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Achieving Gender Equality:

Best Practices for the Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

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Achieving Gender Equality:

Best Practices for the Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

Maiara Folly and Renata Avelar Giannini¹

Introduction

Over the past two decades, significant progress has been made in placing the question of gender equality at the forefront of the sustainable peace agenda. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and other international organizations have approved resolutions highlighting the central role of women in international peace and security efforts.² Nevertheless, moving from theory to practice has proved challenging.

Few countries have taken concrete steps to adopt national policies incorporating a gender perspective while acknowledging the role of women in the peacebuilding process. In an effort to address some of the challenges, in 2005 the UNSC called on member states to implement the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. Initiatives have included the use of plurennial strategies, or National Action Plans (NAPs),³ which present goals and strategies for implementing the WPS agenda domestically. Thus far, more than 60 countries have adopted a NAP, including Brazil.

However, developing a NAP is simply the first step in what must be a sustained and sequenced process. In fact, the recent trend of merely elaborating NAPs has been criticized as insufficient and often ineffective.⁴ In some countries, developing a NAP has

¹ The authors would like to thank Eduarda Hamann for her contributions in the preparation and revision of this text. We also acknowledge the support given by Ana Beatriz Duarte and Caio Paes.

² Resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015).

³ See: UN/UNSC, 2004 and UN/UNSC, 2005.

⁴ Swaine, A., 2009; 2013.; Gibbings, S., 2011; Pratt, N.; Richter-Devroe, S., 2011; Willet, S., 2010; Cohn, C., 2008; Cohn, C. et al., 2013.

not translated into concrete actions and results. On the contrary, NAPs have occasionally derailed grassroots movements aligned to national and international agendas focused on gender equality.⁵ Notwithstanding these challenges, it is imperative that countries commit to implementing the WPS agenda. NAPs are an important element of articulating national strategies aimed at promoting gender mainstreaming and the effective participation of women in peace and security policies, but it is merely one of a series of steps a country must consider.

Brazil launched its inaugural National Action Plan on the symbolic date of March 8, 2017, International Women's Day. The development process was carried out by an inter-ministry working group comprised of representatives from the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Human Rights, Ministry of Justice and Public Security, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (which coordinated the process). Representatives from civil society and from the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) were also invited to take part in the process. This Strategic Paper seeks to highlight best practices in the implementation of National Action Plans. The primary objective is to provide input for the effective implementation of Brazil's NAP in this new phase.

A thorough review of NAPs from a wide range of countries was carried out. The analysis also identified central aspects of NAPs revisions – when these exist – and reviewed studies that identify and evaluate best practices on the implementation process. We identified and summarized six best practices:

- (1) Institutionalization of structures, processes and implementation mechanisms;
- (2) Integration of the WPS agenda with other agendas related to gender equality;
- (3) Continuous mobilization of public and private financial resources and funding;
- (4) Inclusion of civil society actors in the implementation process of the WPS agenda;
- (5) Creation of shared mechanisms for monitoring progress; and
- (6) Effective integration of women into international peace and security initiatives.

Each of the following sections highlights a best practice, identifying the challenges met and actions taken by the implementing country in each case.

⁵ Swaine, A., 2013.



UN Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security (2015). Photo: UN Photo/Cia Pak.

Best Practice 1: Institutionalization of structures, processes and implementation mechanisms

The Women, Peace and Security agenda lacks a robust, institutionalized framework and often finds itself dependent on the work and personal commitment of champions in strategic stakeholder roles. Empowering key individuals to act as champions has been instrumental in fomenting the much-needed political support for the agenda. However, effective implementation of the WPS agenda must also develop and adopt *formal* processes and mechanisms that ensure the continuity of policies and actions over time, while reducing the exclusive reliance on champions to bring about desired policy outcomes.

Most countries have inter-agency committees tasked with implementing national NAPs. These committees consist of individuals designated as points of contact by each ministry or agency involved in the Plan's implementation. Committee members meet periodically to plan and report concrete actions that are carried out by all of the involved stakeholders.

Norway's NAP, for example, was developed and based on contributions from four ministries.⁶ The implementation process is managed by an inter-agency committee headed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is also responsible for coordinating all actions within the scope of the WPS agenda nationally.⁷

In Canada, each signatory institution designated a representative to work on NAP implementation. The initiative was led by the parliamentary committee in charge of the national implementation of the WPS agenda, which recommended that each governmental agency appoint a high-level representative to work on the agenda. Each representative was responsible for identifying financial and human resources relevant to the Plan, and for developing guidelines and monitoring implementation of the Canadian NAP within his or her agency.⁸

The participation of civil society representatives in these policy spaces has been essential to ensuring public participation in the policy implementation process, as well as maintaining the continuity of public policies over time, especially during periods of political and economic instability. During times of crisis, changes in government representatives are commonplace, and go hand in hand with shifts in implementation priorities and strategies. Establishing formal processes and mechanisms for the implementation of NAPs can effectively render the WPS agenda a national policy; and civil society plays a fundamental role in institutionalizing this process.

