

AFGHANISTAN'S NATIONAL ACTION PLAN: 'A WISH LIST OF MANY DREAMS'

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10/2017

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The women of Afghanistan supported their husbands and fathers during the Anti-Soviet Union national resistance by taking food to the battlegrounds, taking care of the children and the elderly on their behalf but became the first targets when the Mujahidin Islamic revolution took into the streets of Kabul and we witnessed rapes, kidnappings, murder of young and old women during the civil war and then the Taliban denied our existence completely but we started a new chapter in 2001 and the international frameworks and laws have been helpful in establishing our existence once again on the streets of Kabul.

A female MP from the 1986 term of the Afghan parliament

Afghanistan is a country that for the past 50 years has experienced ongoing violence of many different kinds: Soviet occupation, civil war between warlords and tribal leaders, the oppressive regime of the Taliban, the bombing by the USA in retaliation for the 9/11 attacks, and a NATO counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operation ongoing for the past 16 years. The Taliban insurgency continues to take Afghan lives on a daily basis and has shrunk public spaces for freedom and civil rights across the country, for all of the population but especially women and children.¹

The first National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security in Afghanistan is therefore of great importance and relevance to the lives of Afghan women. The President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan launched the NAP in June 2015 with a clear commitment by the government to

ensure that women have a strong role in and contribution to the governance and development of war-torn Afghanistan.²

The NAP adoption comes at a critical time in Afghanistan, as Security Sector Reform (SSR) is taking shape, with the involvement of NATO, USA, UK, and many other donors in Afghanistan. Only 1 per cent of the total security forces of over 350,000 personnel in the police, intelligence, and army are women. (This 1 per cent, however, face tremendous challenges and backlash within the system and from the public as well).³

A national peace programme is being explored by the government of the country. In early 2017, the Afghan government agreed on a political peace programme that continued the mandate of the High Peace Council,⁴ which was established in 2010.

As a result of continued pressure and lobby from women's groups, the government ensured at least 20 per cent participation of women leaders as members of the High Peace Council. However, meaningful participation still requires women leaders to influence the peace agendas.

The Afghan NAP is a beginning, a foundation for the government's obligation to respond to continued civil society pressure and lobbying by women's groups and female peace activists. However, the implementation of the NAP is yet to be operationalised at the national and provincial levels.

This working paper analyses the development of the Afghanistan National Action Plan and explores the challenges around its implementation in the context of a continued military conflict in Afghanistan.

AFGHAN WOMEN AND THE AFGHAN WAR

Women have been and will continue to be at the forefronts of insurgency, violent extremism, and radicalisation in Afghanistan; they have defended peace at homes, in communities, and within society at large, but remain unheard, their efforts largely unrecognised.

Looking at the past 50 years of history, Afghanistan has suffered the Soviet Union invasion, the resistance movement against the Russians, the Civil War, the Taliban regime, and a new era post 9/11.⁵ The country has continuously been at war and the social fabric of the society has been ruined. Violence replaced all previous cultural norms of the country.

While the story of the Afghan woman is the story of a victim in the eyes of the international media, Afghan women played different roles at different times throughout history. Women were the family supporters and household caretakers during the resistance movement (*Jihad*) against Soviet invasion until the 1990s, although they faced brutal abuse and treatment during the Civil War of 1991-1994. The war factions raped women, assaulted them on the streets, married them by force, trafficked them into neighbouring countries and abroad, and established a rigid prohibition on women being outside of the home. This treatment became even more lethal during the Taliban regime (1994-2001), which banned women completely from appearing in public. The Taliban forced

women to marry their fighters, took them away from their families, and prevented education and employment for all kinds of women. Women were largely forgotten by society.

However, the story of Afghan women changed in 2002. The new era of international intervention in Afghanistan enabled a relatively supportive environment for the women of Afghanistan. In 2002, the first Women's Summit, held in Brussels, brought together Afghan women from different countries and mobilised them for inclusion in the new government structures and the establishment of the first Ministry of Women's Affairs as part of the interim and transitional administration until 2004. Women took the opportunity and mobilised in masses to include their rights in the 2004 Constitution of the country and achieved gender equality within the Constitution. The 25 per cent quotas of seats for women in parliament enabled thousands of women leaders to run as representatives of their provinces and join the parliament in 2005 and in 2010; currently there are 69 women serving in the Afghan parliament as the representatives of the people (see Table 1).

