

# BILATERAL ACTION PLANS

---

Narrative report of the Afghanistan focus group on the UK  
National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security

**25 September 2011**

## Background

The *UK National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 Women, Peace and Security* (NAP) was published in November 2010, and sets out the UK's strategy for implementing Resolution 1325 and its associated resolutions 1820, 1888, 1889 and 1960, on women, peace and security.<sup>i</sup> The NAP is jointly owned by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Department for International Development and Ministry of Defence, and is split into three sections; national action, bilateral action and multilateral action. The bilateral section contains three pilot country plans, which set out actions being taken on the ground in priority conflict or post-conflict countries, namely Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Nepal.

## The focus group

As part of the National Action Plan's annual review process (detailed in its Annex 2), Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) is coordinating a series of focus groups to assess areas which need further strengthening and make practical, relevant and meaningful recommendations for updates to the document. The aim of the focus groups is to provide a forum whereby civil society and government officials can engage in collaborative thinking on ways forward in strengthening the NAP to ensure it has further impact for women living in areas affected by violent conflict. As a result of focus group discussions, GAPS, in consultation with other civil society organisations, will produce a report with recommendations for inclusion during the NAP annual review later this year.

This focus group was part of a series of discussions planned for 2011. Focus group discussions around participation of women in peace and security and sexual violence during and after conflict had taken place in June and July 2011. This focus group was one of three discussions planned in the NAP focus countries: Afghanistan, DRC and Nepal. It looked at how the UK can better plan bilateral support for the implementation of its women, peace and security commitments in Afghanistan, in order to ensure that, as the NAP is reviewed and updated, it can be as effective as possible in supporting women, peace and security activities.

The focus group discussion included representatives from civil society and the Afghan government. Unfortunately, due to insecurity in Kabul in the period during which the focus group was held, leading to it being rescheduled multiple times, DFID and FCO officials were unable to attend the meeting. It was agreed that a follow-up meeting with UK government officials would be necessary. The focus group started with presentations sent by the FCO on the NAP and from a representative from the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) on the National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA). Discussion aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How did the UK Government produce its plan for supporting action on women, peace and security in Afghanistan?
2. Which Afghan stakeholders were involved in this process, and how were they consulted? Could this process be improved?
3. How well does the UK plan for Afghanistan complement the Government of Afghanistan's initiatives on women, peace and security?
4. Should the UK support countries in developing and implementing their own NAPs, and how should this be done?

This report shares discussion and recommendations drawn up by those present at the focus group, which was conducted under the Chatham House rule. Oxfam and ActionAid helped to facilitate the process but were not focus group participants. It, along with the report from the focus group discussion in Nepal, will be presented to participants in a further focus group to be held in London on 30<sup>th</sup> September. The report from the focus group in DRC will be circulated later. Recommendations from these four focus groups will inform the UK review of the NAP.

## Producing the bilateral action plan on Afghanistan

Without direct representation from FCO or DFID, it was hard to discuss how the plan was produced. However the focus group discussed how a plan of this nature could be produced to best integrate with existing Afghan government plans. It was discussed that the existing NAPWA, of which women, peace and security is a pillar, requires the support not only of the Afghan government but also of donor governments and national and international non-governmental organisations. The role of donor governments in

supporting NAPWA implementation across all Afghan government ministries was then discussed. Donors such as the UK should lobby ministries to implement NAPWA given the UK's considerable influence as a donor to the ministries. At the Kabul Conference in 2010, the UK government was one of the donors that agreed to work towards giving 50% of its funding through the Afghan government. On advocacy visits to the UK, it was indicated to some focus group participants that the UK would use some of its budget in Afghanistan to strengthen the MoWA but this has yet to be realised and none of this support has been channelled towards NAPWA or MoWA. This was a cause for great concern among participants.

Participants recommended that the UK should:

- (1) Create formal mechanisms in the production of future bilateral plans. The first step should be meetings with the relevant government ministries to see how a UK NAP can strength, support and integrate with government led initiatives. It would then be essential to discuss with civil society groups about their experiences and work in order to avoid duplication.
- (2) Focus action on women, peace and security in Afghanistan on supporting NAPWA implementation.
- (3) Ensure some UK government funding to Afghanistan is used to directly strengthen the work of MoWA, including its monitoring and evaluation system to measure the progress of the NAPWA.

### Consulting Afghan stakeholders

Both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and MoWA stated that they had not been directly communicated with about the plan at all. Both ministries were not directly sent the plan nor was the plan officially presented to them. MoWA and MoFA both received the NAP indirectly but would have preferred the plan to be sent to them officially as that presents an opportunity for direct communication with the UK government on this issue. Equally the civil society groups present stated that they had not been consulted with before the writing of the NAP nor had they received it directly with an exception of a meeting during which one of the participants asked about the NAP. The experience of Finland developing a NAP bilateral plan for Afghanistan was shared. Finnish civil servants met with MoFA to consult before the plan was written. When the plan was launched, the Finnish Foreign Minister came to Afghanistan and held a launch event with MoFA and invited media. Participants recommended that a proper launch event is held once the plan is revised where the Ambassador presents the plan if the Foreign Secretary is unable to attend. It was also noted and discussed that there is considerable difference in Afghanistan between North, South, East and West; therefore in consultation processes, it is important to consult with a variety of actors that can also bring in the provincial perspective to help strengthen the plan.

