Associate Parliamentary Group on Women, Peace and Security

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gender action for peace and security

THE PARTICIPATION CHALLENGE

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

1 June 2011

Background

Security Council Resolution 1325 '*urges member states to ensure increased representation of women at all decision making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict.*'[i]

Over ten years have passed since its adoption and its recognition and reaffirmation of the importance of women, peace and security and gender perspectives in peacekeeping, conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Practitioners and policy makers alike increasingly recognise the need to protect civilians, especially women, in conflict, the importance of women's involvement in peacebuilding to achieving sustainable peace and the need for the mainstreaming of gender perspectives into policy and programming. Over recent years, welcome attention has been given to protecting women and to tackling and responding to sexual violence in conflict. However, women continue to be routinely excluded from peace and security processes, and senior appointments within international peace and security structures are overwhelmingly dominated by men. Yet, Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security set out participation as one of their key provisions, as it is unlikely that goals will be achieved otherwise. This is the *participation challenge.*

The United Kingdom has been a global leader of the women, peace and security agenda. Instrumental in pushing for the adoption of five women, peace and security resolutions by the Security Council,[ii] it was one of the first countries to develop its own National Action Plan (NAP). It is considered the informal lead state on this issue in the Security Council. With this in mind, it is crucial that the UK continues to use its direct political and financial leverage to ensure translation from rhetoric into reality.

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 of 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 bodies, will produce a report with recommendations for inclusion during the NAP annual review later this year.

This focus group was the first in a series of three discussions planned for 2011. It asked how the UK government can further encourage meaningful participation of women in peace and security. Discussions were informed by a set of practical guidelines for operationalising the participation provisions of UNSCR 1325 developed by the Initiative on Quiet Diplomacy.[iii]

The focus group discussion was structured in two parts and included representatives from parliament, civil society and government departments. It firstly considered senior appointments within international peace and security structures and how to increase the number of women being put forward for such positions. The meeting heard that broadly there are two types of appointments: those recruited on an open applications basis and those elected. Discussions focused mainly on elected posts, as an area where states have considerable influence and recommendations were made for overcoming barriers to women's representation. The second part of the discussion considered women's participation in peace processes and post-conflict governance. This part of the discussion focused on the importance of women's engagement in such processes and what practical measures the UK government can take to increase women's meaningful participation.

This report shares discussion and recommendations from the focus group. It presents common themes and threads that permeated the discussion in the *overall strategy and approach* section before moving on to consider specific appointment and participation issues. Recommendations were drawn up by civil society representatives, including academics working on the issues, programme staff, policy advisors and senior woman appointees, and subsequently presented to civil service officials and discussed.

Overall strategy and approach

Holistic Approach: Over recent years, the main centre of attention of the women, peace and security agenda has been on sexual violence. Some progress has been made in provision of services to survivors and victims of sexual violence, including access to justice, and attention given to combating the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. There is greater focus on protection and prevention aspects, in both the UK National Action Plan and in the international arena. Although we strongly believe in the importance of prevention of sexual violence and the need for provision of services to survivors,[iv] focus on these issues has been accompanied by a dilution of attention on participation issues which often go overlooked. It was the firm belief of civil society participants that the agenda cannot be split and must be addressed in a holistic way if our efforts and interventions are to be effective and provide value for money to the UK taxpayer. It was noted that decision making which is more inclusive and democratic is a better informed process and leads to better decisions and outcomes. Women, less represented among those instrumental in causing violent conflict to occur, need to be part of peace processes. Civil society representatives, based on programmatic experiences, stressed the links between women's participation and empowerment in political, economic and cultural spheres with rates of sexual violence, with both issues a manifestation of overarching power inequities between women and men. Often the marginalisation of women's influence and participation within decision making forums is correlated with higher rates of sexual violence than would otherwise be the case, and ensures that these issues are less likely to be addressed and given priority during peace making, transition and peacebuilding. The cyclical nature of their interrelation makes attention on women's participation equally as important as tackling sexual violence. The NAP provides a clear vehicle to increase women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution processes, in post-conflict governance and within international peace and security structures. It needs to fully acknowledge and address this reality in a more explicit and targeted way.

