



Foreign &
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International Commitments and Priorities
for the 2019 UK-Hosted International
Conference on Gender-Based Violence
and the 20th Anniversary of
UNSCR 1325 in 2020:
Afghanistan consultation

July 2019

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Introduction and background

Women for Women International, in partnership with Afghan Women's Resource Center (AWRC) and the British Embassy – Kabul, conducted a consultation with civil society organisations and Women, Peace and Security experts on Wednesday 3 July 2019.

Consultation participants developed recommendations on the 20th anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2020 as well as recommendations for the UK-hosted International Conference which will focus on forms of gender-based violence (GBV) – particularly Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict (PSVI) – in November 2019. The consultation brought together 23 leading local civil society organisations, women's rights activists and experts on Women, Peace and Security in Afghanistan.

This report is part of a series of eight consultations that Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS), its members and national partners have undertaken with the UK Government.

The Afghanistan National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR 1325 was approved in 2015 by President Ashraf Ghani with a budget requirement of \$47 million. It is a 5-year plan and will be due for review in 2020. There has been limited progress in implementation of the NAP 1325 due to lack of budget, political will and low capacity of the implementing agencies.

Participants discussed challenges towards better implementation of the NAP 1325 with focus on participation of women, violence against women and girls, legislation in support of women and mechanisms to ensure women's security and their access to justice. Participants also discussed barriers to ending gender-based violence, including sexual violence. Following a challenging and inclusive discussion, participants developed recommendations to bridge some of the existing gaps in implementing the Women, Peace and Security agenda and to ending gender-based violence.

Recommendations

Recommendations – Women, Peace and Security

- 1. Support the implementation the Afghan National Action Plan 1325** through funding, technical support, awareness raising and capacity strengthening.
- 2. Support women's meaningful participation** in social, economic and political life.
- 3. Tackle wider social-cultural norms** that present further barriers for women's participation through specific programming.
- 4. Address the root causes of conflict and violence** as barriers to the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, including women's participation in elections.
- 5. Provide long-term Women, Peace and Security funding** for civil society organisations, particularly women's rights organisations, to enable them to better support and implement programmes and undertake research on women and girls' rights as well as on peace and security priorities.

Recommendations – PSVI and GBV

- 1. Conduct and fund specific interventions to implement strategies to prevent sexual and gender-based violence**, including by tackling the root causes of violence.
- 2. End impunity, improve accountability and promote justice** to ensure that existing work to increase the prosecution of perpetrators of GBV, including sexual violence, is be scaled up. Furthermore, any commitments made to ending GBV, including sexual violence, should be implemented with accompanying accountability plans.
- 3. Increase rights-based, empowerment and survivor-centred support services** to provide protection and establish a monitoring mechanism to track ability to access services.
- 4. Provide long-term civil society funding and support**, particularly for women's rights organisations, to enable them to undertake research on gender inequality, GBV and connections to conflict and security, and to enable recommendations 1, 2, and 3 on PSVI and GBV to be realised.

Discussion

Discussion – Women, Peace and Security

The international community should:

1. **Support the implementation the Afghan National Action Plan 1325** through funding, technical support, awareness raising and capacity strengthening.

The international community should provide better technical support, capacity strengthening and increased funding to the Afghan Government to implement the Women, Peace and Security agenda. This should include technical support and capacity strengthening for representatives of the Afghan security and justice sectors (e.g. legislators, prosecutors, judiciary and the police).

Consultation participants outlined the need for the full implementation of the NAP 1325. They stated that the international community has a significant role in advocating for the Government of Afghanistan to implement its Women, Peace and Security commitments, particularly the NAP 1325, in addition to providing funding and support for capacity strengthening. This could be done through:

- Technical training and support;
- Funding for the Afghan Government and civil society organisations to implement the NAP 1325;
- Support on identifying diverse women experts to build their skills in peace negotiations and conflict prevention, and providing them with access to relevant spaces;
- The development of a monitoring and evaluation system that includes civil society to improve accountability;
- Raising awareness of Women, Peace and Security and the NAP 1325 among government officials, civil society organisations and grassroots communities across Afghanistan to support more successful implementation of the NAP 1325.

2. **Support women’s meaningful participation** in social, economic and political life.

There is limited participation of women in all aspects of life in Afghanistan. However, participants outlined opportunities where the Afghan Government and/or communities are mandated to include women and girls. Such instances should be used to demonstrate the importance of women’s participation. For example, during the April 2019 Peace Jirga, which included a 30% quota for women. Quotas can help to change social norms and ensure that women are better able to participate.

