international community does well to support women and girls' rights and gender equality – and what it needs to improve to meet its commitments and the in-country need.

It is important that this level of meaningful engagement and national analysis in NAP focus countries becomes institutionalised. GAPS believes plans for this should have been included in the new NAP, specifically in the MEL framework. Moreover, organisations consulted during the drafting process should continue to work with GAPS and the UK Government in identifying the challenges and opportunities for promoting Women, Peace and Security through the implementation of the NAP and in UK Government policies in their countries. Funding for this engagement and consultation should extend to include adolescent girls and young women. The UK Government can play an important role in opening up spaces for their inclusion and meaningful participation. GAPS looks forward to working with the three departments on any NAP-related consultations.

The NAP has now also been launched in focus countries which marks an increase in UK Government recognition of and commitment to the importance of delivering on Women, Peace and Security objectives with national stakeholders. These national launches, we hope, provided an opportunity for organisations in the UK NAP's focus countries to understand the UK Government's ambitions and commitments, and to identify how the UK Government will be working with them to implement the NAP. We believe this also signifies the UK Government's accountability to WROs and CSOs for implementation of the UK NAP.

4. Women's Human Rights Defenders, Peacebuilders, Organisations and Movements and Civil Society Organisations:

One of the major findings of the consultations was the importance of, and need for, flexible and long-term financial support to CSOs, particularly WROs working on peacebuilding and Women, Peace and Security issues. Whilst GAPS did not ask specific questions about funding for WROs during the consultations, the need to support WROs and CSOs with long-term funding was a central finding across all four consultation countries. In particular, the consultations highlighted the need for long-term core funding that is flexible. It was disappointing that this recommendation was not adopted as part of the UK NAP and remains an area where more can be done and which could yield major impact in Women, Peace and Security implementation. GAPS has long advocated for additional funding for civil society, and WROs specifically, and believes that the UK Government should use the NAP to drive forward flexible funding to organisations that are providing services and advocating for peace, women and girls' rights and gender equality at local levels. This funding should be aimed at programme delivery as well as supporting the infrastructure of WROs who are often the first responders in crisis and deliver critical services. It is also crucial that the funding process does not result in funding being almost restricted to large or for profit organisations who have the resources to handle the long, complex and demanding bidding process.

5. Funding:

Despite global best practice showing that NAPs need to be funded², the UK NAP has no dedicated budget attached to support its implementation. Funding for NAPs can be delivered in a number of ways: a specific

² [OSCE Study](#) on NAP on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 (2014)

Women, Peace and Security fund; a commitment or target for a percentage of conflict and peace funding on Women, Peace and Security – in line with the UN Secretary General’s 15% target; and through national governments’ support to deliver their NAPs including training, MEL and capacity building. GAPS will continue to advocate for a dedicated budget and funding to support Women, Peace and Security objectives and NAP implementation, including funding for WROs.

GAPS welcomed progress made by the UK in tracking WPS funding through the Conflict Security and Stability Fund (CSSF). The absence of a commitment to build on this progress in the NAP and to introduce a mechanism to track WPS spend across all UK official development assistance in FCAS is a gap, [particularly in light of a recent report on the CSSF by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact \(ICAI\)](#). GAPS will continue to work with the UK Government to ensure more effective, open and transparent reporting on WPS spend.

6. Conflict Prevention and Root Causes of Conflict and Inequality:

The NAP includes only one specific conflict prevention strategic outcome, which focuses exclusively on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)³. This risks supporting the ‘securitisation of aid,’ and instrumentalising women and girls and their rights to prevent violent extremism. Given the importance of conflict prevention and peacebuilding in the purpose and origins of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and the lack of global focus on it being one of the main findings of the UN’s Global Study on Women, Peace and Security, its limited inclusion in the NAP is a significant gap. GAPS encourages the UK Government to ensure that its Women, Peace and Security work is much more centred upon preventing conflict, building peace, the use of gender-sensitive conflict analysis to target the gendered root causes of conflict, and to ensure its policies and programmes address causes as well as the consequences of conflict. GAPS hopes that the mid-term review of the NAP provides an opportunity for the UK to review and strengthen its strategic outcomes to gendered approaches to conflict prevention, peacebuilding and root causes of conflict.

7. Domestication:

UNSCR 1325 and the related resolutions apply to international and domestic policies and programmes in-and-related-to peace and conflict. Furthermore, the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) require all countries to deliver the whole SDG agenda both at home and abroad to achieve the global goals including those on gender equality and peaceful societies by 2030. Gender equality and women and girl’s empowerment, SDG 5, cuts across the whole agenda and no goal can be achieved without all the goals being achieved. Furthermore, the SDG+ movement is calling for stronger links between the goals, such as links between SDG 5 and SDG 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. However, the current UK NAP still focuses solely on the UK Government’s work overseas. It does not extend the UK’s Women, Peace and Security commitments to Northern Ireland⁴ or to refugees, migrant and trafficked women and girls from FCAS in the UK. The implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Northern Ireland and to refugee, migrant and trafficked women and girls would support the prioritisation of gender equality in policies and programmes directed to them, including in any further agreements in Northern Ireland. To deliver fully on the UK Government’s commitments to Women, Peace and Security and to the 2030 agenda, the two agendas must be looked at iteratively and be implemented jointly. The Government should include departments that have responsibility for domestic policy across the UK nations into the NAP implementation process, including the: Home Office, Government Equalities Office, Northern Ireland Office, Policing Agency, and the international sections of the Ministry of Justice and Crown Prosecution Service.