Making the Case: It is clear that the case for women's involvement in peace negotiations and post-conflict governance has not been made effectively within government. Participants noted being frequently asked by officials why they should prioritise women's participation within their work. It continues to be too often viewed as something which can be addressed after peace has been made. This view is misguided. The case has been consistently made by civil society over the years through numerous studies and reports. Recent publications include CARE International UK's "*From Reality to Resolution"[v]* (Nov 2010), the Initiative on Quiet Diplomacy's "*SCR 1325 and Women's Participation: Operational Guidelines on Conflict Resolution and Peace Processes"[vi]* (Oct 2010) and GAPS's "*The Participation Promise"[vii]* (May 2011). A study within government, focused on specific outcomes, would be a strong advocacy tool for effective implementation of the NAP and to get buy-in across government, shifting the paradigm that stabilisation is not about women and to demonstrate the impact women's participation makes to security. This would also complement many of the training commitments which are already in the NAP. This should be prioritised during the first review in autumn 2011.

Review Process: As the National Action Plan undergoes review, reorientation and enhancement, care should be taken to ensure it is made more strategic and to identify where most impact can be made. Short term action should be focused, driven and related to the broader holistic vision and to a long-term sustainable strategy.

Ensuring Consultation: While the development of the three bilateral country strategies within the NAP is a positive and welcome development, the UK government needs to ensure that local women and women's rights organisations are actively engaged and consulted in the development of bilateral country strategies on women, peace and security. There is no information available on how individuals and organisations in Afghanistan, DRC and Nepal were consulted in the development of the three existing country specific action plans. This should be addressed during the NAP's first annual review process and going forward with development of future bilateral strategies.[viii] Without this participation of stakeholders in countries affected by violent conflict, bilateral strategies risk looking as if they are imposed from the outside and are unlikely to directly reflect the priorities of women. There is also need for funding and capacity building of women's rights activists, organisations and networks so they can effectively engage in processes.

We recommend that the UK government add provisions to the NAP:

(1) **Commissioning a study to make the clear case for women's participation for distribution and internal advocacy purposes across government**. Civil society has provided significant evidence on the difference it makes to have women at the peace table and within peace and security structures. However, beyond those officials charged with the direct implementation of the 1325 agenda, questions are often raised asking for such evidence. Government should work to address this internally as a matter of urgency. The completed study should be widely disseminated.

(2) **Refocusing the NAP as a strategy with a key objective of increasing women's participation in conflict situations and within international peace and security structures.** This would make the NAP a much more holistic strategy, increasing its chances of effectively bettering women's lives in conflict affected countries.

(3) **Developing a sustainable and coherent strategy applicable across countries**. While we welcome the country plans in the National Action Plan at present, there is a need for a consistent overall bilateral strategy.

(4) **Highlighting the importance of coherence and continuity in policy on women's rights, including their participation, in peacebuilding and post conflict-governance, and of ensuring public statements reflect this consistently.** There have been several examples, particularly in connection with Afghanistan, where government officials and ministers have made statements encouraging women's participation while in practice not making space for women's involvement in the process. This incoherence has the effect of sending contradictory messages which negatively impacts perceptions of the UK's commitment to promoting, protecting and realising the rights of women in countries affected by violent conflict in practice.

(5) **Making compulsory the engagement of local civil society in the further development of the country specific sections of the NAP** so they meet the needs and expectations of women in the conflict areas they are to benefit.