Thousands of girls returned to basic and higher education and hundreds of them were able to study abroad as a result of international scholarships. For the first time, the perpetrators of violence against women received punishment as legislated in the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) law in the country, which gave hope to millions of women suffering different kinds of violence and discrimination.

Since 2009, however, the Taliban have regrouped and revived their movement across the country. Their first targets were girl's schools, women's clinics, female politicians, female government employees, female doctors and teachers, and women's media. Since then, the space for women's inclusion in public life has again shrunk drastically and the threats of the Taliban have taken many of the achievements backwards.

- 1 Human Rights Watch, "Afghanistan: Events of 2016", in *World Report 2017* (New York, NY: Human Rights Watch, 2017), <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/afghanistan>
- 2 "Launch Ceremony of the National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 - Women, Peace and Security", Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 30 June 2015, <http://mfa.gov.af/en/news/launch-ceremony-of-the-national-action-plan-on-uns-1325-women-peace-and-security>
- 3 NATO, "Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)", Media Backgrounder, October 2013, https://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2013_10/20131018_131022-MediaBackgrounder_ANSF_en.pdf. See also Andrea Ackerman, "Gender in Security Sector Reform: The Case of Afghanistan", http://www.academia.edu/21468147/Gender_in_Security_Sector_Reform_The_Case_of_Afghanistan
- 4 For more information about Afghanistan's High Peace Council, see <http://www.hpc.org.af/english/index.php>
- 5 For a timeline on women's rights in Afghanistan, see <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/women-war-and-peace/uncategorized/timeline-of-womens-rights-in-afghanistan/>



Women have been and will continue to be at the forefronts of insurgency, violent extremism and radicalisation in Afghanistan; they have defended peace at homes, in communities, and within society at large, but remain unheard, their efforts largely unrecognised.

	Provincial Council	Lower House Parliament	Upper House Parliament
No of women	296	69	27
Total members	2,591	249	102

Table 1: Number of women in the Afghan parliament in 2017.

The ongoing war isn't fought on the borders, far away from communities. The war manifests in explosions in the markets, in the farms, in schools and at homes. Women are the first targets of this insurgency. When the Taliban assert their presence in a community, the first impact is that girl's schools are closed and that women are warned not to come out of homes.⁶ There is no clear line between enemy and combatant because the sons and husbands of the women who joined the insurgency and participated in the destruction of homes and villages also hold legitimate grievances that drive them towards violence and insurgency.

Research with women leaders in Provincial Peace Councils from 2012-2016 clearly showed that the Taliban and militants for the anti-government activities easily recruit the young men in their communities.⁷ Many mothers of these young boys share with women at the Provincial Peace Councils not just that these young boys need employment and income, but that sentiments of justice are strong 'push and pull' factors among them. The weak governance, abuse of the police and armed forces in a community, and lack of inclusion in the local and national processes that impact young boys' lives, are key in the recruitment processes into the insurgency.⁸ Meanwhile, women as mothers and wives of Taliban militants, and the soldiers that defend against these militants, continue to suffer as they lose their loved ones on daily basis.

As ISIS affiliates are emerging in different parts of the country, their brutalities against women and girls have also shocked the country. In the eastern region of Nangrahar⁹ in 2016 and 2017, a number of women and girls went missing after the districts were

attacked and taken over by ISIS affiliates. Families didn't even share the news with their neighbours because they were scared and felt 'dishonoured'.

Unconfirmed reports to the Women and Peace Studies Organization (WPSO) suggested that, in early August 2017, a group of ISIS affiliates and Taliban attacked Mirzawlang of Sarepul in the north, and took away over 47 girls between the ages of 11-22 years old.¹⁰ The families and the provincial government authorities continue to deny their disappearance because 'girls are considered family honour and if they are taken away a family honour is taken away and the families don't want to admit [it]'. The above analysis and description of the context in which Afghan women and girls live on a daily basis provides a baseline to understanding the importance, as well as relevance, of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) agenda for Women, Peace and Security in Afghanistan.