8. Arms Trade Treaty:

The UK Government played a significant role in the development and adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), the pre-eminent tool for regulating the global arms industry. The ATT made clear that arms control

³ For more on GAPS’ position on Women, Peace and Security and CVE, see our paper: [Prioritise Peace: challenging approaches to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism from a Women, Peace and Security perspective](#)

⁴ See [An Inquiry into the position of women in Northern Ireland since the Peace Agreement](#)

is a gender issue. Even before the ATT entered into force in December 2014, the UK Government took great pride in what it regularly refers to as “one of the world’s most robust, rigorous and transparent export licensing systems.” Despite the ATT and the UK Government’s role in its development, the Government continues to export arms to countries which have used those weapons in a disproportionate and illegal manner against civilian women and girls, notably to Saudi Arabia – a country engaged in a violent conflict in Yemen where women and girls have suffered disproportionately. The lack of coherence between the NAP and the ATT remains a concern. Whilst it references Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration processes “should account for the needs, opportunities and vulnerabilities of women, men, and sexual and gender minorities”, it does not consider the gendered impacts of the transfer, acquisition, and use of small arms, light weapons, or explosive weapons – or the UK’s own role in arms sales and related conflicts. GAPS encourages the UK Government to use the NAP to reassert its commitment to the ATT.

9. Focus Countries:

GAPS is pleased to see an increase of NAP focus countries as we believe this will be beneficial for NAP implementation and the reach and scale of the impact the NAP will have. The increase in countries allows the UK Government to make commitments to, and report on, a broader number of countries who are at different periods within the conflict cycle. This is an important recognition of the UK Government’s expansion of its priorities and commitments. The NAP also includes an explicit commitment to the strategic outcomes applying to all FCAS and institutions that the UK Government works with that also work in and on FCAS. This, we believe, is vital as it demonstrates the importance of Women, Peace and Security policy and programming being delivered in all areas in which the UK Government works and is important for conflicts that were not – and arguably should have been – included in the focus countries such as Yemen. This commitment to the NAP applying more universally, we hope, will also ensure UK Government staff working in non-focus countries will be designing policies and programmes that deliver on the NAP commitments.

10. Gender Strategies:

GAPS welcomes the emerging development of gender strategies for UK NAP focus countries. [The Syria strategy](#) was published shortly after the UK NAP’s launch and we understand that others are being developed. We would welcome similar strategies for all focus countries and expect these to be developed with meaningful consultation and analysis with national stakeholders including WROs, WHRDs and CSOs to ensure they are based on the specific needs and experiences of women and girls as identified by them, and take into account how these needs and experiences change during women and girls lives as well as the different stages of conflict. GAPS hopes that the development of country-specific gender strategies will continue to be aligned with the strategic outcomes in the UK NAP and support the implementation of the countries’ own NAP for those who have already developed one.

11. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL):

GAPS welcomes the UK Government’s efforts to use existing data collection to report on progress under the NAP. We remain concerned, however, that the indicators in the NAP rely on existing data being collected by other entities. We also believe all the strategic outcomes should have corresponding indicators to be able to demonstrate progress and are concerned that the NAP includes no baselines. GAPS welcomes discussions with the UK Government on the development of the MEL plan since the launch of the NAP and looks forward to being a part of those continued discussions. We remain committed to working with the UK Government to continually assess the success and relevance of the NAP. We hope that the UK Government will continue to publish the monitoring data, mid-term review and final evaluation in line with previous commitments to transparency, and we hope that future UK NAP development processes will integrate MEL from the outset.

12. Country Business and Implementation Plans:

Whilst the strategic outcomes provide welcome high-level aspirations for the UK Government, we would welcome clarity about how these will be implemented in NAP focus countries and other FCAS in which the UK Government operates. As the UK Government plans to include its output and activity level NAP-related

work in Country Business Plans, it is difficult for civil society in the UK and FCAS to see what the UK Government will be doing and measure this against the strategic outcomes. GAPS appreciates that there is a balance between avoiding prescriptive plans that do not allow for changes throughout the life of the NAP; and plans that include high levels of detail. However, in its current form, it will be difficult for civil society to assess the extent to which the UK Government is making progress across all areas. GAPS would welcome strong commitments on implementation throughout the life of the NAP which include policies, programmes and diplomatic work.

13. Government Coordination:

GAPS welcomes the establishment of the Cross Whitehall Working Group on Women, Peace and Security and the genuine passion and commitment of its members. This coordination body has provided a sound platform to drive forward the UK Government’s policy on Women, Peace and Security. GAPS appreciates our relationship with the Working Group and the regularity of our meetings. We hope this Group continues to be active in driving forward the implementation of the NAP and its MEL to ensure the UK Government is achieving its goals and amending their approaches and activities where necessary.

14. Internal Capacity:

GAPS welcomes the outcome on the UK Government’s own capacity building on Women, Peace and Security. Internal capacity remains key to the implementation of any plan and policy as it supports training, skills, knowledge and buy-in of central stakeholders who will be delivering the UK NAP. We believe building internal organisational capacity, including the Government and civil society, is a key way in which the UK Government can both deliver its NAP and learn from and undertake analysis based on the needs and experiences of organisations working on Women, Peace and Security in its focus countries – and all FCAS. We hope that the Government takes on GAPS recommendations that: all staff in FCAS are trained; and commitments from Ministers to meet regularly with WROs and WHRDs in FCAS.

15. Working Together Going Forward:

GAPS looks forward to working with the UK Government on the implementation of the new NAP and its monitoring and evaluation. We hope to build on the strong relationships we have with the Government and look forward to providing support and scrutiny. GAPS also looks forward to working with the Government to identify opportunities to further the integration of Women, Peace and Security into Government strategies, policies and programmes on peace, conflict, security and stability.

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