

United Kingdom

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Overview

The United Kingdom (UK) was the second country in the world to develop a national action plan (NAP) for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in March 2006. It is currently implementing its third NAP, which covers the period 2014-2017. The UK acknowledges women, peace and security (WPS) as being at the centre of its work both to prevent and resolve conflict, and to promote peace and stability. Gender mainstreaming and references to WPS are found within the relevant policy architecture and is being strengthened institutionally.

Design

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) drafted the current NAP in close collaboration with the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Ministry of Defence (MOD). Although these three departments jointly own and implement the NAP, the FCO and particularly DFID have significantly more experience in gender than the MOD. The Stabilisation Unit (SU) was regularly consulted. A cross-departmental working group brings together staff from these government branches to coordinate work on WPS.

The current NAP covers the four pillars of UNSCR 1325 and designates six focus countries: Afghanistan, Burma/Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Libya, Somalia and Syria (some of which were previous focus countries as well). The NAP provides top-level framing to the UK's overall approach to WPS and high-level objectives and indicators, summarised by a national WPS Intervention Framework which for the first time pulls together the UK government's overarching WPS vision across a range of sectors.¹ In addition, an implementation plan (IP) was subsequently released to complement the NAP by providing greater detail on actual activities and output-level indicators. The IP includes activities taking place at the time the document was drafted and does not include a forward look at upcoming programmes and priorities developed during the duration of the NAP. The NAP includes activities focused on improving the UK government's WPS work, including training, the appointment of specialist cadres and gender advisers, and a strengthened commitment to women's participation in peace and security decision-making structures.

The UK government has a fairly open-door towards civil society. Its consultation of civil society on the NAP, both in the UK and in conflict-affected countries, took place through the Gender Action for Peace and Security UK network (GAPS)². GAPS and its member organisations were also involved in the development of the UK's first two NAPs.

Civil society workshops to review the previous NAP and to prepare the current NAP were organised in conflict affected countries by GAPS, and in the UK co-organised with significant support from GAPS. These discussions nominally fed into the design of the current NAP. However, this was not significantly reflected in the new NAP or the IP. The key requests that were addressed included adequate monitoring and evaluation, resulting in the first ever NAP baseline, midline and evaluation being planned and budgeted, as well as a commitment to track WPS spending through the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund. Other requests around

¹ This brings together relevant frameworks including the Building Stability Overseas Strategy, DFID's Building Peaceful States and Societies paper, DFID's Strategic Vision for Women and Girls, DFID's Theory of Change and guidance notes on tackling violence against women and girls, as well as recommendations from the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) for implementing the WPS resolutions.

² GAPS works to promote women's rights in the context of conflict and to raise awareness and monitor the UK's policies and actions on WPS. The network has a diverse membership of peacebuilding, development, humanitarian, women's rights and human rights organisations.

better coordination and integration across government actions and policies as well as commitment to consultations with UK and in-country civil society remain more challenging.

The NAP remains outward-looking and does not include any specific reference or activities related to Northern Ireland on the grounds that this is not considered to be a conflict-affected area. It also fails to address WPS issues in the national arena as it does not cover issues such as improving support to refugees and asylum seekers who have survived sexual and gender – based violence (SGBV) or addressing persistent reports of SGBV in the centres in which asylum seekers are detained in the UK.

The NAP affirms the importance of working with men and boys for women’s participation, protection and promotion of their rights, and that men and boys can also be survivors of SGBV. However, it does not go beyond this to include other issues such as work on men and masculinities, such as researching and addressing how dominant masculinity norms influence the engagement of young men in violence.

As with the previous NAP, there are references to multilateral engagements, including with the European Union (EU), highlighting efforts to increase gender mainstreaming and female participation in Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions. Compared to the previous NAP, the current plan includes less concrete references to EU-related activities as outputs or indicators. Similarly, the references in the IP to EU-related activities are mostly related to Afghanistan. The UK is not particularly active in EU-level meetings on WPS and seems to be much more focused on the UN. However, some UK government officials have shown interest in learning from other EU Member States’ (MS) experiences of NAP development and implementation.

There is no dedicated budget for either the NAP or the IP. In fact, the IP collates WPS activities which had been previously budgeted in the plans of the various ministries and departments involved. This means that the effectiveness of funding dedicated to this area is more difficult to track.