AFGHANISTAN'S NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON UNSCR 1325¹¹

In the context of extensive international engagement in Afghanistan since 2001, women's groups and activists have worked hard to engage themselves in national reconstruction and governance structures. Since international organisations and actors worked with the women's groups and organisations, the principles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and UNSCR 1325 were already incorporated into the women's participation and empowerment programmes, shown by the many laws and policies adopted

- 6 Bakhtar Safi "Taliban ban women from shopping in Kapisa's Tagab", *Pajhwok Afghan News*, 8 September 2017, <https://www.pajhwok.com/en/2017/09/08/taliban-ban-women-shopping-kapisa-s-tagab>
- 7 Research conducted by the Women & Peace Studies Organization (WPSO) can be accessed online at www.wpsa-afg.org. Hard copies of the WPS Forum reports may be obtained directly from WPSO.
- 8 See the case study from 3 provinces on systems conflict analysis done in Afghan Women's Network, Women and Peace Studies Organization, and Women Knowledge and Leadership Organization, *Understanding Local Conflicts: Case Study from Helmand, Logar and Nangrahar Provinces: System Conflict Analysis*, August 2017, <http://wpsa-afg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Conflict-analysis-of-3-provinces.pdf>
- 9 For more on ISIS in Nangrahar see Masood Saifullah, "Nangrahar: Gateway to Afghanistan for 'Islamic State'", *DW*, 30 December 2015, <http://www.dw.com/en/nangrahar-gateway-to-afghanistan-for-islamic-state/a-18952201>
- 10 See also Abdul Matin Sahak and Hamid Shalizi, "Attackers kill dozens of Afghan villagers in northern province", *Reuters*, 6 August 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-islamic-state/attackers-kill-dozens-of-afghan-villagers-in-northern-province-idUSKBN1AM00G>
- 11 Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorate of Human Rights and Women's International Affairs, *Afghanistan's National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 – Women, Peace, and Security, 2015-2022* (Kabul, Afghanistan: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, June 2015), available online at https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/wps-afghanistan_national_action_plan_1325_0.pdf

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| 1 Afghan Constitution with Gender Equality provisions | 10 Procedure for the prevention of discrimination |
| 2 Elimination of Violence against Women Law (EVAW) | 11 Amendment of some of the provisions in the Civil Servants Law in favour of women |
| 3 National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) (2008 – 2018) | 12 National Strategy for Elimination of Violence against Women and its Implementation Plan |
| 4 Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) | 13 Modification of Electoral Law with a view to gender equality (National Unity Government) |
| 5 Family Law | 14 Adoption of regulation for the prevention of sexual harassment (National Unity Government) |
| 6 Regulation on women shelters or Women Protection Centers | 15 Anti-Harassment Law |
| 7 Policy to increase girls' enrolment in schools | 16 Policy to improve female prisoner's access to justice (National Unity Government). |
| 8 Law on guardianship of orphaned children | |
| 9 National Economic Empowerment Program | |

Figure 1: List of the laws and policies developed for women's rights since 2001.

to protect women's rights since 2001 (see Figure 1). Even in the absence of an official NAP, Afghan women mobilised themselves in the Constitution drafting processes, in legislative equality, and achieved many other accomplishments for women's rights in the country. In 2009 when the group of women learnt about the behind the scenes talks with the Taliban, the women's groups campaigned for inclusive and transparent peace processes and ensured that the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program that was adopted at the Afghanistan London Conference in 2010 included women's perspectives.¹²

All the laws, policies, and plans of the government listed in Figure 1 are influenced by CEDAW, especially the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan, though this plan was never implemented fully. Women's groups and activists mobilised en masse during the adoption of the 2004 National Constitution to ensure that the law addressed gender equality before the law and effectively enshrined the government's obligation to advance women's access to

health, education, job opportunities, and family welfare. Likewise, CEDAW articles were utilised during the drafting process of the country's first Elimination of Violence against Women Law during 2008/09 and many forms of violations against women that had not been criminalised before (in the 1970s Penal Code) were recognised as crimes against women including rape. Afghanistan submitted its first report in 2013 to the CEDAW committee.

Afghanistan's NAP was formalised as a result of lobbying work by the women's groups and organisations. The Afghan government initiated the process of consultations for the NAP in 2011 by working with a number of women's organisations and activists to establish a consultative process at the national and provincial levels. There were two phases to the process: the consultation and drafting phase; and the finalisation and adoption phase.