There are numerous examples of countries that promote civil society participation and consultation. In the United Kingdom, the Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) network, formed by 17 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) along with experts in human rights and peacebuilding, maintains a constant dialogue with the British government. Using awareness campaigns and evidence-based research, the network assists ministers, members of parliament and public officials in the development of programs focused on implementing the WPS agenda.

In Canada, the Women, Peace and Security Network (WPSN-C) plays a similar role. It is made up of 70 individuals and NGOs, and facilitates civil society engagement with the Canadian government vis-à-vis WPS agenda implementation.

⁶ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Justice and Public Safety, and the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion.

⁷ Magnus, H.; Wilde, A., 2016.

⁸ House of Commons, 2016.



March for Women's Rights and Gender Equality on International Women's Day (2015). Picture: UN Photo/Devra Berkowitz.

Best Practice 2: Integration of the WPS agenda with other agendas related to gender equality

In some contexts, substantive knowledge about the Women, Peace and Security agenda is limited. Complicating matters, it is frequently isolated or marginalized on the policy agenda, with limited engagement from civil society and government actors. Because the WPS agenda has often been closely associated with the defense and foreign affairs sectors, there is a (artificial) separation between this agenda and others related to the promotion of gender equality. As a result, the intersection between foreign and domestic policies focusing on gender equality must be explored.

One way to accomplish this is for countries to honor and internalize international commitments on gender equality on the domestic front. In fact, there is a relationship between the WPS agenda and other important international commitments, such as the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), among others. Although the WPS agenda focuses on profoundly “masculine” contexts, its goal is to achieve gender equality.

An important step in this direction was the acknowledgement by the General Recommendations Committee of CEDAW that implementing the WPS agenda is essential to ending gender inequality and to guaranteeing the rights of women and girls, as set forth in the Convention. The CEDAW member states were encouraged to report to the General Committee on commitments to the WPS agenda, which include the development of implementation strategies and indicators to track progress.⁹

Another means to raise awareness of the importance and centrality of the WPS agenda is by producing and disseminating reliable information outlining the correlation between gender equality and increased safety. Quality research – and the effective presentation and communication of this research – is essential for the development of evidence-based public policies focusing on gender equality. Today, only 41 percent of all countries regularly produce data on violence against women. Of those, a mere 13 percent have a budget dedicated to gender-sensitive statistics and data collection.¹⁰ The need for data that reflect the different realities of men, women, boys and girls, can therefore not be overstated. Quality data is crucial to formulating more complete assessments of gender inequities, and to identifying advances (and relapses).

In order to effectively promote gender equality as a foreign policy issue, it must be promoted domestically as well. Such an “inside/outside” approach further legitimizes mobilization efforts and strengthens political support – at home and abroad – for activities related to WPS issues. It also encourages the involvement of civil society groups that tend to have a parochial focus on domestic policies to consider a more holistic approach to gender-based policies.¹¹ This might mean involving entities such as the ministries of justice or the interior, and law enforcement officials implementing policies related to women’s rights.

After recognizing the need to treat the WPS agenda as a public policy priority, many countries incorporated a domestic dimension to the revised versions of their NAPs. For example, Bosnia-Herzegovina has proposed initiatives that highlight the intersection between the domestic and the international agendas. During the implementation phase of the first Bosnian NAP (2010), there was a misalignment of the national strategy, its structure and the NAP itself. The 2014 revision then included issues that were directly related to the domestic agenda, such as migration and natural disasters, with the result of greater local government engagement. Moreover, WPS agenda implementation in the country is based on human security, thus shifting the focus from the state to individuals while establishing connections between development, equality and security.¹²

9 Miller, B.; Pournik, M.; Swaine, A., 2014.

10 UN Women, 2016a.

11 Steinberg, P., 2015.

12 Babic-Svetlin, K.; Jacevic, M.; Mansury, M., 2016.

The United Kingdom's NAP has a section dedicated to "building national capacity".¹³ It includes targets and indicators for the domestic implementation of the agenda and seeks to increase the number of women holding public office. Similarly, the United States' NAP aims to institutionalize gender mainstreaming as part of its diplomacy efforts, defense programs and development actions. To accomplish this cross-policy gender mainstreaming, the U.S. is developing dedicated educational policies and training programs in these areas. Australia, for its part, has included among its NAP objectives supporting domestic NGOs with initiatives that promote the WPS agenda in the country.¹⁴

The development of action plans that take into consideration the mission and scope of regional organizations is another means of strengthening the WPS agenda. Besides broadening the legitimacy and impact of the actions, adopting a regional perspective encourages the creation of initiatives and programs that take the particularities and context of each region into account. To date, Regional Action Plans have been developed by the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Pacific Islands Forum, and the Arab League.

