



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:
Democratic Republic of the Congo consultation

June 2019

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Introduction and background

Women for Women International, with the support of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS), conducted a consultation workshop in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) with civil society organisations and experts on Women, Peace and Security. The consultation workshop took place in Goma on Tuesday 18 June 2019.

The consultation focused on developing recommendations on the following: the 20th anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2020; the 2019 UK-hosted International Conference on the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI), taking place in November 2019.

This report is part of a series of eight global consultations that GAPS, its members and national partners are working on with the UK Government.

Recommendations

Recommendations – Women, Peace and Security

The international community should better support the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda in the DRC by:

1. **Taking a more holistic approach to women and girls' rights, including through establishing a more integrated approach to humanitarian, development and peacebuilding programming.** A more comprehensive approach that integrates women and girls' rights into programming should address gender inequality (including lack of education, skills training and economic empowerment) and lead to an increase in women and girls' meaningful participation in social, economic and political life.
2. **Tackling wider harmful social norms that present further barriers to women's meaningful participation, for example by:**
 - a. Increasing awareness of women and girls' rights and gender equality at a local level using a rights-based approach focused on power, discrimination and harmful social norms;
 - b. Promoting 'positive masculinities' in the school curriculum.
3. **Supporting the successful implementation of the 'second generation' and current DRC National Action Plan (NAP) by:**
 - a. **Specifically providing for Women, Peace and Security priorities in the national budget;**
 - b. **More clearly and genuinely demonstrating the political will to involve women** in the implementation of the NAP through the development of a formal strategy for women's participation;
 - c. **Raising awareness of Women, Peace and Security** among government officials, civil society organisations and grassroots communities across the DRC, to support more successful implementation of the NAP;
 - d. **Developing a structured monitoring and evaluation mechanism for the 'second generation' NAP** which feeds learnings from challenges and/or successes with implementation into the development of an improved 'third generation' NAP for 2022 onwards.
4. **Strengthening government capacity:** The international community should better advocate for and support the internal capacity of the DRC Government – particularly at a community and provincial level – to strengthen its ownership, implementation and integration of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. This should include a review to ensure the harmonisation of relevant existing laws such as Electoral Law and Article 14 of the Constitution, and the ratification of new gender-specific legislation to prevent violence and other forms of discrimination against women and girls.
5. **Providing long-term civil society funding and support:** The international community should fund and support Congolese civil society organisations, specifically women's rights organisations, with accessible, flexible, long-term funding for them to implement their self-defined priorities.

Recommendations – PSVI and GBV

- 1. End impunity, improve accountability and promote justice:** The international community should support existing work to increase the prosecution of perpetrators of sexual violence and ensure any commitments made to ending sexual violence include implementation and accountability plans.
- 2. The international community should support an increase in efforts to prevent sexual violence in conflict** by promoting a more holistic approach to the prevention of gender-based violence (GBV), including through the funding of women's economic empowerment programmes (as outlined in recommendation 1 on Women, Peace and Security above).
- 3. The international community should support an increase in survivor-centred protection services,** including rights promotion, empowerment and survivor-centred support to end stigma.
- 4. Increase longer-term funding and support for civil society organisations, including women's rights organisations** to provide refuges, shelters, support centres and other services that survivors need to access.

Discussion

Discussion – Women, Peace and Security

The international community should better support the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda in the DRC by:

- 1. Taking a more holistic approach to women and girls' rights, including through establishing a more integrated approach to humanitarian, development and peacebuilding programming.** A more comprehensive approach that integrates women and girls' rights into programming should address gender inequality (including lack of education, skills training and economic empowerment) and lead to an increase in women and girls' meaningful participation in social, economic and political life.

Participants outlined the need for an increase in efforts to tackle the root causes of gender inequality to prevent violence against women and girls (VAWG), and to support women's meaningful participation (including in conflict prevention and social norm change). Such approaches should integrate gender equality into peacebuilding, humanitarian and development programmes. This should include establishing and standardising more holistic programming to address harmful social norms and promote gender equality. Policy and programme interventions should include free universal access to education, adult-specific interventions for literacy improvements, and piloting a national programme for women's economic empowerment. Participants discussed the need to engage men in gender equality programming, particularly the promotion of 'positive masculinities' in the school curriculum. Participants also highlighted the importance of financial and technical support for civil society organisations as they are often best placed to transform deeply entrenched and widespread sociocultural norms, through various activities and outreach (*see recommendation 5 on Women, Peace and Security*).

