National implementation of the UN Security Council's women, peace and security resolutions[1]

By Aisling Swaine

◼ Executive summary

The implementation of the women, peace and security resolutions of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) faces ongoing challenges. National action plans (NAPs) are being developed as a means to address the implementation gap, with 40 such NAPs developed by UN member states to date. NAPs aim to enable states' commitments under the various UNSC resolutions to become the actions they take in both domestic and foreign policy. Stand-alone NAPs offer significant opportunity to advance national implementation of the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda. They also present risks, however, most notably in terms of how strategic provisions of the various WPS resolutions are translated into actions in an action plan. Successful implementation of the WPS agenda is thus not just contingent on the adoption of a NAP, but the proper implementation of that NAP. This policy brief provides an overview of the key opportunities and constraints presented by NAPs and the action planning process itself, and concludes with a range of recommendations for enhancing the development and implementation of NAPs for the overall fulfilment of the WPS agenda.

Introduction

The passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) in 2000 paved the way for a schemata of resolutions and action frameworks that aim to advance gender equality concerns in the field of international peace and security. Referred to now as the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda, most significant about these developments has been the inclusion of what are considered to be thematic issues – the needs, concerns and rights of women – within the remit of the UNSC. A total of five UNSC resolutions have been passed under this agenda: additional to UNSCR 1325 are UNSCR 1820 (2008) focusing on sexual violence in conflict, followed by UNSCRs 1888 and 1889 (2009) and 1960 (2010), which all focus on advancing implementation of the WPS agenda.

While these resolutions were adopted as a means to address inaction on gender equality in the international

peace and security arena, the implementation of the WPS agenda has faced the continuing challenge of ensuring that the resolutions fulfil their essential function: to transform the ways that states implement their peace and security interventions. Bridging the gap between the ambitions of these resolutions and the ongoing realities of the exclusion, discrimination and gendered violence that women continue to experience in this arena is now a primary concern. Action-oriented frameworks are being developed to tackle the implementation gap so that states' commitments under the resolutions become the actions they take in both domestic and foreign policy.

WPS action planning

The development of national action plans (NAPs) is promoted as a practical means through which states can translate their commitments into action. At the time of writing there are 40 NAPs in existence globally (see Box 1).

Box 1: Existing NAPs
To date, 40 NAPs have been developed (23 in Europe, 11 in Africa, 3 in the Americas and 3 in the Asia Pacific region). Concurrently, regional initiatives have evolved, including a Regional Action Plan by the political territories of the Pacific (2012) and regional policy commitments by political entities such as the European Union (2012). Notably, what might be considered "hard" security institutions such as NATO have also developed specific policy commitments on WPS for their members and partners.

The majority of NAPs take UNSCRs 1325 and 1820 as their basis. This means that in theory these NAPs broadly cover what is now considered to be a four-part thematic framework for implementation – **participation** (of women in decision-making processes and structures), **prevention** (of conflict by mainstreaming women's views in all aspects of prevention and in the prosecution of conflict-related crimes), **protection** (from gender-based violence), and **relief and recovery** (enabling women's agency and addressing their needs during and after crises).

Some states have argued that stand-alone NAPs are not necessary and instead favour mainstreaming actions on WPS into existing policy. Approaches to national implementation therefore vary. Advocates, however, argue that separate plans offer a far more comprehensive and robust approach.

NAPs themselves have varied in quality and content globally, and themselves face implementation challenges. There are emerging concerns about gaps between national-level commitments and subnational-level implementation. Specific strategies are now being developed to promote the multilevel implementation of NAPs, such as "localisation" strategies (see Box 2) and monitoring and evaluation initiatives located at the regional and community levels such as those identified in the Sierra Leonean NAP.

Box 2: "Localisation" as a new way forward
"Localisation" strategies are being spearheaded by the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) as a means to decentralise the implementation of NAPs and involve local governance structures in implementation, such as provincial and district leadership and traditional leaders. "Localisation" was first piloted by the GNWP in Burundi and is also now operational in Colombia, Nepal, the Philippines, Sierra Leone and Uganda. The GNWP is also developing local development guidelines to provide guidance to local authorities on how to implement NAP commitments at the local level.

Implementation of the WPS agenda: the opportunities and constraints of NAPs

Stand-alone NAPs offer significant opportunity and risks to advance national implementation of the WPS agenda.

These are discussed below.

1. Opportunities
Development of a NAP strengthens the national focus on WPS
The process of developing a NAP, if undertaken in a comprehensive manner, can result in an increased national-level understanding of and focus on the WPS agenda, as well as increased actions. Planning processes involving audits that evaluate current related actions and identify gaps and appropriate responses will likely produce the most robust action plans and make way for the inclusion of new initiatives. Increased actions can result in or require increased funding, drawing resources towards WPS initiatives. Overall, the process can promote gender mainstreaming and prioritised actions to empower women across sections of government that otherwise might not traditionally employ such approaches.