Although Latin American countries do not have a joint action plan, the importance of the WPS agenda has been highlighted in recent years in the Conferences of Ministers of Defense of the Americas. Moreover, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) provides regional training on this agenda and, Union of South American Nations (Unasur), the Council of South American Defense has a line of research dedicated to women and defense.¹⁵

Best Practice 3: Continuous mobilization of public and private financial resources and funding

One of the greatest obstacles to the implementation of the WPS agenda is the low allocation of financial resources for WPS-related initiatives and programs. Between 2012 and 2013, only 2 percent of donors budget for supporting peace and security actions in "fragile countries" had gender equality as the main objective.¹⁶ Moreover, among countries that adopted NAPs, few committed to guaranteeing a budget to carry out actual implementation of the plan.¹⁷

¹³ Idem.

¹⁴ Cuillerier, M.; Sarosi, D.; St. Pierre, K., 2017.

¹⁵ Giannini, R. A., 2016.

¹⁶ OECD DAC Network on Gender Equality, 2016.

¹⁷ Miller, B.; Pournik, M.; Swaine, A., 2014.

Such a scenario leaves financial support for the agenda subject to the political priorities of each governmental entity. It is therefore advisable that NAPs contain a specific timeframe, projected costs and financing sources necessary to implement the goals. These goals must be objective, realistic and measurable.¹⁸

The Philippines has stood out for its ability to mobilize governmental resources for its WPS agenda. In fact, since 1996, gender has been mainstreamed in the country's budgetary planning, allowing for public spending to consider the specific needs of different social groups.¹⁹ Since then, at least 5 percent of the budget from each government agency has been allocated to the promotion of gender equality. Apart from these minimum resource thresholds for each agency, the implementation of the Philippine NAP also receives regular financing from an entity connected to the Office of the President and dedicated to peace and security.²⁰

Another strategy is mapping the government institutions responsible for executing activities related to WPS policies. For example, the second Netherlands NAP (2016) provides detailed information and guidance on the institutions involved, as well as the financial and human resources available for each.²¹ In addition to strengthening the integration of the WPS agenda with other agendas related to gender equality, this practice prevents duplication of efforts and budget waste.

Concurrent to these efforts, continued civil society mobilization and pressure is essential. Efforts should focus on formalizing an annual budget item dedicated to the implementation of the agenda within and across all agencies. Among South American countries, Chile has taken important steps in this direction. Chile's revised NAP (2015) requires each institution involved in the WPS agenda to include an amount dedicated to financing the necessary actions to fulfill the Plan's goals into its annual budget.

Globally, an innovative proposal was presented by the Women, Peace, and Security Financing Discussion Group, an entity composed of UN agencies and civil society and governmental actors – both from donor countries and from those affected by conflict. After a series of consultations, the group proposed the creation of a Global Fund for Women, Peace and Security, in order to develop an alternative source of funds for implementation of the WPS agenda in different parts of the world.²²

18 Giannini, R. A., 2016.

19 Cabrera-Balleza, M.; Popovic, N., 2011.

20 Philippine Republic, 2010.

21 Swaine, A., 2014.

22 Ariño, M.V., 2015.



Chilean delegation during the UN Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security (2015). Photo: UN Photo/Amanda Voisard.

Best Practice 4: Inclusion of civil society actors in the implementation process of the WPS agenda

The limited integration between society and government actors – even during the implementation process – is a function of the WPS agenda working in isolation. Therefore, besides highlighting commonalities of this agenda with sets of other gender-related policies, it is also crucial to create both formal and informal mechanisms to facilitate an exchange between civil society and the principal governmental entities involved in the process.

In Jordan, a national coalition comprised of representatives of ministries and civil society organizations has played an essential role in raising awareness about the positive impact of the WPS agenda at the local and international level. The interplay and exchange between these actors has resulted in innovative initiatives, such as specialized service provision for refugee women in Jordanian territory.²³

²³ UN Women, 2016b.