- 2. Tackling wider harmful social norms that present further barriers to women's meaningful participation,** for example by:
 - a.** Increasing awareness of women and girls' rights and gender equality at a local level using a rights-based approach focused on power, discrimination and harmful social norms;
 - b.** Promoting 'positive masculinities' in the school curriculum.

The discussion acknowledged the barriers that harmful sociocultural norms present to achieving gender equality. For example, patriarchal structures in the DRC do not allow for meaningful women's participation. Currently, women's participation at negotiating tables and representation in decision-making bodies is low. Participants stated that women's participation is often seen as a threat to men's power and that there is therefore very little political will for women and girls to be meaningfully involved. There is also a very low presence of women in command services (army, police and other security services). It was noted that the frequent and persistent insecurity in some parts of the country further prevents women's participation.

These challenges are situated within in the context of wider gender inequality. Such prevailing harmful social norms generally lead to women and girls' exclusion and increase their vulnerability to human rights violations. As an example, participants outlined the current low school enrolment rate for girls, as well as the low adult female literacy rates. Recommendations focused on the need to minimise and address these, for example by strengthening women's

economic empowerment, supporting women's participation in socio-economic and political life, 'positive masculinity' programming, and targeted education and literacy programming.

3. Supporting the successful implementation of the 'second generation' and current DRC NAP by:

- a. Specifically providing for Women, Peace and Security priorities in the national budget;**
- b. More clearly and genuinely demonstrating the political will to involve women** in the implementation of the NAP through the development of a formal strategy for women's participation;
- c. Raising awareness of Women, Peace and Security** among government officials, civil society organisations and grassroots communities across the DRC, to support more successful implementation of the NAP;
- d. Developing a structured monitoring and evaluation mechanism for the 'second generation' NAP** that feeds learnings from challenges and/or successes with implementation into the development of an improved 'third generation' NAP for 2022 onwards.

Participants recognised that the existence of a DRC NAP was, to an extent, an expression of the DRC Government's political will to protect women and girls in times of conflict and to promote gender equality based on various international agreements, UNSCRs and national laws that promote human rights. Participants noted that the Women, Peace and Security agenda is a holistic agenda that includes, but is not limited to, the protection of women and girls in times of conflict.

The participants discussed the two DRC NAPs specifically, including the 'first-generation' NAP (2010-2018), and the current 'second generation' NAP (2019-2022). There was consensus among participants that the implementation of the 'first generation' NAP had been weak in the DRC for the following reasons:

- **Budget:** The NAP was not integrated into the national budget and there was no allocation of funds to support its implementation.
- **Duration/timelines:** The NAP was not timebound and failed to include a clear timeline for implementation, which limited the progress of implementation.
- **Objectives:** The NAP did not set performance indicators for certain objectives, which meant that many of the objectives were unquantifiable. As a result, rigorous evaluation of the NAP could not always determine whether the activities and initiatives had achieved the intended results or identify areas that needed further time and resource investment. In addition, some activities did not accurately identify targets or those responsible for them.
- **Provincial implementation and monitoring:** The NAP was unique in calling for Local and Provincial Steering Committees, in addition to a National Steering Committee, to facilitate implementation and coordination. However, in practice, there was an absence of these implementation and monitoring committees in many provinces. This resulted in low ownership of the NAP by stakeholders, both from government and civil society.
- **Practical strategy for meaningful involvement:** There was no a practical strategy to involve women and girls in the implementation of the NAP, including in project development meetings. Such a practical strategy should especially aim to reach those who are particularly marginalised, such as people living with disabilities. This could include meaningful consultations at key milestones throughout both the implementation and evaluation of the NAP.

The 'second generation' NAP (2019-2022) was revised in order to better meet the requirements set out in UNSCR 1325 as well as legal instruments ratified by DRC and regional and international commitments, including the Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union Agenda 2063. In particular, the 'second generation' NAP aimed to integrate and address the challenges and concerns identified by the current political, social and economic context, including the participation of youth, adolescents and girls, and decentralisation. Participants noted the different, more specific language used in the revised and more time-bound 'second generation' NAP, signifying a strong commitment to: making more concrete progress on gender equality; integrating the gender dimension into all levels of decision-making on conflict prevention and resolution; and fighting against impunity for perpetrators of VAWG. Despite this, however, many of the barriers that prevented the implementation of the first NAP (highlighted above) remain and should be addressed to ensure the current NAP is implemented and transformational.