NAPs promote better planning and co-ordination on WPS-related initiatives
The process of developing a NAP provides the opportunity to co-ordinate cross-ministry action related to the WPS agenda. The Nepalese NAP highlights this as a specific benefit, while the Liberian NAP notes that it gives the country's Ministry of Gender and Development the opportunity to strengthen its co-ordination function through its role in leading the implementation of the plan. Similarly, the NAP can act as an inter-ministry accountability mechanism, as noted by the Ugandan NAP (2008). Through the establishment of implementation oversight mechanisms, associated meetings and review processes can act as forums where departments must report on progress and in effect also be informally and formally subjected to peer review. The Irish NAP, for example, allowed for the establishment of a Monitoring Group, which brings together all ministries involved in the NAP, civil society stakeholders and relevant parliamentary representatives. The Monitoring Group oversees the production of a mid-way progress report and a final implementation evaluation report.

NAPs can reinforce national commitments on gender equality
The majority of NAPs make links to existing national commitments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), and national laws on gender equality and violence against women. Identification with these frameworks positions the NAP relative to "harder" legal and policy commitments on gender equality, as well as ensuring that the NAP is situated within wider gender equality frameworks. Whether intentional or not, this can give a rights basis to the plan, which ultimately should be its foundation. Of note is the coming general recommendation on women and conflict being developed by the CEDAW Committee, which has the potential to strengthen the linkages between NAPs and rights-based commitments under CEDAW (see Box 3) (CEDAW Committee, 2011: 16).

Box 3: CEDAW and the WPS resolutions
The CEDAW Committee's (2011) Concept Note and the expected general recommendation on the subject of "the protection of women's human rights in conflict and post-conflict contexts" situate global commitments to women's rights in conflict and post-conflict processes, including the WPS resolutions, within the context of non-discrimination and women's rights set out in CEDAW. The general recommendation may create opportunities for enhanced enforcement of the WPS resolutions, and in fact the committee is already questioning states and making requests for the imple-mentation of UNSCR 1325 under CEDAW reporting processes (see, for example, CEDAW, 2008).

The process of developing NAPs can educate
The process of developing a NAP can result in and/or be used as a way of enhancing knowledge on the WPS agenda, including on national commitments and individual respon-sibilities related to that agenda. While the planning process itself can by default be educative, specific learning oppor-tunities can also be taken. For example, the development of the Sierra Leonean NAP involved workshops that resulted in enhanced awareness of and engagement with the implementation of the WPS resolutions nationally.

2. Constraints
Over-reliance on NAPs as "the remedy"' to implementation deficits on the WPS agenda
There are risks associated with full relying on NAPs to remedy gaps in the implementation of the WPS agenda. That political considerations will trump full implementation of the provisions of the resolutions is a necessary consid-eration, as is consideration of whether states will interpret the definitions of conflict, security, and peace at the development and/or implementation stage of an NAP in ways that enable them to tailor their obligations accord-ingly. Women's civil society organisations in Northern Ireland, for example, have highlighted that despite its relevance to their conflict-affected context and their lobbying to the UK on the subject, the UK NAP (both the 2006 and updated 2012 iterations) excludes Northern Ireland and effectively reneges on the UK's obligations under the WPS resolutions in its domestic context. The "stand-alone" nature of NAPs may also be interpreted in ways that position the NAP as simply a political tool whereby the completion of a NAP is in itself considered to be the end goal, with little consideration of the impact of the plan or its substance.

Lack of accountability on the implementation of NAPs themselves
Mechanisms for measuring implementation are imperative elements of NAPs (see Box 4). However, not all NAPs contain such frameworks, which is a significant gap. Measuring implementation is contingent on the inclusion of timelines as provisions for evaluation. Some NAPs note that progress reports will be made to statutory bodies,

such as an annual report to the Council of Ministers in Bosnia-Herzegovina, to the senate in Estonia and to the national Human Rights Commission in Croatia. Many NAPs, such as that for Nepal, note that progress reports will be made publicly available. However, it is not clear whether this has happened in all or any cases (aside from Estonia, which has made its report accessible).

Box 4: Measuring progress
An emerging trend is the adoption in NAPs of of the indicators on WPS that have been developed by the UN and European Union (EU). The German NAP (2012) incorporates the EU indicators. It notes that these indicators were originally developed to build on commit-ments to "women and conflict" under the BPFA and WPS resolutions (situating EU and German approaches to WPS within wider gender equality normative frame-works). The German NAP aims to contribute to the implementation of the EU indicators.

A number of countries have already completed full cycles of implementation and have revised and issued updated NAPs (a total of eight countries). It is not clear what the results and impacts of these earlier NAPs have been. Making reports of such evaluations publicly available would enhance public accountability regarding implementation and enable lesson learning on the "how to" of NAP imple-mentation to be made available across countries. Budgets are also a significant factor to be considered. Very few NAPs outline budgetary commitments to implementation. Accordingly, monitoring and evaluation reports may follow suit (the Estonia implementation report does not include information on spending related to the plan).

Tendency for an "activities" rather than a "results" focus
"Action plans" may pose the risk of simply collating a list of "actions", with little attention to what the impacts and results of those actions might be. A "results" focus within NAPs would assist in promoting a focus on what the overall NAP is intended to achieve, i.e. transformation in the lives of women. NAPs should be structured around the results and outcomes they wish to attain rather than the actions they wish to frame.

