WPS ACTION PLAN
ADVISORY GROUP MEETING
(SEPTEMBER 2021)
SUMMARY REPORT

January 25, 2022

REPORT PREPARED BY THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY NETWORK-CANADA

Photo: Katrina Leclerc, 2017
Thank you to all the meeting participants, especially those who chaired discussion groups Elin Miller (GAC), Elisabeth Humphrey (GAC), Elinor McNamee (GAC), Rowena Williams (WPSA), Urooj Mian, Jo Rodrigues, and Monique Cuillerier, as well as note-takers Vanessa Anderson (WPSA), Méliné Svadjian (GAC), Sarah Wazzi-Moukahal (GAC), David Cerenzia (CCYPS), Mary Pierre-Wade (WPSA), and Angela Jagnyziak (IIWR-MB).

This report has been reviewed by Government of Canada officials working on CNAP implementation.

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Background


The Group will comprise civil society experts and government officials and will be co-chaired by a Peace & Stabilization Operations Program (PSOPs) official and a representative of civil society through the Women, Peace and Security Network-Canada (WPSN-C). The Group will meet regularly throughout the Action Plan’s life cycle to exchange experiences and best practices, discuss challenges and develop innovative solutions related to the implementation of the Action Plan. The Group will also engage with staff from Canadian embassies abroad and women’s groups’ leaders to learn from experiences from the field. The Group will improve progress monitoring by means of a continuous dialogue between civil society experts and government officials who are responsible for implementing the Action Plan. WPS Champions will attend meetings as defined in the Group’s terms of reference.

The Advisory Group at least annually since 2018, with the recent goal of two ‘regular’ meetings to address CNAP progress generally and two 'special' meetings on specific themes. Ideally, the fall regular meeting reviews progress as set out in the annual progress report which is to be tabled in Parliament each September. The progress report for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2020 was delayed and released in June 2021.

Previous meetings had the following themes:
- December 2020: Regular meeting (focus on government implementing partners)
- November 2020: Special meeting on disarmament
- June 2020: Regular meeting focusing on five themes
- January 2020: Special meeting on WPS and GBA+

The objectives of the September 23rd meeting were:
- Review the 2019-2020 CNAP progress report (sharing relevant additional updates covering the year since then).
- Identify major achievements and challenges, both relating to the CNAP implementation and the reporting process itself.

A recent publication by the WPSN-C, Reporting on Progress: Reflections on the Latest CNAP Progress Report, provided analysis by Network members in advance of the meeting.

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1 Supporting and protecting women peacebuilders; Programming and other forms of support for the WPS Agenda during COVID-19; Implementation of the UN Secretary General’s Appeal for a global ceasefire; Peace and security in Canada: What does implementation of the WPS agenda look like at home?: Action Plan reporting and mid-term review: Strengths and areas for improvement.
The meeting included an opening panel and breakout discussion groups. Discussion groups were designed to facilitate participants’ exploration of either the work of a specific government CNAP partner or the overall report.

Following the established practice, the meeting was jointly chaired by the WPS team in PSOPS/GAC (Elin Miller) and the WPSN-C (Beth Woroniuk). Given public health guidelines, the meeting was held via Zoom. The meeting used Chatham House Rule, so the contents could be shared without attribution to specific speakers.

Participants included (see Figure for the poll results on the percentage breakdown):
- WPS focal points from across CNAP implementing departments
- Office of the WPS Ambassador
- WPS Champions (Global Affairs Canada, DND, RCMP)
- Representatives from National Indigenous Organizations
- WPSN-C members.

Participants were asked to contribute to a ‘word cloud’: what WPS issue do you focus on in your work. See Figure 2 for the results.

(Figure 1: Responses by participants via Menti.com)
Opening panel on progress and challenges

*Moderator:* Jacqueline O’Neill, Ambassador for Women, Peace and Security

*Panelists*

- **WPS Champions**
  - Gwyn Kutz, Director General for the Peace and Stabilization Operations Program, Global Affairs Canada (GAC)
  - Assistant Commissioner Maureen Levy, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)
  - Josee Robidoux, Chief of Staff and Director of the Directorate Gender Equality and Intersectional Analysis participated in the place of Major General Lise Bourgon, Department of National Defence/Canadian Armed Forces (DND/CAF)
- **Kristine St-Pierre**, WPSN-C Steering Committee member
- **Louisa Housty-Jones**, represents BC on the Council of Women of the Assembly of First Nations (Assembly of First Nations)

There were different perspectives from the panelists. In order to respect Chatham House Rule, specific speakers are not identified.