Implementation

Beyond the implementation of the activities detailed in the IP, the UK continued to play what it sees as an international leadership role on WPS, making eight commitments at the 15th anniversary of the adoption of UNSCR 1325 and affirming the importance of WPS in governmental processes such as the ‘National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015’, the ‘Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015’ and the new aid strategy ‘UK aid: Tackling global challenges in national interest’. Investment in improving government capacity in WPS-related issues included various levels of training for government officials and the development of a good practice guide on integrating gender into conflict and stability programming.

In the run-up to the UNSCR 1325 anniversary in 2015, the UK also convened a high-level event in New York which helped to galvanise political interest in the agenda and may have contributed to the passing of UNSCR 2242. The UK’s own commitments included funding to the Global Acceleration Instrument and to the Women, Peace and Security Centre at the London School of Economics (LSE), shining a torch on women’s participation, strengthening the pool of gender advisers within the MOD, ensuring the gender sensitivity of future relevant military doctrines and early warning and joint conflict analysis and assessments, continuation of the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) (see below), supporting other governments to implement UNSCR 1325 and ensuring that women will be at the centre of countering violent extremism (CVE) efforts both nationally and locally.

The UK Government also runs a global initiative to PSVI led by a high profile collaboration between the then Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, William Hague, and the actress Angelina Jolie. The Initiative culminated in a widely-attended international summit in June 2014 in London which brought welcome attention and funding to address the

issue. Furthermore, the prevention of sexual violence in conflict and SGBV are increasingly addressed in the training of UK military forces in preparation for overseas deployments. However, the cost of the summit compared to the sustainability of PSVI programming funding has been questioned. The PSVI would also be stronger if it addressed the problems of sexual violence in relation to refugees and asylum seekers within the UK, where this could be dealt with more sensitively and respectfully in claims processing, and where it is an issue in detention centres. Finally, the narrow focus on sexual violence does not address the broader areas of the WPS agenda, including conflict prevention or participation. More sustainable and predictable funding as well as holistic funding for this area is required to address the complex interlinked issues faced by women and girls in conflict, and the underlying roots of SGBV.

The UK acknowledges the need for the meaningful participation of women in peace processes and provides some support for it but the success remains patchy. For example, at the UK-hosted 2014 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Summit in Wales, which included a focus on Afghanistan, Afghan women's voices were not present and the UK ministerial delegation was entirely male. One of the main obstacles to the implementation of the NAP is that the IP – which should be driven by it, is, in reality, more of a compilation of pre-scheduled activities.

To monitor the implementation of the NAP, the UK government reports on an annual basis to Parliament against the Plan's outcome and high-level indicators and the IP's activity-based targets. The three departments which co-operate on the NAP (DFID, the FCO, and the MOD) produce this report jointly. One or more government ministers present the report to Parliament. The annual report to Parliament is a key means by which the UK government, parliament and civil society monitor the UK's activities and progress on WPS.

The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on WPS is the UK's parliamentary forum for the discussion and critical analysis of WPS issues. As such, it is an extremely useful formal monitoring mechanism. GAPS provides the secretariat for the Group and the APPG Coordinator is rotated among GAPS member organisations.

During the preparation of the most recent monitoring report, there was no general consultation with civil society. The draft report was not formally shared with GAPS for input. The report was presented to parliament immediately before the Christmas parliamentary recess and an oral report did not take place until February 2016.

Review

The UK's NAP and IP combine a number of initiatives in a range of countries but without systematic gendered-assessments of programmes. It is, therefore, hard to know to what extent these have resulted in improvements for women and girls in conflict-affected countries. Learning from the previous NAP, there have been positive trends in terms of increasing coordination between government departments and dialogue with civil society both in the UK and in countries with UK missions. This dialogue includes biannual meetings between the UK government and GAPS member organisations which provide a useful channel for discussing progress and emerging issues, and for sharing the latest research and findings on WPS-related issues. The UK also part-funded consultative workshops in Afghanistan, Myanmar and Somalia organised by GAPS and its member organisations to review the previous NAP and feed into the writing of the current one. It will be important for the final evaluation of the current NAP to include consultations in conflict-affected countries in order to ensure that the perceptions of grassroots stakeholders are also included.