Appointments within international peace and security structures

Security Council Resolution 1325 calls on member states to provide candidates to the UN Secretary General so there are more women as special representatives and envoys. It also urges member states to ensure increased representation of women in peace and security mechanisms and institutions. This should be something which is relatively easily achievable as well as simple to monitor progress. However, more than ten years on, senior posts within international peace and security structures remain, for the most part, dominated by men. Of the fifteen members of the UN Security Council only three members currently have a woman as their Permanent Representatives.[ix] The UK has never appointed a woman as the UK's Permanent Representative to the UN in New York.[x] Of the 27 current Special Representatives of the UN Secretary General, 11 are women.[xi]

There are considerable arguments and some evidence that international organisations are more effective when views at senior levels from both women and men are present. The case for increased numbers of women appointed within peace and security structures needs to be made at both principled and pragmatic levels. In the era where HM Government is looking to achieve "*maximum value for money for UK aid through its contributions to multilateral organisations*,"[xii] these arguments should be increasingly persuasive. The Multilateral Aid Review found that '*most multilaterals are still not paying enough attention to gender issues*'[xiii] and expressed concern about '*weak senior level commitment to gender issues in a small number of organisations.*'[xiv] It is quite clear 'business as usual' is not the most successful route forward. Increasing the numbers of women in senior positions within these institutions is one way the UK government can lead by example.

Appointment procedures: Although officially many international posts are recruited on an open and merit centred basis, in reality, the majority of posts require support and lobbying from the candidate's domestic government. This gives governments a strong opportunity to influence the numbers of women appointed to vacant posts. There are several levels of appointments in question, some of which the UK government can address more easily than others:

    (a) National: numbers of women who serve as Ambassadors and Heads of Mission

(b) Bilateral: opportunities where the government can push hard for women's representation

(c) Multilateral: the need to ensure UK nominations for posts within institutions show gender balance

Broadly speaking, people being put forward for such posts are from high ranks of the political establishments such as former foreign ministers and heads of government or state, eminent persons normally well known in foreign ministries, or senior civil servants. There is a particular issue for women within foreign ministries regarding career pull through to senior levels. There are a large number of women in junior and mid-level positions, but men dominate senior posts. The FCO is no exception to this observation; of the 14 Directors, 3 are women.[xv] The adoption of further family friendly working practices could go some way to closing this gap. These are the kinds of issues which need to be addressed if more women are going to be put forward to such posts. The situation is worse at the higher echelons of the defence and security establishment, where a yet more determined approach is warranted. Transparency in appointments is also a considerable issue: unless the process for appointments and that leading to the selection of individuals who governments put forward are made less opaque and open to public scrutiny, appointments are likely to remain largely dominated by the current "*jobs for the boys*" mentality.

Rosters: A UK roster to which individuals can apply for inclusion would be a positive way to increase the transparency of appointments. This would also be a good mechanism to increase the number of women who are available to be put forward for such positions from outside the usual channels and a pool which could also be targeted to raise profiles. Recognising the UK does not put forward a candidate for every vacant post, the development of a similar global roster or pool of individuals could be a useful exercise, as is developing a roster of individuals who could be supported and provided with training so they are able to be put forward for such posts in the future. The UK should lead on this initiative.

We recommend that the UK government add provisions to the NAP:

(6) **Ensuring women are put forward for all levels of posts within international peace and security structures quickly and setting targets for the number of such posts filled by women.** The government should work to identify "quick wins," posts which could be filled by well-qualified women in the immediate future. This would set a positive example and be a precedent for future recruitment.

(7) **Making simple adaptations to the Cabinet Office-led process which puts candidates forward for positions at the international level.** A section should be added which specifically asks if women have been considered for the post. Simple adaptations to forms such as adding a tick box would encourage those undertaking recruitment exercises to proactively consider women candidates and make it easier for government to monitor progress and adherence.

(8) **Promoting the use of its considerable influence with other countries,** particularly those where it is a substantial donor, to encourage women candidates being put forward as well as encouraging requests for women SRSGs, letting mission host countries know that there is an option to ask for this specifically, as was done by President Johnson-Sirleaf in Liberia.

(9) **Developing a roster in the UK and/or leading on an international process developing an accessible pool of women who are prepared and qualified to take on senior posts**. As well as this pool of existing talent, the UK should lead on an international process, drawing from the coalition of countries which have already shown commitment to the women, peace and security agenda, that would identify women in conflict affected countries that can be supported through training and personal development to be able to take roles in the future. This would provide a platform whereby countries, including the UK, can demonstrate their interest in women's meaningful participation and inclusion in international peace and security structures, and that this goes beyond country interest in having their nationals appointed to such positions.