Participants wanted to know how much of the bilateral plan for Afghanistan was new activities or measures particularly aimed at the implementation of 1325. They wished to know if there were any particular new programmes and how plans had changed as a result of the NAP.

The issue of duplication was discussed. Participants felt that there is a problem of much duplication in Afghanistan and that if better linkages between all the different actors could be made it would prevent both wasted time and money.

Participants also discussed that sometimes individuals are communicated with or invited for meetings, but that linkages with individuals are not as productive as building formal links with the institutions themselves. If procedures are put in place and institutional linkages made, then after individual people leave positions, the linkages and structures can remain.

Participants recommended that the UK should:

- (4) Formally present the NAP to the relevant Afghan ministries and seek to find synthesis and opportunities for supporting work with existing plans, in particular the NAPWA. Following conversations with relevant government ministries, Afghan civil society should be consulted in a way that takes into account differences across Afghanistan, with effort made to speak with actors from different provinces. Once the plan is revised, a formal launch event should be held with MoFA.
- (5) Make connections with institutions rather than individuals. Building systems and procedures is the best way to ensure that, as individual people in roles change, communication channels stay open.

## Synergies with Government of Afghanistan initiatives

Participants felt that there was a clear opportunity for synergy between the NAPWA and the UK NAP. The two documents are compatible so conversations need to take place between UK and Afghan government officials to capitalise on the synergies and to make the most of them. MoWA shared that they are currently focusing on monitoring and evaluation (M&E) work, and once this M&E is complete, it will show where MoWA most needs support, in the implementation of NAPWA, and elsewhere. As M&E was being discussed, participants shared that they felt M&E of the UK NAP was also essential and that this should be done with MoFA and MoWA so that outlines of other work taking place can be part of the M&E process to avoid duplication. Legal reform was also identified as a key area where more attention needs to be directed but that this needs to be done through the correct institutional process. Again it was stressed that this is a plan from one country to another country therefore government relations and process are key and need to be observed.

Participants raised that in the grid section of the bilateral plan for Afghanistan in the NAP, only UK ministries are mentioned. In order to better complement existing work and build better linkages with Afghan-led initiatives, it was recommended that this grid section reflect this in a relevant and cohesive way. Afghan ministries and civil society could be named as the necessary partners to work with to achieve the goals outlined. This would make the connections stronger.

The issue of duplication and regional differences was discussed again. Participants pointed at the importance of a formal consultation process engaging with ministries and civil society. The number of countries developing NAP bilateral plans focused on Afghanistan was discussed. It was raised that better processes and linkages need to be made to avoid many plans for Afghanistan not being integrated with one another. This was identified as another way where the issue of duplication happens.

As national and international NGOs and civil society should also be implementing the NAPWA using gender policy documentation, this should be shared in order to expand learning and strengthen actions around gender integration and NAPWA implementation.

Participants recommended that the UK should:

- (6) Meet directly with MoFA and MoWA to make sure opportunities for synergy are maximised and to avoid duplication.
- (7) Draw from the findings of the monitoring and evaluation process taking place for the NAPWA and look to strengthen the areas where gaps are identified, in close communication with Afghan ministries.
- (8) Have a monitoring and evaluation process for the NAP in partnership with MoFA and MoWA.
- (9) Name the Afghan actors with which it will be communicating and acting on each action outlined in the plan for Afghanistan in order to strengthen linkages and improve communication.
- (10) Ensure there is regional flexibility within plans that are developed.
- (11) Give increased focus to the issue of legal reform, whilst making sure that correct process is followed.

## Supporting the development of a NAP for Afghanistan

MoFA is currently drafting its NAP, drawing together 9 deputy ministers and 10 focal points from line ministries and a group of advisors from the UN and from embassies. This is being done with the financial support of Finland. This process presents an opportunity for coordination and cooperation. Participants discussed the importance of all activities with the same aims being mutually reinforcing. The UK has a role as a donor and as such it can help in the implementation of Afghan lead plans and initiatives. Better communication between all donors working on issues of women, peace and security needs to be built. Donors need to strengthen communication between each other and with the Afghan ministries and civil society actors. The role of MoWA and the NAPWA were discussed as a core mechanism for building these linkages with donors being supportive rather than leading. Any plans made by the UK government to implement their own NAP should be connected to the efforts already taking place at national government

level. In order to support countries in developing and implementing their own NAPs, it is important to build open lines of communication through institutions so that plans can be updated via consultation with all relevant actors and avoid duplication.

The issue of shared learning between countries with NAPs was discussed. It was asked if it was possible to build some links between Nepal, Afghanistan and DRC so that learning within this process can be shared.

Participants recommended that the UK should:

(12) Strengthen links to the NAPWA and MoWA within the UK plan.

(13) Create linkages between NAP focus countries to share learning.

(14) Strengthen communication with donor governments in order to avoid duplication.

It was agreed that follow up meetings are essential, especially as it was not possible for FCO or DFID to join the discussion. Participants felt that the correct process would be for FCO and DFID to meet first with the relevant Afghan ministries and that following this there should be consultation meetings with civil society actors.

---

<sup>i</sup> UK Government, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 Women, Peace and Security (2010), <http://www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/global-issues/conflict-prevention/women-peace-security-action-plan>.