The panel explored both the intent and the practicalities of the annual progress report. It was described as a place for the government to both note progress and where efforts have fallen short. It is a record, tracked over time, which enables both civil society and Parliament to hold the government accountable. It provides transparency.
There was agreement that the delay in the release of the progress reports was frustrating and worked against their usefulness. The progress report released in June covers FY 2019-2020. Yet much has happened since: COVID-19, the ‘Call to Action’, the incorporation of domestic departments in the ISC/CIRNAC implementation plan, the Black Lives Matter movement, more and more Canadians have woken up to the importance of the national reconciliation agenda, and within GAC, there has been the articulation of a Feminist Foreign Policy.

One panelist noted that many parallels can be drawn between work that needs to be done to ensure the safety of Indigenous women and LGBTQI+ people in Canada and women in conflicts around the world. Nations thrive when women’s rights are upheld.

Panelists noted a number of areas where progress has been made:

- The progress report provides a useful overview of initiatives and activities taken across all the CNAP departments. This report notes key developments, such as the appointment of the WPS Ambassador.
- This year, the federal government passed legislation on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). This was a significant step in upholding the rights of First Nations people in this country.
- Pre-deployment training is having an impact.
- Some departments are identifying gaps in the data being collected. “This gives us the idea of areas in which we should ensure data is being collected, and identifying other gender or identity factors that can be useful.” Learning is happening around which indicators are actually useful.
- The reporting process, while cumbersome, provides an opportunity to see great initiatives and allow a refocusing to make projects and programs better.

The panel also noted various challenges and, in some cases, strategies to address these challenges:

- The report is time-consuming and demanding to produce. It can be difficult to pull all the data together.
- Counterparts and focal points are constantly changing as there is rotation in government. The handover from the outgoing focal point to the incoming focal point is not always smooth. Work is being done to increase support to new focal points and the community of focal points. There is outreach to new departmental focal points and new training opportunities. Currently an online WPS course is being finalized. It is hoped that this course will strengthen the network feeding into the report.
- The GAC implementation plan has over 80 footnotes and changes that are needed for continuous improvement are being tracked. For example, revising targets on consulting with women-led civil society organizations during scoping missions based on the gaps that have been identified, where this was not being done on policy related missions.
Although the section on 'challenges' in the progress report is improving, there is a need to improve the ability to analyze what is not going according to plan. Although it is hard to admit that there are expectations not being met and it is preferable to document progress, there have been challenges and setbacks over the past two years. There is a need to address the cultural difficulty in resisting the reporting of gaps and challenges, something emphasized during the ongoing reporting process for this year. “There is a lot of learning and improving as we go, which makes a retrospective comparison tough.”

The panel noted areas where improvements could be made – both in the progress report and the CNAP (and its action plans) more generally:

- It remains difficult to understand what actual progress is being made. There are long lists of activities in the summary reports, but there is no compelling narrative or overview of WPS successes and shortcomings which could form the core of the progress report.
- Action and accountability on Ending Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People could be improved. An Action Plan was released in June of this year. The goal was to ensure the voices of survivors and families are at the heart of this work. The process used to develop this action plan needed to respect existing work. In carrying out regional engagement, three frameworks were identified by survivors and families as needed immediately:
  - There is a need for a national strategy to support increased wraparound services, a national investigative task force as an independent review mechanism for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls where there is evidence of bias or error, and a national framework for prevention to provide comprehensive and coordinated national response for a First Nations led violence prevention strategy.
  - There needs to be healing, an acknowledgement that gender violence is happening in First Nations, and a recognition that there is a gap in work around men and boys whose healing must also be included.
  - There also needs to be accountability, ensuring all governments and institutions are accountable for those they serve.

This point is linked to the ongoing calls for the elaboration of a stronger domestic component in the next CNAP.

- For some departments, it’s now clear that the Action Plan did not identify the ‘right’ or best objectives. They are learning what is actually needed to advance WPS objectives, and in some cases, these are not the actions outlined in the Action Plan.
- “The way the CNAP currently is designed and written focuses on “more women” as the solution, thinking that will solve all problems. But we know this isn’t the case.”
More meaningful targets could better measure results.

Overall, the conceptual approach of the CNAP could be strengthened. There could be a greater elaboration in the progress report of feminist analysis, objectives, and principles. This is objectively relevant as CNAP is often acknowledged as one of the key pillars of Canada’s Feminist Foreign Policy. As well, there could be a greater focus on an intersectional approach and what that means to the CNAP and to the work of each department.