Participants outlined an overall lack of political will from the DRC Government on Women, Peace and Security, which has thus far led to weak implementation and a lack of ownership and support from partners (including donors). To address this, participants recommended that action should be taken by the DRC Government to more genuinely demonstrate political commitment to the meaningful participation of women in the implementation of the NAP, including by appointing more women to formal decision-making positions. Participants highlighted the need for the international community to support NAP implementation and gender equality in the DRC by advocating for an increase in women's participation in social, economic and political life at every opportunity, not just in discussions about the implementation of UNSCR 1325. More significant financial commitment from the DRC Government to this agenda would significantly improve the chances of successful implementation.

Participants outlined the need to raise more public awareness of Women, Peace and Security programmes specifically, as well as to promote gender equality more widely across the DRC. Participants suggested that the international community should support civil society organisations to increase knowledge and awareness of the relevant national, regional and international legal instruments, as well as understanding of what meaningful participation, and the routes to increase it, look like. Efforts should also be made to improve the detailed understanding of relevant legislation among both national and provincial government officials.

- 4. Strengthening government capacity:** The international community should better advocate for and support the internal capacity of the DRC Government – particularly at a community and provincial level – to strengthen its ownership, implementation and integration of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. This should include a review to ensure the harmonisation of relevant existing laws such as Electoral Law and Article 14 of the Constitution, and the ratification of new gender-specific legislation to prevent violence and other forms of discrimination against women and girls

Participants outlined the potential for the international community, including the UK Government, to accelerate progress on the Women, Peace and Security agenda through providing technical support to the DRC Government to strengthen its ownership, implementation and integration of the 2019-2022 NAP. This should include supporting a review of relevant laws to: assess whether they are fit for purpose; remove instances of legal contradictions; and ensure that they meet international legal standards.¹ Participants also suggested that the international community should advocate for the DRC to: introduce new specific gender equality legislation to prevent discriminatory behaviour and abuse; better integrate Women, Peace and Security priorities into the national budget; and develop a strategy for women's meaningful participation.

Consultation also participants outlined the need for relevant existing laws in the DRC to be reviewed to ensure that current legislation is coherent and does not inhibit progress on the implementation of the NAP. For example, a contradiction exists between the Electoral Law (Article 13, Paragraph 2) and Constitution on Parity (Article 14). The latter exhibits the commitment of the Congolese State to promoting women's right to participate in decision-making bodies and at negotiation tables. However, Article 13 of the Election Law does not enable the integration of women's candidates as it is a requirement for the candidate lists to be validated by the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), which participants stated tends to exclude women. This, along with the failure to organise elections, has led to a lack of trust in legislative structures. The international community has a role to play in addressing this.

- 5. Providing long-term civil society funding and support:** The international community should fund and support Congolese civil society organisations, specifically women's rights organisations, with accessible, flexible, long-term funding for them to implement their self-defined priorities.

Civil society organisations, particularly women's rights organisations, are essential. They should have access to long-term, accessible, flexible funding to implement their self-defined priorities. This would enable them to continue their service delivery and advocacy roles based on their own priorities and analysis, rather than a donor-driven agenda. Participants reflected on the lack of coordination in the actions and approaches of local and international organisations. Support to civil society organisations, particularly women's rights organisations, should include the development and implementation of coordination mechanisms to avoid duplication of work and ensure efficient

¹ For example, Article 13 of the Electoral Law and the implementation of the Constitution on Parity.

implementation of Women, Peace and Security priorities. Funding should be combined with longer-term capacity strengthening support to civil society organisations, particularly women's rights organisations.

Discussion – PSVI and GBV

- 1. End impunity, improve accountability and promote justice:** The international community should support existing work to increase the prosecution of perpetrators of sexual violence and ensure any commitments made to ending sexual violence include implementation and accountability plans.

Participants all reported that perpetrators regularly escape prosecution. There is widespread lack of understanding of the relationship and prioritisation of international legal instruments over national instruments by domestic, regional and provincial judicial courts. National legislation should integrate international standards. This requires targeted and specific capacity strengthening and technical support for DRC Government officials, with particular focus at the community and provincial levels, and the security and justice sectors.

Participants outlined wider issues around impunity, corruption and bribery, which create a lack of trust in institutions. Across the board in the DRC, there are often double standards in the application and enforcement of the law. This has been further entrenched by the failure to organise local elections and the growing mistrust in institutions. To increase reporting and prosecution, it is essential for people to trust in the institutions that should provide justice.