12 United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, "Communiqué of 'Afghanistan: The London Conference'", January 2010, <https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/Communique%20of%20London%20Conference%20on%20Afghanistan.pdf>

Consultation and drafting phase

The Afghan NAP officially claims to have followed a robust consultation process across the country, consulting with many relevant actors and agencies. However, many women's organisations and groups are still critical of the process. They believe only a small group of people were engaged and consulted. The process of consultations evolved around the elite women in Kabul and in major provinces where the security situation allowed for consultations to be held. Provinces that have war and/or insurgency going on could not be part of the consultations, like the southern region of Loya Kandahar that includes Kandhar, Zabul, Uruzgan, and Helmand. Only the Afghan Women's Network, a network of around 120 women's organisations, was invited formally to join the process and many groups and organisations that were not part of the Network remained excluded.

Nevertheless, a steering committee was established at the Deputy Minister level, comprising representatives from all the ministries and agencies that are part of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda (these include security sector ministries, the High Peace Council, Ministry of Women's Affairs, the education sector, and the development sector) and this committee participated in the drafting and consultation process. The consultation mainly took place in the provincial capitals and in urban areas, again as a result of the lack of mobility and security challenges in more remote regions of the country.

The on-the-ground realities for women living under insurgency and under rule of, or threats of attack from, the Taliban are excluded from the Afghan NAP because the consultations were not held in those areas due to the manifest security challenges. While a large part of the population lives under the Taliban's influence and control,¹³ excluding women from these communities in the NAP means the plan is detached from the challenges faced by women in local villages and districts.

Moreover, the female members of the Provincial Peace Councils (PPCs) who worked for peacebuilding in their provinces were not consulted in a systematic and targeted manner. Some of them ended up in the consultation process at the regional level because they happened to have another position besides being a member of the PPC, while the rest of them continue to remain unaware of the Afghan NAP and the processes involved.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), with funding from the Finnish government and technical expertise of UN Women, initiated the drafting process; as the agenda of WPS is new to Afghanistan, the Ministry lacked skills and capabilities to ensure that the consultation processes were transparent and inclusive of all relevant actors and agencies. The process of consultations and then drafting also did not include a clear assessment of the women's issues and policy-level priorities of the government within the WPS agenda and this resulted in the drafting of an Afghan NAP that does not have a baseline assessment. Successful achievement of its milestones and indicators will not be possible without a proper baseline assessment. For example, one of the security sector indicators includes a 10 per cent increase of women in the police force. However, in the absence of a baseline, it is impossible to measure an increase.

While women's engagement in the police and security sector is a priority for the women's movement in the country, the plan lacks clear procedures on how to increase the number of women in the security sector, and how to ensure a safe and enabling environment for women in police and army that should include their recruitment, retention, promotion, capacity building, and protection mechanisms.

Another issue that emerged during the drafting process is the lack of a monitoring and evaluation system that needed to be embedded within the Afghan NAP. The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

13 Bill Roggio, "Taliban controls or contests 40 percent of Afghan districts: SIGAR", *FDD's Long War Journal*, 1 May 2017, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/05/taliban-controls-or-contests-40-percent-of-afghan-districts-sigar.php>

strategy came into effect after the NAP was finalised and approved by the National Unity Government in June 2015. If the M&E strategy was incorporated into the NAP, it would have been more specific and results-oriented; the issue of the lack of a baseline could have been addressed as well. Furthermore, the draft didn't accompany an action plan or implementation strategy. Since the process has taken years, many people changed positions, and a different group than those who drafted the Afghan NAP developed the implementation strategy much later in the process.

The NAP raises huge expectations, as it claims to achieve so many objectives, from women's inclusion in peace and security agendas, elections, and judicial structures, to combating gender-based violence and providing psychosocial support, from relief and recovery programmes for refugees and vulnerable women to the provision of education and higher education opportunities for women. However, as the implementation strategy and indicators indicate, there is a distinct lack of clarity about how these objectives will be achieved and what level of resources can be committed by the government and its international partners.

Finalisation and Adoption Process

The Afghan NAP was adopted in June 2015 by the President of the National Unity Government (NUG) in Kabul as an effort to boost the inclusion and participation of women within national peace and security frameworks.¹⁴ The adoption came after a lengthy process of finalisation by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its international partners.

There has been criticism of the delayed finalisation of the plan. There are also concerns expressed by various women's organisations and activists that the NAP needed to have more substance and deeper analysis of the current challenges of women

within the country, as well as concrete actions by the NUG to improve the situation and condition of Afghan women.

