

GAPS's Response to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's International Development Strategy

GAPS welcomes the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office's (FCDO) publication of the International Development Strategy (IDS) and its prioritisation of women and girls. However, while there are some elements of the strategy that are welcomed, GAPS is concerned that the approach to gender equality through the 'three E's of education, empowerment and ending violence **risks pre-empting and siloing efforts** under a 'women and girls' approach rather than appropriately addressing the root causes of gender inequality or the structural barriers that marginalised women and girls face. While these are important issues, gender equality cannot be achieved in isolation. Gender Equality is necessary for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the commitments to the Women, Peace and Security agenda such as the National Action Plan (2018-2022), and the WPS Humanitarian Action Compact. It is disappointing not to see Women, Peace and Security as a priority policy in the IDS; the UK Government should **integrate WPS as a cross-cutting priority across all policy and programming in FCAS** to ensure gender equality is considered part of a broader and sustained approach to conflict prevention. The IDS fails to recognise how conflict and gender inequality are intrinsically linked, and how **women and girls are also disproportionately impacted by climate and global health crises**.

The Integrated Review pledged to tackle conflict and instability, and while the IDS commits the UK to develop a conflict and atrocity prevention hub to target structural drivers and root causes of conflict, the strategy does not explicitly make conflict prevention a priority. The UK Government should act on the recognition that all conflicts and crises have specific gender dimensions, and prioritise addressing gendered drivers of conflict as the basis for any policy and programmes in FCAS through **embedding gender-sensitive conflict analysis**. This approach would enhance conflict prevention, strengthen the sustainability of peacebuilding initiatives, prevent gender-based violence, and promote women and girls' meaningful and equal participation in peace and mediation processes. While the IDS also repeatedly emphasises the importance of addressing security threats, by not integrating gender equality within the strategy, it fails to recognise how women's rights organisations and women-led civil society have been instrumentalised to gather intelligence at the expense of gender equality, and how any approach to security must give women and communities the power to assess and meet their own security needs. GAPS strongly urges the UK to **re-commit to developing the strategic conflict framework** outlined by Minister Vicky Ford in February as an opportunity to reflect on and implement gender-sensitive approaches to conflict prevention and security.

GAPS is pleased to see a focus on ‘putting people first’ which prioritises partnering with countries to ensure that the design and delivery of programmes are locally led by those who understand the context best, and the voices of those impacted by programmes are heard. However, it is crucial that the FCDO outlines details on how it intends to institutionalise such a participatory approach and ensure it includes **meaningful engagement with diverse civil society, women’s rights organisations and civil society organisations** so that their perspectives inform agendas. The Government must **guarantee direct funding for women and girls’ rights organisations which is accessible, flexible and long term, and remove bureaucratic barriers associated with procurement, proposals and grant management**, especially for those living in FCAS, to achieve gender transformative change¹. While GAPS is pleased to see the Foreign Secretary’s renewed commitment to restore funding to women and girls, the UK Government must clearly outline **how it will replace the £1.9bn worth of UK ODA cuts** to gender-significant or -principle programmes to meet pre-2020 levels², and when the Government will **reinstate spending 0.7% of GNI on ODA** as set out in the International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015.

Finally, The IDS outlines that the UK Government “will uphold International Humanitarian, Human Rights and Refugee Law and meet [their] international obligations to protect refugees and people seeking asylum”, yet passed the Nationality and Borders Act last month which has been widely criticised as directly contradicting these obligations. The Act is a concerning move by the UK Government that makes seeking protection from persecution more difficult for women, girls, and marginalised groups and ultimately undermines their own commitment to protecting survivors of sexual violence in conflict. The UK must **acknowledge that seeking asylum is never illegal** as per the Refugee Convention which the UK is a signatory of, **immediately repeal the Borders Act** and ensure that they **do not breach their international humanitarian obligations** in all future immigration policies.

In reviewing the IDS, it is crucial that the UK Government **strengthens its Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning systems** by ensuring it collects and uses evidence of what works in gender equality, peace, security and conflict prevention programmes to feed into lessons learned for future programming and policy. As part of both the Women and Girls Strategy and Strategic Conflict Framework due to be published later this year, we urge the UK Government to provide an ambitious plan for involving women and girls as part of a coherent conflict prevention approach that reduces their vulnerability to existing and emerging crises.

¹GAPS, [The Key to Change: Supporting Civil Society and Women’s Rights Organisations in Fragile and Conflict Affected Contexts](#)

²CARE International, [UK Leadership on Gender Equality Globally](#)