(10) **Leveraging its influence at the European Union** to ensure EU commitments to take 1325 seriously are translated into increased numbers of women at senior levels in the External Action Service

Women's participation in peace processes and post-conflict governance

Women's conspicuous absence at top peace tables is well documented. In the past 25 years only one in forty signatories to peace agreements has been a woman.[xvi] Recent research has also found that only 16% of peace agreements concluded between 1990 and 2010 contained references to women and many of these

references contravene provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and so infringe human rights standards.[xvii] Experience shows peace agreements which are 'gender neutral' or 'gender exclusive' are far less effective than those where all within a conflict affected society are involved. Donald Steinberg, US ambassador to Angola and a member of the Joint Commission charged with implementing the Lusaka Protocol, states that "*The exclusion of women and gender considerations from the peace process proved to be a key factor in our inability to implement the Lusaka Protocol and in Angola's return to conflict in 1998…I have no doubt that the exclusion of one-half of the population from the Angolan peace process – and from the institutions of governance and the formal economy – meant that inadequate attention was paid to areas essential to consolidate peace and reconstruct the country.*"[xviii]

Women in Peace Processes: There are many barriers to involving women in peace processes, both as participants and as mediators. The terms of the participation process do not currently admit women. Not only do family commitments, communication and safety concerns play a part, but the prevailing view still continues to be that, as women do not make up the majority of those carrying the weapons, they have no stake in being around the peace table and have no influence which they can bring to bear. Yet, it is obvious that women are negatively affected as a result of violent conflict, both as combatants and as civilians.[xix] Women have an equal stake in building a durable peace and the potential to contribute to deliberative democratic processes to this end in the same way as men.

There is significant potential for governments and multilateral organisations who act as facilitators of processes to influence the parties at the table. This provides an important opportunity for the UK to increase women's participation, during peace processes and in post conflict governance. The UK should be prepared to use conditionality whenever they are funding or facilitating a peace process to ensure women participate effectively in discussions. Although government officials may not always have appropriate networks and contacts to effectively engage the right groups and individuals within formal peace negotiations, they can engage UK civil society and nongovernmental organisations in countries concerned, many of who have extensive networks. The UK should also consider how it can attach this kind of conditionality as part of its contributions to wider basket funds and use its influence bilaterally.

Building Capacity: Issues around capacity of women's organisations in conflict affected countries is a considerable obstacle preventing women's views being adequately reflected in peace process. There are many examples where local women's organisations can be more effective if they have adequate resources to operate on a sustained footing and communicate their views. Funding available for activists is shaped by wider policy constraints. Issues of capacity and sustainability of women's organisations are particularly acute in countries where a large proportion of foreign aid is provided as direct budgetary support to host governments. Funds rarely trickle through to grassroots organisations. The UK government should consider how this can be addressed and support for women's organisations, particularly in the countries covered in the bilateral section of the NAP, can be increased. When women's organisations are struggling to survive, they are less able to engage in processes. For example, although the UK government has consistently said it works to encourage women's participation in the reconstruction and governance of Afghanistan, the Afghan Women's Network, which wants to undertake a nationwide consultation exercise ahead of the Bonn Conference in December 2011, does not have the funds in order to do so. Ensuring women's organisations are adequately funded, have the capacity to engage women effectively and the opportunity to be involved during formal peace talks and conferences would be a clear way of making it certain that women are able to effectively participate.

Cultural sensitivity: Cultural sensitivity is an important aspect in all interventions. Care needs to be taken to avoid entrenchment of the perception of women's rights and participation as the international agenda, rather than a movement emanating from the people of the country concerned. At the same time, it should be recognised that the cultural argument is often a last bastion against the full recognition of women's rights. Notwithstanding the above, the UK, particularly in ministerial level interventions, should not hesitate to require the engagement of women. Research via a lessons learned document or a detailed study on how cultural sensitivities in different settings can be effectively overcome would be a useful document for officials and ministers to use in preparation for diplomatic discussions and when considering engagement around these issues, and should be developed.