Although the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, and the Women's Commission of Parliament have developed plans and strategies to combat violence against women, promote women's rights, and ensure their inclusion in the national and local processes, little has been drawn from these documents during the finalisation process of the NAP. For example, the Ministry of Women's Affairs¹⁵ developed a comprehensive National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) and they are critical that NAPWA was not incorporated into the NAP. The two plans do not synchronise, even though both have the same goal: women's empowerment in Afghanistan.

Likewise, similar concerns have been raised by the female members of the High Peace Council,¹⁶ whose initial mandate was to ensure women's voices are part of the national peace process. These women have been allowed minimal contributions into the development and finalisation of the Afghan NAP. They had recommended that, since the High Peace Council had also been engaged in outreach activities to foster women's participation in the peace process, the NAP needed to ensure that their contributions and roles are also recognised and documented. The Plan does not include clear procedures to involve and engage women in peace negotiations with the Taliban and other conflict actors, resolutions, and reconciliations at every stage.

The plan remains a 'wish list of many dreams', with little clarity on the achievable indicators as well as a clear milestone due to lack of the current situation analysis. While a limited number of civil society representatives participated¹⁷ in the finalisation process, many women's organisations criticised the lack of consultation in, and resulting exclusion from, the process.

14 See "Afghanistan enacts National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security", *Nobel Women's Initiative*, 14 July 2015, <https://nobelwomensinitiative.org/afghanistan-enacts-national-action-plan-on-women-peace-and-security/>

15 Interview with the former Director of Planning at the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Kabul, March 2017.

16 Interview with two female members of the High Peace Council in Kabul, March 2017.

17 The Afghan Women's Network has around 100 members and participated in the drafting and finalisation process. Many women's organisations that are not members of the Network believe they were not consulted and included in the process. Interview with Ms Saqeb in Kabul, March 2017.

PARTICIPATION, PROTECTION, PREVENTION AND RELIEF AND RECOVERY

The Afghan NAP is built on the foundation that UNSCR 1325 is relevant to the situation of Afghanistan, which is going through state building, transitional processes, women's empowerment and political participation. The agendas set out in UNSCR 1325 are seen to be of critical importance and use to the context of Afghanistan and therefore Afghanistan obligates itself to the following measures under each of the four 'pillars' of the UNSCR 1325:

Participation:

- Increase effective participation of women in the decision-making and executive levels of the Civil Service;
- Women's active and effective participation in leadership positions in security agencies;
- Ensuring women's effective participation in the peace process;
- Encouraging women's meaningful participation in the drafting of strategies and policies on peace and security;
- Strengthening women's active participation in elections.

Protection:

- The protection of women from all forms of violence and discrimination through the enforcement, monitoring, and amendment of existing laws and development of new laws and policies;
- Women's human rights are promoted through gender mainstreaming of laws, policies, and institutional reforms;
- Providing for an enabling environment for women to have access to justice through their effective participation in the judiciary;
- The protection of women from all forms of violence through awareness raising and public outreach;
- Health, psychological, and social support is available for survivors of violence throughout Afghanistan;

- Special measures are in place ensuring women's protection from sexual violence.

Prevention:

- Prevention of violence against women;
- The elimination of the culture of impunity surrounding violence against women;
- Strengthen the role of women in the security sector and judicial structures;
- Gender-related reforms in the security and justice sector;
- Involve men and boys in the fight against all forms of violence against women;
- Increase awareness among women of their rights and their role in preventing violence and resolving conflict.

Relief and Recovery:

- Provision of relief and recovery services for women affected by conflict, internally displaced persons (IDP), and women survivors of violence;
- Increasing rural women's economic security through increased employment opportunities;
- The social and economic needs of women are considered in the design, implementation, and evaluation of relief and recovery programmes;
- Girls and women's increased access to education, healthcare services, and employment, particularly for refugees, the internally displaced, and returnees;
- The implementation of the IDP policy provisions related to UNSCR 1325.

While these actions and measures are of great importance for achieving gender equality in the country, implementation continues to be the critical aspect of the NAP. The NAP is divided into two phases. The first phase is commencement, from 2015-2018, and the second phase, from 2019-2022, is for implementation: to see changes in the situation of Afghan women.