In 2015, the UK government commissioned an independent baseline assessment of the NAP.³ The evaluation, which was conducted by Social Development Direct, found that 'the NAP is an

³ See

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/488461/NAP_Baseline_FINAL_DRAFT_-_December_2015.pdf

overly complex document' with cross-cutting issues split artificially into the four pillars. While the evaluation found high commitment of individual UK government officials to WPS-related issues, it also found that WPS mainstreaming in programmes was a challenge and that this was compounded by the absence of strong references to WPS or the NAP in departmental strategies at Whitehall-level. WPS is also not a priority in the cross-departmental conflict analyses, which have only been undertaken for two of the focus countries. The lack of a dedicated budget limits any accurate assessment of its effectiveness, and the current training effort, while welcome, has been insufficient to reach all stakeholders who are implementing the NAP. Considering the increasing focus on CVE, while it is positive that women are considered, there are also potential risks (e.g. WPS concerns becoming instrumentalised or funding being diverted for CVE activities rather than supporting the work which women's organisations themselves consider most important).

Although the evaluation found that the UK was supporting grassroots CSOs working on WPS-related issues, it also found that more could be done 'to move support beyond the prominent educated elites'.⁴ One of the main areas for improvement in the government's reporting was the lack of consultation with local women's organisations in the focus countries on how they perceive the UK government's actions on WPS. To remedy this, GAPS and its member organisations conducted an online survey of CSOs in the NAP's six focus countries to inform GAPS' annual shadow report to the official report.⁵ The survey resulted in feedback from 45 women's rights organisations and other civil society organisations (CSOs) working on the focus countries. GAPS sought to gather feedback via the online survey since a lack of funding prevented a more participative, face-to-face consultation process in the various countries. One weakness of this methodology was that it limited the feedback to organisations which had access to the internet and whose representatives were proficient in English, French or Arabic. The results of this survey combined with member organisation input and drawing on the official report to parliament, informed the shadow report. The shadow report was then presented to Parliament.

The shadow report called on the UK to:

1. Affirm that comprehensive action across the WPS agenda is a UK government priority
2. Ensure the meaningful participation of women from conflict-affected countries in peace, security and development talks hosted by the UK or other actors
3. Earmark finances for the NAP and WPS agenda and track spending through gender markers in wider development, humanitarian and stabilisation funding
4. Guarantee the consultation of women's rights INGOs and CSOs based in conflict-affected countries in the design and review of the UK's WPS objectives
5. Commit to strengthening transparency on the UK's progress against its WPS commitments, including through clear monitoring and reporting processes.

Conclusion

Specific activities to implement UNSCR 1325 are designed and implemented but gender mainstreaming in non-UNSCR 1325-focused activities remains a challenge. Implementation could be more effective if it was based on more holistic gender analysis. The UK takes pride in demonstrating international leadership on the WPS agenda. It seems that there is also interest from the UK to engage in exchanging experiences in the EU. For example, in March 2016, the FCO participated in the Dutch Presidency of the Council of the EU's conference on NAPs.

⁴ Social Development Direct (2015), Evaluation of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security: Baseline Study, London.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/488461/NAP_Baseline_FINAL_DRAFT_-_December_2015.pdf

⁵ See <http://gaps-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/GAPS-Shadow-Report-Assessing-UK-Government-Action-on-WPS-in-2015.pdf>

Furthermore, there is a need to take a more holistic approach to gender and to engage men more consistently in this work, including on masculinities. The consideration of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) issues in conflict is also only at the early stages of being recognised and addressed. Such a holistic approach to gender would require the consistent inclusion of gendered power analysis as part of overall conflict analysis and project monitoring and evaluation (including those not under the WPS label *per se*). It also requires moving beyond single issue projects addressing only SGBV or perceiving women as victims and acknowledging and supporting women's resilience and agency and identifying ways of working with both women and men, boys and girls for peace and gender equality.

Finally, it is a positive development that due to sustained CSO advocacy and pressure from key parliamentary allies, UK civil society involvement in the NAP has increased and that channels for consultation and exchange have been institutionalised (e.g. the GAPS shadow report welcomed in the NAP). However, concerns remain about the degree to which the regular exchange has achieved change in government policies or implementation, or whether a more fundamental critique is needed which might shake the boat a bit more. The future challenge will therefore be to remain focused on concrete policy objectives: to encourage the UK to increase its funding and tracking of funding for WPS-related issues, to increase its work on participation and conflict prevention, and to achieve meaningful consultation and exchange with CSOs, including with women's organisations in the countries in which the NAP is being implemented. This could take the shape of briefings by local CSOs working on WPS for senior UK representatives during their visits to the NAP focus countries and other conflict-affected countries and regions. Senior ministerial leadership has proved to be an effective tool for progress, renewed leadership at the highest level is key to progress being made.