We recommend that the UK government add provisions to the NAP:

(11) **Making compulsory the use of conditionality in peace processes supported by the UK to demand a quota of women participating in peace negotiations** as a requirement for such support.

(12) **Adapting standing instructions on dealing with crisis situations to incorporate 1325 and make encouraging women's participation in transitional processes integral to the UK's efforts in such situations**. The focus group was disappointed that this has not been explicitly built into the objectives of the Arab Partnership Fund as part of the UK's response to events in the Middle East and North Africa.

(13) **To actively engage UK civil society networks in identifying appropriate women peacebuilders and women's rights activists in conflict affected countries to be engaged in formal peace processes.** The government may often not have networks in conflict affected countries to be able to easily engage local women peacebuilders and activists. Civil society can be better placed to develop these networks and may have existing contacts. Through pro-active engagement of UK civil society, government will be able to access these networks and individuals. Once names and contacts have been provided to government there is a responsibility to ensure these people are engaged.

(14) **Build in funds for women's organisations** so they are put on a sustainable footing and able to engage in peace processes on a continuous basis. There are many examples where women's groups in countries affected by violent conflict are able to engage local communities and provide women's voices in peace processes. We recognise the government may find such small grants too burdensome to administer and so should consider engaging an appropriate nongovernmental organisation or network to act as a conduit for such funds.

(15) **Commissioning research on best practice to overcome cultural resistance and engage with the 'tradition and culture' argument**. This kind of research would be particularly useful in Afghanistan and the results, including lessons learned, could be transferable to other situations in the region and elsewhere, on the understanding that approaches that are catalytic in one instance may not necessarily work in all contexts.

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[i] United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000).

[ii] These are SCR 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009) and 1960 (2010).

[iii] Initiative on Quiet Diplomacy, *SCR 1325 and Women's Participation: Operational Guidelines for Conflict Resolution and Peace Processes,* October 2010.

[iv] The second civil society focus group discussion will be on sexual violence during and after conflict to discuss issues around how the UK government can improve its support to international, national and local actors to better prevent and react to this security threat.

[v] Available at http://www.careinternational.org.uk/research-centre/conflict-and-peacebuilding/91-from-resolution-to-reality, last visited 30th June 2011.

[vi] Available at http://www.iqdiplomacy.org/images/stories/handbook/pdf/scr1325_iqd.pdf, last visited 30th June 2011.

[vii] Available at http://gaps-uk.org/docs/The%20Participation%20Promise.pdf, last visited 30th June 2011.

[viii] The third civil society focus group discussion will consider and examine the effectiveness of the bilateral section of the National Action Plan.

[ix] These countries are Brazil, Nigeria and the USA.

[x] Available at http://ukun.fco.gov.uk/en/about-us/whos-who/former-permanent-representatives.

[xi] Available at http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/sites/srsg/table.htm, last visited 30th June 2011. Figure only includes SRSG posts, not Envoys, Advisors etc.

[xii] DFID, *The Multilateral Aid Review,* March 2011, Annex 7Terms of Reference, pp. 207.

[xiii] DFID, *The Multilateral Aid Review,* March 2011, p. 19.

[xiv] DFID, *The Multilateral Aid Review,* March 2011, p. 66.

[xv] Available at http://www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/power-point/publications/transparency/fco-london-staff-organogram-june-2010, last visited 30th June 2011.

[xvi] UNIFEM, Women's participation in peace negotiation: Connections between presence and influence, April 2009.

[xvii] C. Bell and C. O'Rourke, 'Peace Agreements or Pieces of Paper? The Impact of UNSC Resolution 1325 on Peace Processes,' (2010) *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 59, pp. 941- 980.

[xviii] Donald Steinberg, *Failing to Empower Women Peacebuilders: A cautionary tale from Angola*, 2007, available at http://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/Resources/NGO/gissue_hr_part_failingtoempowerwomenpeacebuildersangola_international_crisis_group_2007.pdf, last visited 30th June 2011.

[xix] For example, see ICRC, Women Facing War; ICRC Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women, 2001, available at http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46e943750.html, last visited 30th June 2011.