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CONNECTING THE LOCAL TO THE NATIONAL

Afghanistan is clearly divided between urban and rural communities. While the urban communities living in big cities like Kabul, Mazar, Hirat, Nangrahar, and Kandahar have had a basic access to education, health facilities, jobs, and most importantly state institutions, the rural communities have run on their own during the years of civil war and beyond. They have been governed under the Jirga or Shura rule, which empowers tribal leaders and elders based on their wealth, identity, ancestors’ name and fame, and/or even based on their ties with the armed groups. During recent years, the Taliban strengthened their grip on the affairs of rural areas and took advantage of the lack of state institutions in those communities, established their writ deciding the face of civil and criminal disputes. Communities conformed having no other options.¹⁸

Contemporary research claims that around 70-80 per cent of Afghans live in rural areas with minimal or no contact with state institutions or access to basic services. In such circumstances, where women are entirely illiterate, do not have any access to health and education, nor any community level engagement, the idea of a National Action Plan remains alien. However, there is not adequate data due to the lack of access to most of the rural areas to generalise this assumption to the larger population

of the country; this lack of data prevents a thorough assessment of the ‘localisation’ of the NAP and the traction of the WPS agenda in Afghanistan more broadly.

While the NAP is considered a national plan, it clearly lacks all the elements required to connect the grassroots engagements of women’s leaders and women’s groups to the central government institutions. The security situation and lack of mobility in different parts of the country are major challenges for the government, the international community, and even the women-led NGOs based in Kabul, and connections with local women’s organisations has not been established in a systematic manner.

The changing nature of conflict is evident in Afghanistan: from an insurgency towards brutal killing of civilians and women in particular, to radicalisation of young men with violent extremism ideologies which continues to happen at the local levels. These issues have not made their way into the NAP’s situational analysis or measures to change.

Another missing link is that between the NAP and all the other parallel and allied WPS-focused programmes and projects run by international partners, NGOs, and local women’s organisations. These should have been incorporated into the implementation plan, to ensure that there is a coordinated and coherent effort for the realisation of women’s meaningful participation. So many ad hoc WPS-related activities by the international community and NGOs are currently underway and are not synchronised with the NAP.

18 Kara Jensen, “Obstacles to Accessing the State Justice System in Rural Afghanistan”, *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 18 (2) (2011): 929-950.

IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Security remains the number one challenge for the implementation of the NAP at the provincial and local levels where insurgency is taking shape and continues to recruit and arm thousands of young Afghans. Many of the provinces and communities that are under direct threat of insurgency were prevented from engaging in the consultation process around the NAP in the first place. Today, as per the reports from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan's Reconstruction (SIGAR), the Taliban contest and influence around 40 per cent of the territory of Afghanistan¹⁹ and that makes it almost impossible for the Afghan government and international community to implement the NAP nationally. However, the local civil society groups and organisations that are established at the provincial levels might be the right platform for implementation because they are able to engage in outreach with their own communities and since they come from the same communities, the threats of the Taliban will be lesser to them than to those groups and organisations coming from Kabul.

Another challenge for implementation remains the lack of resources. It took the Ministry of Finance more than two years to finalise the costing of the NAP as per the donors' requirements. Even now, at the time of writing this paper, the costing is not finalised between the Afghan government and the donors. While the NAP was being developed, Afghanistan had more than 150,000 international forces engaged as part of the NATO/ISAF coalition forces which rapidly transitioned into less than 15,000 in 2016 and 2017; this has a huge impact on the level of resources that come to Afghanistan as part of military or development aid packages, as most of the funds that came to Afghanistan were part of the international community's military engagement. The Nordic countries – mainly Finland and the European Union – remain the main supporters of the NAP.

Before the Brussels-Afghanistan Conference, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs produced the first report on the implementation of the Afghan NAP to gauge the attention of the international partners and donors,²⁰ although implementation has not yet started officially because of the funding challenges. MOFA's progress report illustrates the progress made, and initiatives undertaken, by the government and by international partners as well as NGOs and women's groups, for the promotion and inclusion of women in the peace and security structures of the country, as

19 Bill Roggio, "Taliban controls or contests 40 percent of Afghan districts: SIGAR", *FDD's Long War Journal*, 1 May 2017, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/05/taliban-controls-or-contests-40-percent-of-afghan-districts-sigar.php>

20 Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Progress Report on Women's Status and Empowerment and National Action Plan (NAP 1325)* (Kabul, Afghanistan: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016), http://mfa.gov.af/Content/Media/Documents/Progress_Report_on_Women_Rights1610201610265714553325325.pdf



Wazhma Frogh and other activists at a protest against the Taliban's stoning of a woman in Parwan province, 2011.

well as gender mainstreaming within the government. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance have been working for the past two years to finalise the NAP budget following its adoption by the President. However, there is a general consensus among government and the women's organisations in Afghanistan that for many activities of gender mainstreaming there isn't a need for additional budgets because the government agencies have already been obliged to ensure gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment in their operations and programmes that will directly impact the implementation of the NAP.