We could do a better job of the ‘so what?’ How do the proposed activities make a difference?

Data on deployments could be disaggregated by more than gender. We need better information on Indigenous people and visible minorities.

In the wrap-up, several questions and issues were highlighted. It is clear that the next CNAP provides an opportunity to strengthen the analysis and bring new issues into better focus: the climate/security/gender nexus, strong intersectional approach, clear domestic agenda (including Indigenous, decolonializing, and anti-racist elements), and feminist analysis. Second, more work is required to shape the progress reports so they answer the most important and useful questions and clearly function as an accountability tool. Third, it would be useful to explore what targets and indicators are truly important and contribute to our understanding of progress. Fourth, it will be important to look at how the learning element of the progress reports can be strengthened.

Thanks were extended to the panel for their comments and to the many individuals who worked on this progress report.

**Breakout Groups**

The breakout groups were an opportunity for an informal exchange of progress and challenges as outlined in the progress reports, as well as significant developments since March 2020. The groups were structured in order to focus on specific elements in the progress report and enable discussion of specific government departments.

The suggested questions for discussion were:

**For Government representatives:** what do you think is the most significant advance in your section of the report? What did you and your colleagues find the most challenging? How are you adjusting your approach going forward? What questions do you have for colleagues working outside of government who are working on similar issues?

**For non-governmental representatives:** what did you find the most interesting in the report? What do you think is the most significant advance? What questions do you still have after reading the report? How does your work on WPS issues overlap with the work of this department? What advice do you have for the government representatives?
**Group 1: Summary report**

The group discussed key challenges they experienced during the development of the 2019-2020 Annual Report. These included ensuring the right points of contact in each department, assessing how to provide useful input, and ensuring a consistent flow of information. While all agreed these had been difficult components in the past, there was a shared view that these would provide fewer barriers going forward, having laid the groundwork during the development of the last Annual Report.

The group discussed the utility of shifting from a summary report (with topical indicators, and identifying if these were on track or not) to focusing on broader objectives – and if the initial indicators should be re-included in future reports. While the topical indicators were seen as useful, the conversation circled around how best to demonstrate meaningful advances in the work when peacebuilding outcomes do not necessarily measure progress (e.g. cannot demonstrate what might have been prevented, or prove a causal link).

The discussion noted that there is a tendency to measure outputs (e.g. number of staff that took specific training) but not outcomes. Both government and civil society representatives lamented the difficulty of how best to measure the benefit we bring to the international community, particularly as change is incremental and must be measured over a long period of time. It was pointed out that this is beyond the scope of the yearly reporting exercise, which cannot capture long-term reforms.

One suggestion was that qualitative data and stories can help frame the narrative of progress and could be a way to capture advances, particularly as stories have a tendency to get lost as institutional memory fades over time, making it difficult to observe true change.

It was also noted that granular, concrete indicators make it difficult to roll up the story into a comprehensive narrative. Some suggestions to overcome this included the use of SMART technology to help with retaining stories, or including from the onset an expectation of videos that tell these stories.

**Group 2: GAC – Thematic Programs and Multilateral Engagement (chapters 1-11 of the GAC annual report)**

The group discussed a number of topics, including advancements within their sections of the report, challenges in reporting, and best practices to mitigate these challenges.

One challenge reiterated by several participants was how to fit the implementation plan drafted in 2017 to changing situations and contexts. Given that the implementation plan covers a five-year period, the original targets and indicators may be overly restrictive in new contexts. Changes within Focal Point departments and unprecedented global challenges may shift implementation focus. This can be hard to reflect within original targets and indicators.
Additionally, the broad context makes it challenging to report within specific targets and indicators. Some attendees noted being overwhelmed by the number of implementing projects and the sheer amount of data that had to be collected from these projects, emphasizing that it is difficult to reflect the diversity and impact of these varying projects within the specified targets and indicators. One suggestion to mitigate this included maintaining regular discussions with project implementers, identifying commonalities amongst the projects for reporting, and facilitating discussions between project implementers to share best practices.

Participants also discussed the challenge of reporting on work that involves shifting normative frameworks and traditional understandings of gender issues within peace and security. While reporting on indicators related to targets is helpful, there are normative changes that are not adequately reflected within annual reporting. Participants also noted that the annual report fails to capture the need to apply WPS beyond just a gender-based analysis to provide a deeper understanding of how intersecting identities such as age, race, sexuality, etc. impact women's abilities to thrive within peace and security work.