In Western Europe, there are numerous successful models of networks and open channels of communication between government decision-makers and representatives of civil society. For example, the NAP development process in the Netherlands included consultations between the government and 24 civil society organizations, all of them signatories of the Plan. In the eyes of the Dutch government, the experience provided by organizations working with WPS-related themes is fundamental to the efficacy of policies focusing on gender equality. These organizations signed the Dutch NAP knowing that their input during the consultation process contributed substantively to the final product and the adoption of the document.²⁴

The first Philippine NAP (2010) came about through the collective work of a small group of activist and academic women and key individuals in the government. In partnership with the Ministry of Peace, the group created a Preparatory Committee made up of representatives from the government, academia and civil society organizations. It is also worth noting that this NAP has its origins in an informal meeting of five women in a cafeteria and was rooted in a cooperative process throughout.²⁵

Other examples abound: in South Korea, the “1325 Network” was created to offer suggestions about the country’s National Action Plan and its implementation. The Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, which promotes the implementation of NAPs at the national and subnational level in countries such as the Philippines, Liberia, Nepal and Sierra Leone, is a good example of the role society can play in the implementation of NAPs.²⁶ Civil society organizations in Burundi deserve great credit for their work on women’s rights; they advocated for – and won – a 30 percent quota for women in public institutions.

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 itself (2000) contributed greatly toward the inclusion of women’s organizations in decision-making processes in Serbia and other Balkan countries. The strategy relied on the mobilization of local women, who put pressure on international entities and demanded that they push governments to take actions to achieve gender equality. This strategy is known as “double boomerang effect”. The approach also raises awareness among local networks of the need for “bottom-up” oversight, in order to ensure that UN and other international actors are acting accountably and in conformity with their agreed upon peace and security obligations in the Balkans.²⁷

24 Cabrera-Balleza, M.; Popovic, N., 2011.

25 Steinberg, P., 2015.

26 Swaine, A., 2015.

27 Swaine, A., 2015.

Best Practice 5: Creation of shared mechanisms for monitoring progress

The creation and use of joint mechanisms to track a National Action Plan's progress is essential to ensuring that a National Action Plan is a means to reach gender equality and not an end in itself. Monitoring activities through a consolidated plan containing targets, specific goals and indicators to measure progress ensures that policies and actions are implemented and the plan's impact assessed. Periodic reviews determine whether policies are indeed helping to reach the desired targets and goals.

The UN has acknowledged the importance of establishing measurable and transparent criteria to assess the impact of NAPs. To nurture and bolster a culture of NAP measurement, the UN has recommended the adoption monitoring mechanisms that employ specific indicators to identify advances – and relapses – in the implementation of the WPS agenda.²⁸ Consequently, NAPs with rigorous monitoring and evaluation tools have become the standard, in terms of lending greater transparency and efficacy during the implementation phase.²⁹

Ireland is one example of a country going from theory to practice for effective monitoring. Led by a working group of government and civil society actors, it has developed a successful model of NAP assessment, regularly publishing performance reports. The reporting highlights best practices, monitors progress and identifies implementation gaps. Such gaps are, in fact, commonplace in most countries, illustrated by the absence of specific indicators and the lack of budgetary provisions in most NAPs globally.³⁰

Other countries have commissioned reviews and impact evaluations by external experts. The United Kingdom assigned a specific budget line for this purpose. The report was carried out while the 2014-2017 NAP was being implemented, and recommended that the British government include a multi-sector perspective in the Plan's implementation.³¹

Some countries have strengthened accountability through public hearings in dedicated parliamentary committees. This mechanism has been adopted in Australia, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom and has contributed measurably to the transparency of WPS agenda implementation at the national level. Moreover, hearings have a great potential to draw public interest to the agenda, adding to increased oversight and accountability.³²

²⁸ UN/UNSC, 2011.

²⁹ Miller, B.; Pournik, M.; Swaine, A., 2014.

³⁰ Cuillerier, M.; Sarosi, D.; St-Pierre, K., 2017.

³¹ GAPS, 2017.

³² Miller, B.; Pournik, M.; Swaine, A., 2014.

Most countries produce monitoring and implementation reports on their NAPs. In some countries, such as Canada, Norway and Sweden, reporting is carried out by the government agency or body that coordinates the agenda in the country, along with input from the other institutions involved in the NAP implementation. In other cases, an inter-agency committee develops these reports jointly with occasional input from civil society. Australia, the United States and New Zealand, among others, have adopted this practice.