Consultation participants discussed the various challenges and barriers preventing women and girls’ meaningful participation in social, economic and political life at various levels. At the grassroots level, women are unable to participate in peacebuilding and conflict prevention decision-making processes, often due to lack of awareness or access. This includes high illiteracy rates, as well as structural and patriarchal barriers on perceptions of women and girls’ participation. At the national level, there is a lack of political will, discrimination against women, failure to implement the laws and policies supporting women and girls’ rights, lack of budget for implementation of the NAP 1325 and limited human resource/capital. At the international level, the needs and voices of a diverse range of women are often not taken into consideration. For instance, if there is representation at the international level, women are usually not selected based on their skills, expertise or lived experience, but on their existing relationship or connection with a host organisation. This leads to a lack of diversity of women able to participate.

Participants also highlighted the specific risks for women and girls’ participation in elections, both in terms of their role as voters and their role as candidates:

- **Female voters:** Security is a serious big concern for all voters, but it affects women and adolescent girls significantly and prevents them from casting their votes. This is further compounded by a general lack of awareness in the electorate about the importance of women’s role in elections as voters;
- **Female candidates:** Security is also a serious concern for female candidates, particularly those who often receive threats of violence. In addition to this, there is a challenging lack of access to financial resources in comparison to men, who spend a lot of money in their campaigns. The lack of transparency in electoral

systems, prevalence of sexual harassment of women by electoral personnel and corruption all affect women candidates.

The international community should support women and girls' participation in public life by investing in awareness-raising programmes on women and girls' rights (particularly their right to participation), improving security at polling stations, and advocating that threats against women in the public eye are taken seriously.

3. Tackle wider social-cultural norms that present further barriers for women's participation through specific programming.

This could be achieved by: increasing awareness of women and girls' rights and gender equality at a local level using a rights-based approach focused on power, discrimination and social norms; and by engaging men and boys on gender equality.

Participants outlined the linkages between women and girls' limited participation and wider social norms. For example, social norms in Afghanistan mean that women are expected to stay inside the home, which has a direct impact on women and girls' limited participation in social, economic and political life. There are, of course, women and girls who defy these stereotypes and access public, socio-economic and political spheres, often with great personal danger.

Changing these harmful social norms is a key opportunity for progress on women and girls' rights and gender equality. Any policies or programmes should be led by civil society and women's rights organisations who have knowledge of context-specific approaches.

Consultation participants also reflected on how gender inequality increases women and girls' vulnerability. Specific programmes are required to raise awareness of women and girls' rights at a local level, for example engaging men and boys on the importance of gender equality and integrating this into the school curriculum.

4. Address the root causes of conflict and violence as barriers to the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, including women's participation in elections.

Participants highlighted that the major risks for women and girls' safety and women's rights organisations are conflict, violence and the lack of security. They acknowledged that conflict, violence and a lack of security impact women, girls, men and boys, and that the impacts are deeply gendered. As a result, work towards gender equality, peacebuilding and conflict prevention, including a focus on preventing the escalation of violence, is essential. Participants recommended that the international community should support the reform of the electoral systems. The international community should also fund long-term awareness raising programmes on the importance of women's meaningful participation.

5. Provide long-term Women, Peace and Security funding for civil society organisations, particularly women's rights organisations, to enable them to better support and implement programmes and undertake research on women and girls' rights as well as on peace and security priorities.

Civil society, particularly women's rights organisations in Afghanistan, lack adequate, accessible and flexible funding. Funding is often tied to donor priorities which makes it difficult for civil society organisations, and particularly women's rights organisations, to implement programmes based on their self-identified priorities. Funding should be provided to better support research, and implement programmes, on women and girls' rights as well as on peace and security priorities.

More broadly, there is limited financial support for the implementation of Women Peace and Security in Afghanistan, particularly the NAP. \$47 million was required for NAP implementation, however neither the Afghan Government nor the international community has dedicated this full funding. Participants stated that this is a manifestation of a lack of political will, which is a major challenge to prioritising the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

The international community should advocate for more funding to be allocated to the Women, Peace and Security agenda at local, national and international levels. Funding allocation should also be better coordinated to ensure a clearer strategy for funding to local agencies. This could include capacity strengthening to support women's

meaningful participation in negotiations, conflict resolution and peace processes. Funding should not be invested in programmes and projects that are unsuitable for the local context or are not gender-sensitive.

Accessible funding for civil society in Afghanistan is extremely limited, particularly for women's rights organisations. Their programmes are often tied to short or medium-term donor programmes or projects, which makes it difficult for them to: implement their self-defined priorities; access funding; and respond flexibly to emerging needs. This should be redressed to ensure Afghan women's rights organisations can implement their self-defined priorities and ensure that their programming is context-specific, responding to their own gender-conflict analysis. Such a fund should acknowledge the vital role of women's rights organisations in local, national and international advocacy as well as in service delivery.