Some participants noted that an overwhelming number of focal points who participate in the CNAP Advisory Group process are women, and emphasized the need for gender parity and ensuring that divisions are taking into account diverse participation and opinions.

CSO representative asked about seeing more information about how the CNAP overlaps with Feminist Foreign Policy. In response, government officials noted that Canada's FFP includes the CNAP, as well as the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP), the progressive trade agenda, and the 2017 Defence Policy (Strong Secure Engaged).

**Group 3: GAC – Bilateral Engagement (chapters 12-20 of the GAC annual report)**

The group discussed challenges with the implementation plan, including the reporting period being so long ago. In government, especially at GAC, there is a high turnover of officers responsible for the reporting process and handovers are often not complete. Although a participant raised that the training for new focal points has been very useful, there was agreement on the importance of ensuring a comprehensive handover process.

It was also mentioned that in programming there is a continuity of learning throughout the year. You start to learn the “do’s and don’ts” and what to look and advocate for in programming and it generally gets easier to report on this.

One of the biggest challenges discussed was how the implementation plans are structured. The GAC departmental report does not allow for reflection of the political context and stage of conflict in the reporting countries and these situations are always changing.
The impact that COVID-19 has had on programming and women in different countries is a further issue. A suggestion would be to add more of a nuance to some of the indicators, while balancing the need for consistency in year over year reporting.

The group discussed how these challenges could be tackled in the next CNAP. “We need to reimagine our engagement on this front.” A lot of work needs to be done. It is understood that we need a baseline to ensure we track progress, yet we further need targets that can be adaptable to the global context.

There are specific examples that are not captured - or that are complicated to capture - in the current reporting, for example:

- The peace process in Colombia, political context and stage of conflict are always changing. Our report doesn’t always reflect that.
- Civilian representative at NATO in Afghanistan wasn’t quite captured by targets and indicators in the report.
- Reporting on Afghanistan will be a challenge in the next report (targets not relevant anymore).

There is an opportunity to reimagine how reporting can be done differently moving forward. The biggest challenges are in how implementation plans are structured with no responsibility to change global context.

The group noted that there needs to be a baseline (track same things year over year) to ensure progress is visible. The implementation plans can't be changed, because that would disrupt the consistency in year over year reporting. Creative solutions to these issues need to be found without changing targets.

The targets are developed by partners and focal points across the department, not by the WPS policy unit.

The group also discussed focus countries (which are identified by GAC, not within the CNAP), which were chosen through discussion and based on interest. This is a spotlight on the countries but not a targeted programming envelope. All missions are responsible for ‘implementing WPS’ even if they are not an official focus country.

**Group 4: DND/CAF**

The group began by discussing successes. These included:

- the effort going into the report and those who are working to bring it together;
- the number of women in command of operation, which was 50% and a first for CAF;
- the acknowledgement that there is a lot going on, whether it is targeted or about awareness; and
- there is an increase in momentum, more is getting done and with a sharper focus.
On the operational side, it is hard to quantify impact, but participants noted that the energy and the excitement of everyone is incredible. Operationally what is happening with training around the world, and courses, is “awesome.” There are small steps and success in the right direction. This may not be as fast as ideal, but it is still positive.

Some participants noted the culture is changing in the CAF. “We will see the difference in the next 2-5 years.” They believe a lot is happening and there is participation and action in different areas.

The group also discussed challenges, including the narrow focus on participation within the WPS agenda and the structure of what is reported due to the implementation plan. Although there is an attempt to show impact, how data is captured does not help with this. Attempts to show advance in WPS are off target.

There are also challenges related to implementation, not just reporting. For example, the goal of 25% women in the CAF (by 2026) remains elusive. It is hoped that the barrier assessment will help with this. There are also exit surveys to help understand “why women do not stay in CAF longer.”

Demonstrating impact is another reporting challenge. Providing information on conferences and events at high levels is important to show our leadership and engage allies in WPS. But the current level of reporting does not capture the impact of participation in such events.

DND/CAF participants noted that there are targets and indicators that do not feel useful and it would be helpful to have more flexibility in reporting.

The group also discussed the ongoing challenge of what it means to operationalize WPS. It is raised in the summary report, but there is little clarity. For example, what would a feminist defence policy look like?

Several other points were raised including that having the CNAP, with its political backing, is essential for the CAF. As well, DND is massive and there is a need to consult broadly before there are any changes to targets and indicators.