Despite some progress, these review processes need to be made more transparent and accessible. Lessons learned by one country or context should be shared and translated into effective NAP implementation strategies for other countries and regions.³³ Thus, successful experiences at the local or national level may help establish global monitoring indicators across a range of policy areas, such as sexual violence prevention, conflict prevention and promotion of greater female participation in peace processes.

Sustained engagement of civil society is also crucial. The extended civil society ecosystem – including NGOs, academia and other non-governmental actors – can effectively contribute to the monitoring process by providing information, research and technical support for the creation of processes and outcome indicators, and by performing assessment reports on specific actions and policies. The engagement of these actors promotes transparency in governmental actions and contributes to policy continuity, as they demand that actions in priority areas be carried out.

³³ Idem.



Major General Kristin Lund becomes Force Commander of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). She was the first woman to command the military component of a UN peacekeeping mission. Photo: UN Photo/Mark Garten.

Best Practice 6: Effective integration of women into international peace and security initiatives

There is a growing recognition inside and outside of the UN that women's participation and leadership is fundamental to achieving sustainable peace. For example, the presence of women in peace negotiations, increases by 20 percent the probability that a peace agreement will last at least two years; also, in the long term, it raises the probability that peace will last for more than 15 years by 35 percent.³⁴

Research also indicates that the inclusion of uniformed women in military and police operations broadens the protection network around women and girls affected by conflict. Data from 40 countries shows a positive correlation between the proportion of female police officers and rates of reported cases of sexual abuse.³⁵ In East Timor and Burundi, for instance, the presence of female peacekeepers was essential to increasing the participation of local women in elections, strengthening the legitimacy of electoral processes in these countries.³⁶

³⁴ República Federativa do Brasil, 2017. (apud Stone, L., 2014).

³⁵ República Federativa do Brasil, 2017. (apud UN Women, 2011).

³⁶ República Federativa do Brasil, 2017. (apud UN/DPKO, 2010).

In Liberia, a police unit made up exclusively of women has proactively promoted the safety of local women, including through self-defense training for women and girls enrolled in schools and community centers. The example set by the female police officers encouraged more women to join the Liberia National Police.³⁷

The UNSC unanimously adopted Resolution 2122 (2013), acknowledging and valorizing the positive impact created by civilian, military and police women who act as safety providers. The resolution emphatically stresses the need to include women in all stages of conflict-resolution processes, from pre- to post-conflict.³⁸

Nevertheless, challenges remain for women to be fully included in peace processes.³⁹ Only 2 percent of head mediators, 4 percent of signatories and 9 percent of negotiators in peace agreements are female.⁴⁰ Women make up only 3 percent of the military and 10 percent of police forces in UN missions, most of them in support roles.⁴¹

Reversing this scenario will be paramount if women are to be effectively represented both at negotiation tables and in the field. The unique experience they have in conflict situations and their perspective on how to navigate conflict puts women in a unique position to play a fundamental role in achieving sustainable peace through the incorporation of a gender perspective into activities related to peace and security.

37 UN Women, 2010.

38 UN/UNSC, 2013.

39 Swaine, A., 2014.

40 UN Women, no date.

41 UN/DPKO, no date.



Graduation ceremony of the Liberia National Police's 33rd Police Academy Class, which included 104 female officers. Photo: UN Photo/Christopher Herwig.

Conclusions and final recommendations

The WPS agenda should not be treated as separate or distinct from sets of policies related to gender equality. This is, without a doubt, the most important conclusion of research analyzing NAPs from dozens of countries. Like any other public policy, the WPS agenda requires adequate institutional coordination and planning, with dedicated budgetary allocations and the necessary instruments to monitor its progress.

NAPs must be seen as tools to reach gender equality. The NAP development process can be prone to friction – or outright resistance – since it often results from an inter-agency negotiation process including institutions in entrenched cultural environments where gender equality was not even a topic until a short time ago. One must exercise caution not to see NAPs as an end, but rather as a more comprehensive public policy to be broadly debated with civil society and implemented by multiple actors.

Besides facing some difficulties intrinsic to its scope as a topic dominated by traditional notions of masculinity, the WPS agenda is often restricted to the areas of national defense and security. This association can have a negative effect on the transparency of actions and data that are crucial to monitoring NAP implementation. For example, when there are monitoring and assessment reports, they tend to describe activities without evaluating them – or, the information simply remains publicly unavailable. During the NAP implementation process, it is all the more essential to establish benchmarks focused on results, transparency and accountability, so that one's objectives can be effectively achieved.

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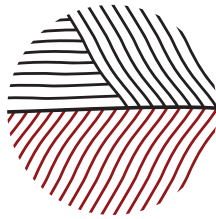
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