Discussion – PSVI and GBV

The international community should:

- 1. Conduct and fund specific interventions to implement strategies to prevent sexual and gender-based violence**, including by tackling the root causes of violence.

There are some existing prevention and protection mechanisms in Afghanistan. The Government of Afghanistan is committed to ending GBV and therefore some frameworks – such as: the Afghan constitution; specific laws to prevent violence against women and girls; UNSCR 1325; the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); and other human rights declarations – are international major commitments that exist on paper. The supporting institutions are the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), women's local councils and the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA), which work to implement these frameworks to support protection from and prevention of GBV both domestically and in public.

Capacity strengthening of the security and justice sectors on these frameworks, laws, gender equality, women and girls' rights, gender budgeting and accountability to constituencies on the implementation of relevant legislation, would support the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence and help protect victims and survivors. The international community should provide both technical and financial support to achieve this.

Participants noted the significance of the root causes of violence, and the need for specific interventions to address these. For example, participants outlined that at the community level the misinterpretation of Islamic rules by men is a major root cause of violence. In addition, women have very little understanding of their rights, from an Islamic perspective and those granted by laws. Harmful social norms, including early-forced child marriage, discrimination, illiteracy and poverty, were outlined as some of the causes of gender inequality. At the national level, women and girls' rights and gender equality are not seen to be a priority for policy makers. Participants recommended that engagement with men and boys on gender equality, through awareness raising and programmatic work, could improve this.

Participants observed that women's economic independence is vital to being able to escape violence. The international community should fund and support the implementation of programmes for women's economic empowerment and vocational skills training to meet this need. This should be situated in holistic programming to address conflict and gender inequality.

- 2. End impunity, improve accountability and promote justice** to ensure that existing work to increase the prosecution of perpetrators of GBV, including sexual violence, is scaled up. Furthermore, any commitments made to ending GBV, including sexual violence, should be implemented with accompanying accountability plans.

While mechanisms and frameworks exist to prevent and respond to GBV and sexual violence, a lack of awareness on these available laws and policies leads to low investigation and prosecution of violence, and a lack of accountability and punishment for perpetrators. As a result, survivors rarely receive justice.

Participants highlighted the need for the Government of Afghanistan to: develop clear mechanisms for the full implementation of the current legislative frameworks; strengthen the capacity of its personnel for the implementation of laws; and monitor local law enforcement procedures to better identify areas for improvement.

When victims and survivors are aware of mechanisms for justice, they often do not have the funding they require to support a case. For example, case registration fees and other financial contributions are frequently required during legal procedures, which mean that victims and survivors are not able to benefit from the available mechanisms. The international community should better support access to legal aid for survivors.

As highlighted in recommendation 1 on PSVI and GBV, the security and justice sectors lack sufficient knowledge and capacity to use the mechanisms for justice that exist. The international community should invest in technical training and support for legislators, prosecutors, the judiciary and the police. This training should be long term and incorporate a gender-sensitive approach, as a short-term response would not deliver the scale of change that is required.

- 3. Increase rights-based, empowerment and survivor-centred support services** to provide protection and establish a monitoring mechanism to track ability to access services.

Participants highlighted the significant need for funding to provide survivor-centred support services including psychosocial services, counselling and rehabilitation centres. There is a significant lack of funding for such services in Afghanistan despite the scale of the need.

There was a consensus that organisations and agencies need to strengthen their coordination to increase access to support services and therefore that identifying and establishing or improving referral pathways for victims and survivors is necessary. In conjunction with this, the international community should support programmes that raise awareness of the available services. Women face barriers to accessing services, such as: harmful social norms and acceptance of violence; the low number of women in legislative systems; limited access to legislative bodies. Therefore, raising awareness of the available services and referral pathways is essential. This should be undertaken by local and national organisations and should be supported by the international community.

Participants outlined the need for increased data collection on the prevalence of GBV, including sexual violence, as well as on use of services. Data collection should guarantee survivor anonymity. It requires advocacy from the international community to ensure the Government of Afghanistan collects such data and establishes a monitoring mechanism to track and regularly report the number of survivors accessing services.

- 4. Provide long-term civil society funding and support**, particularly for women's rights organisations, to enable them to undertake research on gender inequality, GBV and connections to conflict and security, and to enable recommendations 1, 2, and 3 on PSVI and GBV to be realised.

Participants highlighted the need for increased, longer-term and easily accessible funding and expert support for civil society organisations, particularly women's rights organisations and women's rights activists for: service provision, advocacy and research. Such funding should enable organisations to implement their self-defined priorities including to support the implementation of recommendations 1 and 2, and provide the services referenced within recommendation 3 on PSVI and GBV.