It's important to note that the Afghan government has appointed a number of women to leadership and management positions in the cabinet, as the governors, judges, prosecutors, and has increased efforts to raise the number of women in the police and army. All this has been part of the lobby and advocacy work by the women's groups and activists with the President and the First Lady of the country.

The NAP provides a list of objectives, actions, and expected results and indicators. It also clarifies the role of the lead agencies and the supporting agencies for implementation of each activity. The plan envisions that whole government agencies will ensure that UNSCR 1325 provisions are incorporated into their work and also has identified a set of actions for each government ministry or agency. However, a specific implementation plan, with clear timeline and budget is still not in place to implement the NAP in a successful manner. Women's organisations and activists continue to lobby for the finalisation of the budget and the costing process. These same women are also asking the government for a monitoring and evaluation plan to ensure that activities implemented are able to bring positive changes into the lives of Afghan women. A responsive M&E system based on results would require the NAP to have concrete outcomes, resources for the implementation, and organisational structures for better implementation. Clear and transparent planning, monitoring, and community consultation processes will allow civil society organisations to evaluate and measure the impact of the indicators set out in the NAP.



While the NAP is considered a national plan, it clearly lacks all the elements required to connect the grassroots engagements of women's leaders and women's groups to the central government institutions.

CONCLUSION AND WAYS FORWARD

The Afghan NAP is an important document for the women of Afghanistan. The country continues to suffer terribly as a result of the conflicts and atrocities by the Taliban, local warlords, and armed groups, as well as international and regional terrorist groups. Women are a target group for all these perpetrators of violence, not least because they are considered to be agents of change and therefore a threat to existence of the war and insurgency altogether.

As the country is moving towards reforms and improving institutional capacities, the role and contributions of women should not be ignored. The NAP, if implemented properly, will enable a relatively positive inclusion and participation of women into the national processes for peace building and democratic changes.

The key challenges in the process have been two-fold: first, the NAP lacked an inclusive drafting process, producing a document that lacks clarity around timeline, implementation plan, and impact measures, and which does not include an established baseline assessment; and, second, the NAP lacks connection between local people's efforts around peace building and community engagements.

As outlined above, there are other concerns around implementation that are preventing the realisation of the 'many dreams' recorded in the NAP. These challenges pose great concerns for successful implementation of the WPS agenda. As a first priority, however, the budget and the implementation plan need to be finalised by the government so that implementation can begin. The government needs to ensure that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as a central coordinating body, has the required capacity and the political will to ensure that all relevant actors are part of the implementation processes and a clear reporting procedure should be devised to inform the public on the results.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. While the Afghan NAP is already developed and adopted, and the implementation plan is not yet public, it is important for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to engage a larger group of experts, activists, and women at the local level in the implementation plan. This group should be able to prioritise the objectives and indicators that can be achieved during the first NAP phase, which is active until 2022.

2. The budget and the costing for new activities under the NAP should be finalised as soon as possible since it is already late; Afghanistan was supposed to start the implementation of the NAP in the second half of 2015. The budget could include the prioritised activities and indicators for the next five years.

3. Afghanistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs should re-activate the Steering Committee meetings and the Technical Working Group meetings to coordinate the implementation of NAP-related activities. These activities are currently being undertaken by government agencies and civil society organisations but are not recognised as part of the official Afghan NAP budget and costing procedures. These are off-budget activities for NGOs and civil society organisations.

4. Besides the official representatives of the government agencies in these groups and meetings, a number of women's organisations, activists, and experts need to be included so they provide technical advice as well as more reliable updates about the realities on the ground in areas that are not accessible to government officials.

This is paper 10/2017 in the LSE Women, Peace and Security Working Paper Series.

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