**Group 5: RCMP, Justice, and Public Safety**

The discussion focused on advancements and challenges in the implementation of the CNAP. The government representatives believe that objectives according to the CNAP are largely being met.

A common challenge cited by government representatives is that of maintaining capacity/expertise on WPS within units implementing the CNAP. Rotation of personnel contributes to this problem, as well as the lack of knowledge of staff generally on how to integrate gender perspectives in their work. GBA+ is a broad tool and not sufficient for equipping staff to effectively integrate gender perspectives in their day-to-day work. More is needed to support better gender-based analysis in the context of the work of each department and contribute to more effective results. Furthermore, in many cases, expertise or responsibilities lies with one person within a unit (and responsibilities for
WPS almost exclusively given to women). When the focal person rotates out, the knowledge is often lost.

The role of mentorship on implementing WPS was also noted as important and more could be done in this area. More metrics to track results are also needed. The group concluded that there is a need for more focused training and capacity building, including at entry levels, to enable mainstreaming of WPS in the work of partner departments and move the yardstick further on WPS objectives.

**Group 6: Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) & Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)**

The group discussed the need to adhere to timelines and allow for a window to make adjustments to the inputs, as well as the need to expand the goals to allow for clarity in areas where the linkages are not as clear or that there is a technical collaboration effort.

The ability to add in relevant indicators to capture the data would be useful and the reporting template needs to be reviewed to support the above.

Narrative reporting could be improved to include some elements of impact assessment for enabling future work.

There is a challenge to avoid duplication in reporting, especially with many partners. Capacity building and engagement with civil society could be increased to help understand the WPS issues and its relevance. Small scale discussions with WPSN members are welcome and would support government institutions.

Participants noted that the timing of his meeting and the discussion were welcome.

**Group 7: Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) & Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC)**

The group discussed the ISC/CIRNAC Implementation Plan, which was recently released.

The plan is integrated across the two departments and government officials noted that the implementation plan demonstrates that ISC and CIRNAC are full implementation partners. Having a plan helps to get internal buy-in on WPS. Staff can be busy with other issues and having a way to demonstrate linkages and get strategic buy-in are important.

Publishing the implementation plan was a major accomplishment in itself. The domestic focus makes this implementation plan unique. There are elements in this plan that are not fully included in other departmental implementation plans, for example, women’s health and well-being, which is included in connection with the MMIWG Action Plan.

CNAP 2 does not have a strong domestic focus, however there is an opportunity with the next CNAP. The CIRNAC/ISC implementation plan and upcoming reporting are
examples of how the domestic agenda can be applied to WPS. Other departments will see that it is something they can do, too.

CNAP 3 was announced in connection with the ministerial in June. There is a hope that it will be much more connected and focused across government partners and more collaborative. Participants noted that they hoped that much of what ISC/CIRNAC did on their plan connects with the direction of CNAP 3.

The CNAP is focused on safety, security, and well-being of women in other countries. Participants asked: how does that stack up against what we’re doing in Canada? Canada has an image of defending human rights. There are all these initiatives for improving the lives of women in conflict-affected countries, but what are we doing internally for Indigenous women?

Participants also asked how are we reflecting international human rights commitments internally. This applies to UNDRIP, obviously, but also other international treaties and instruments. Some felt that there is a need to look inward first before looking outward.

With regards to reporting, civil society suggested that it would be nice to see more descriptions of accomplishments, showing what has happened. Many of the current indicators lack context (they are numbers without anything else).

Some participants said that this is not an issue of qualitative versus quantitative reporting, but elaborating on what they mean. If two or three elaborated examples were included in the summary document, it would be more useful in public outreach to non-experts.

The group also discussed the importance of building connections between implementing partners, as there are areas where their work overlaps. ISC, for example, only works closely with CIRNAC.

**Conclusion**

After the breakout group discussions, there was a short plenary. Participants were asked to contribute to a word cloud on what would contribute to an effective annual progress report (see below).

The WPS team at Global Affairs noted that they are working on the 2021 progress report and internal planning has begun for CNAP 3. They are also looking forward to announcing the winners of the Civil Society Leadership award at the end of October.

The organizers of the meeting closed the meeting with gratitude for all those participating. They thanked the panelists and speakers, as well as those who led small group discussions. They also noted appreciation for all the participants who entered into these discussions with a shared commitment to learn and advance these discussions. Finally, thanks were extended to all the note takers, as their contributions made this report possible.
What is a word or phrase that would describe an effective CNAP annual progress report?

(Figure 3: Responses by participants via Menti.com)