Potential for the adoption of selective rather than comprehensive approaches
The situating of NAPs by the majority of European states (where the majority of NAPs have been developed) within ministries of foreign affairs locates their actions predomi-nantly in the international . As a result these NAPs pre-dominantly focus on these countries' role as "donors" and membership of international multilateral entities. Relevant domestic concerns may be overlooked as a result of this approach. However civil society organisations in Ireland, for example, advocated for attention by the NAP to the Irish domestic context, e.g. to the situation of women refugees coming into Ireland (the NAP was led by the Department of Foreign Affairs). This resulted in the inclusion of actions in

the NAP relating to the processing and protection concerns of women refugees and migrants to Ireland, thus ensuring that the NAP looked at both domestic and foreign policy.

Narrow and diluted interpretations of the WPS resolutions
It has been widely documented that "evaporation" may occur when attempts are made to implement concepts of gender equality and women's empowerment through policy. Key in the implementation of NAPs is ensuring that an understanding of the unequal power relations that inform women's exclusion is used to advance the trans-formative potential of the WPS resolutions. NAPs must recognise the conceptual difference between addressing women's strategic concerns (rights-based and transforma-tive) and their practical needs. NAPs should encompass a twin-track approach of (1) ensuring that WPS initiatives are enacted and mainstreamed through all related policy, and (2) each section of the state apparatus identifying specific actions to overcome the discriminations that required the passage of these resolutions in the first place.

Conclusion

NAPs offer a framework through which to co-ordinate and action commitments on the WPS agenda. It is important that NAPs are used to enhance accountability by making visible any progress (or lack thereof) by states towards implementing the WPS resolutions and the NAP itself. Further ways to enhance current approaches to action planning include the following.

1. Give a "results focus" to action planning, implementation and evaluation

A "results" focus is required to ensure that NAPs are structured around the results and outcomes that the WPS resolutions intend to achieve. The evaluations of NAPs should assess the substantive quality of the actions themselves, i.e. whether they are contributing towards the normative changes envisioned by the resolutions, rather than simply whether actions themselves have been performed or whether thematic aspects of the resolutions have been addressed. *The results proposed in NAPs should reflect the transformative aspirations of the WPS resolutions.*

2. Employ comprehensive and inclusive processes to develop and revise NAPs

Factors that lend themselves towards a more successful NAP need to be incorporated in all aspects of NAP develop-ment and implementation. These include (1) wide stake-holder involvement, including a broad range of ministries, parliamentary representation, civil society members, women's organisations, and diaspora and refugee organi-sations; (2) the inclusion of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms; and (3) a clear statement of funding specifi-cally earmarked for the implementation of the NAP from each ministry concerned.

3. Mirror national actions with those central to foreign policy

Comprehensive approaches to the national implementation of the WPS agenda need to "look both ways", i.e. at both domestic and foreign policy.

4. Address the "dilution" of equality concepts

NAPs and the actions therein should encapsulate and address both the practical and strategic interests and needs of women. *Gender mainstreaming should be made meaningful* by ensuring that NAPs contribute towards the attainment of gender equality as set out under the WPS resolutions, CEDAW, BPFA, and other national and interna-tional frameworks.

5. Address the ongoing accountability deficit

Greater transparency regarding progress towards the implementation of NAPs is needed. In particular, reviews and evaluations of implementation should be undertaken and made publicly available for the purposes of account-ability and lesson learning. In addition, states should use mechanisms like the CEDAW Committee and the Universal Periodic Review as spaces to advance accountability for progress on the implementation of the WPS agenda.

6. Enable flexible approaches

The implementation of the WPS resolutions should not be restricted to stand-alone NAPs or, indeed, to the some-times-limited actions that NAPs contain. For the WPS agenda to evolve, the international system needs to ensure that there is space and support for alternative, but equally effective and innovative, implementation strategies.

> **Norway could organise a learning seminar to examine the review and evaluation of NAP implementation.** The event could bring states together for the purposes of reviewing monitoring mechanisms, sharing lessons learned on review and reporting processes (particularly from those eight countries that have done so), and encouraging more accountability on progress towards the implementation of NAPs.

References

CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) Committee. 2008. "Con-cluding observations to the United Kingdom." CEDAW/C/UK/CO/6. July 10th.

CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) Committee. 2011. "Concept note: general discussion on the protection of women's human rights in conflict and post-conflict contexts." ‹http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/GRConcept-Note.pdf›

■ THE AUTHOR

Aisling Swaine is a visiting fellow at the Transitional Justice Insti-
tute, University of Ulster, Northern Ireland. She is a specialist on
gender-based violence (GBV) and gender equality issues as they
relate to conflict-affected and development contexts. She has held
programme manager posts with NGOs and the UN in South-East
Asia and Africa, and now consults globally in the fields of gender,
GBV, women, peace and security, transitional justice, humanitarian
action and related issues. She holds a PhD from the Transitional
Justice Institute and has a number of publications on related issues.

■ NOREF

■ The Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre
■ Norsk ressurssenter for fredsbygging