The international community should:

- Provide technical support and long-term capacity strengthening for DRC Government officials and the security and justice sectors by investing in long-term, context-specific, Women, Peace and Security training for legislators, prosecutors, judiciary and the police. This would include training on gender-responsive budgeting, as well as the development and roll out of clear reporting and accountability mechanisms. Any training, technical support or capacity strengthening should be long-term, mainstream a gender-sensitive approach, and should particularly target state institutions such as the National Assembly, the Provincial Assemblies, the National Government and the Provincial Governments;
 - Support the implementation of institutional reforms to address and better document issues of corruption (including money laundering), weak legal frameworks, bureaucratic management and access to justice for survivors;
 - Support the review and amendment of relevant legislation in DRC to ensure legislation reflects local realities and does not inadvertently enable perpetrators of violence to avoid justice;²
 - Use diplomatic efforts, including sanctions and embargoes if necessary, against all national governments and international institutions that support armed conflicts in the DRC, including through arms control;
 - Use diplomatic efforts to ensure the DRC Government commits to denouncing all cases of impunity, and formally commits to sentencing all perpetrators in accordance with the law;
 - Support advocacy, led by civil society, for the establishment of special courts for addressing cases of sexual violence in conflict;
 - Support the Central Government in the DRC to roll out a plan for Provincial Governments to implement the action plan of the Kampala Declaration;
 - Provide longer-term training for security and police personnel and support centres on gender-sensitive approaches, the development of protocol, and policies for the prevention and response to GBV.
- 2. The international community should support an increase in efforts to prevent sexual violence in conflict** by promoting a more holistic approach to the prevention of GBV, including through the funding of women's economic empowerment programmes (as outlined in recommendation 1 on Women, Peace and Security above).

Participants identified armed conflict as a root cause of violations of women and girls' rights. They noted that, while VAWG is often a result of harmful social norms, persistent insecurity throughout DRC has increased the prevalence of sexual violence, and the vulnerability of women and girls.

² For example, Article 13 of the Electoral Law and the implementation of the Constitution on Parity.

Women, girls, men and boys continue to be forced to join active armed forces, particularly in the eastern part of the DRC. This has serious, gendered consequences for the individuals and for the wider community. During times of armed conflict, sexual violence increases. Prevention requires the strong mobilisation of the entire community.

In line with the DRC NAP, participants made the following recommendations to prevent sexual violence:

- Provide training for women, adolescent girls and girls in early warning, mediation and peaceful conflict resolution techniques;
- Establish operational systems to monitor violations of the rights of women, adolescent girls, girls, men, boys and vulnerable people;
- Establish 'Peace Women' Committees in all provinces, including women and girls from diverse groups, and made up of all movements across the country;
- Include women, adolescent girls and girls in all negotiation, mediation and peaceful conflict resolution missions;
- Strengthen governance around resource management, which is the main source of conflict;
- Develop community actions to prevent sexual violence including promoting 'positive masculinities';
- Strengthen the capacity of young people to support the transformation of harmful sociocultural norms;
- Integrate capacity strengthening for army, police and other security officials (see recommendation 1 on PSVI and GBV).

3. The international community should support an increase in survivor-centred protection services, including rights promotion, empowerment and survivor-centred support to end stigma.

The international community should invest in long-term social norm change and should equip communities to take ownership for ending the stigma affecting survivors of GBV, for example through the development of community support and reintegration systems.

The international community should develop and implement holistic protection systems to support survivors of GBV to feel safe and comfortable to report. Such protection systems should include access to justice as well as psychosocial support and economic opportunities.

The international community should make available a reparation and/or solidarity fund to support the rehabilitation of survivors. The fund should have clear structures in place to ensure effective management and distribution.

4. Increase longer-term funding and support for civil society organisations, including women's rights organisations to provide refuges, shelters, support centres and other services that survivors need to access.

Participants outlined the current very poor access to basic socio-legal services for survivors of sexual violence, including health, justice, social, legal and reintegration services. This should be addressed by supporting the creation of integrated and multisectoral community-level structures (such as women's shelters) for the holistic support of survivors of gender-based violence, including sexual violence, based on provincial edicts. For this to be successful, it is essential to provide adequate funding and resources for their construction/development and to partner with civil society to promote the centres and sensitise the community for their use to also end stigma affecting survivors of sexual violence.

Participants outlined the need to situate the prevention of sexual violence in conflict within the broader conflict cycle and gender equality commitments. Responses to gender-based violence, including sexual violence, should be included within conflict prevention programming and policies. Responses should also address wider gender inequality, which is exacerbated in conflict, for example by investing in holistic gender equality interventions that reduce vulnerabilities to violence. This further supports recommendations made in section 2 under the Women, Peace and Security discussion section of this report.