



**Written Submission
for the
Looking Back, Looking Forward: Consultations on Canada's National Action Plan -
Women, Peace and Security (WPS)
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Background

This brief summarizes perspectives from researchers at York University and their research partners on the key obstacles facing women in communities affected by conflict and violence and related critical areas of focus for the Government of Canada's (GoC) National Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security (WPS). Input to this brief was provided by research and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) from Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Uganda. The majority of the CBOs are partners on the Conjugal Slavery in War (CSiW) Research Project with additional feedback from CBOs working with Professor Rivas on women's rights, sexual violence and women's political participation in Afghanistan and Liberia.

The CSiW Research Project led by Professor Annie Bunting of York University has, since 2011, engaged in collaborative research across the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Uganda and conducted over 250 interviews with female survivors/victims of conflict related sexual violence to document their experiences. The CSiW research group is currently engaged in research in the DRC, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and Uganda with institutional and CBOs working in communities affected by conflict.

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The partner organisations responded to a five-question survey sent out early 2017. The survey responses along with our on-going research with partners in communities affected by conflict, reveal gaps in the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security(WPS) agenda, particularly as it relates to women and girls in conflict, post-conflict and fragile states. These gaps also have an implication on the Canadian National Action Plan (C-NAP) and are highlighted below along with recommendations to redress the situation. It is apt to point out that though some of the responses were context-specific, they however, had common elements hence, a similarity in suggestions made to GOC across the spectrum of questions.

Key Issues

1. Vulnerabilities of Women and Young Girls in Conflict Affected Communities

Women, girls and boys in societies affected by conflict and violence are particularly vulnerable to physical and sexual violence. Preliminary findings from our on-going research and from other sources point to the continuum of violence experienced by women and girls in conflict, post-conflict and fragile states.² For survivors of sexual violence there is often no aftermath of conflict but rather they face continuing and changing forms of violence. Feedback from Liberia shows that the majority of victims of sexual violence are between the ages of 11 – 21 and identify the home as the place where a significant amount of violence takes place.

It is important to acknowledge the role Canada has played over the years, in the support and promotion of the rights of vulnerable women and girls across the globe. A major focus of Canada's work in this area has been maternal and reproductive rights and, more recently, the child, early and forced marriage campaign.³ Presently, the abduction and sexual enslavement of women and young girls by combatants or parties to conflicts including extremist group remains under addressed in Canada's implementation of the WPS agenda. Given the rise in the abductions and sexual enslavement for purposes of forced marriage of women and young girls

² Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict Related Sexual Violence, S/2016/361/Rev.1 of 22 June 2016; Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict Related Sexual Violence, S/2015/203, 23 March 2015; Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict Related Sexual Violence, S/2014/181, 13 March 2014; Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict Related Sexual Violence, A/67/792-S/2013/149, 14 March 2013; Protecting and Promoting the Rights and Leadership of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Settings in Global Study,2015, Chapter 4, P. 68; Report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry in the Syrian Arab Republic United Nations Human Rights Council, 31st session, A/HRC/31/68, 11 February 2016 edited version para 112; see also March 2015 statement by Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, UN HRC, Geneva 17 March 2015.

³ See Child, early and forced marriage in http://international.gc.ca/world-monde/aid-aide/child_marriage-mariages_enfants.aspx?lang=eng accessed 08/04/2017.

across communities affected by conflict, a new C-NAP ought to address and respond to the issue.

Recommendations

I. The expansion of the Canadian government's current campaign or focus on child, early and forced marriage to include the growing trend of abduction and enslavement of women and young girls for forced marriage and sexual violence across several conflict, post-conflict and fragile states. A new C-NAP should articulate concrete steps and firm commitments that will guide and shape Canadian international development and humanitarian assistance in responding to this issue.

II. A new C-NAP should mainstream issues of sexual violence into Canadian international development assistance and address it comprehensively under the four pillars of prevention, participation, protection and relief and recovery, which underpin Resolution 1325. C-NAP should provide support for programmes which aid in rebuilding affected communities and facilitate the rehabilitation and reintegration of victims/survivors of sexual violence into communities.

III. Canada should move away from the rape as a 'Weapon of War' language and recognise the continuum of violence as a major obstacle in conflict-affected societies. This shift would demonstrate a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges women and youth are facing and should be explicit in Canadian policy such as the C-NAP.

2. Assessment of Current Post-Conflict Programs Providing Relief and Recovery for Victims/Survivors

CSiW partner CBOs have identified problems in current post-conflict programming for victims/survivors in affected communities to include: poor coordination of programs and activities offered by different actors; a one size fits all approach by donors in providing programs for rehabilitation without necessarily taking into consideration the physical, mental and psychological state of the survivors to undertake such programs and lack of continuity in programs and interventions offered by donors in affected communities. To this later point, a commonly stated example given by partner CBOs is the proliferation of women's tailoring programs in post-conflict settings by donor organisations and actors. The tailoring programs are often unsuited for many of the women and girls who, due to physical or health challenges resulting from abuse sustained during the conflict, are often unable to undertake the tasks required of this profession. Partners also noted that the programs rarely led to sustainable

incomes as their adoption and use were not usually based on market analysis or studies to determine their feasibility in the communities.

Recommendations

IV. Donor countries should seek to engage with CBOs working directly in affected communities in addressing the post-conflict needs of victims/survivors and to facilitate their rehabilitation and reintegration into communities.

V. A new C-NAP should provide an institutional framework or directives for how Canada as a donor country engages with other actors working within the same geographical space on the WPS agenda in order to maximise the impact of the presence of these actors in the field.

3. Challenges to the Implementation of the WPS Agenda-Funding

Funding is integral to the success of the WPS agenda. The lack or inadequacy thereof is a common theme reflected in our work with CBOs working with women, girls and children affected by conflict related violence. Our CBOs have consistently indicated the issue of poor and sporadic funding for women organizations working on issues central to the WPS agenda as an inhibiting factor in realising the implementation of the WPS agenda. Further, high levels of insecurity, particularly in conflict affected areas such as Afghanistan and DRC means that donors and NGOs are increasingly operating at a distance from the local population. This interface between donors and CBOs far removed from the areas of conflict further accentuates the disconnect between local CBOs that are engaged in grassroots work that seeks to address the needs of women and girls, and the donor community. Problems with the existing funding structure include: the poor and sporadic nature of current funding opportunities available to CBOs; short term funding for projects; available funding from donor states and organizations often being directed at large multilateral organizations and donor agencies and government engagement with urban center based organizations in countries of need.⁴

Recommendations

VI. A new C-NAP should include a funding mechanism that provides a percentage of its international development and humanitarian assistance funds to CBOs working in conflict, post-conflict and fragile states.

⁴ The problem of funding for local women's organizations has been identified in other reports. See, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace, A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 the Global Study, UN Women, 2015*, p. 90; See, *An opportunity for Global Leadership: Canada and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (Hon. D. Nault Chair October 2016 42nd Parliament 1st Session, pp. 43-48.*

VII. Canadian governmental and nongovernmental agencies including diplomatic missions engaged in international development and humanitarian assistance should avoid the creation of a development elite by working only with CBOs based in state capitals and large cities. Rather, there should be efforts and steps at engaging and working with CBOs operating in areas of conflict that are far removed from state capitals and large cities. Diversity in the locations of the CBOs donors engage with will assist officials to rethink aid distribution and provide more targeted assistance.

4. Role of States

States have the primary responsibility to ensure the realization of the WPS agenda within their territorial boundaries and in this respect Canada and other countries can exercise leverage over these states in ensuring the implementation of the WPS agenda within their territorial boundaries.

Recommendation

VIII. Canada should, through advocacy, aid, bilateral assistance and diplomatic channels, exercise leverage over states to ensure that they commit and fulfil their obligations to the implementation of the WPS agenda.