1. Introduction

The recognition that conflict disproportionately affects women is well documented in the conflict and peace-building literature. Given the rise of internal conflicts in particular, women's non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and concerned governments worked together to place this issue, as well as acknowledgement of the part women play in conflict prevention and as advocates for peace, on the international agenda. The adoption of five UN Security Council resolutions (UNSCRs) dealing with women, peace and security – 1325, 1820, 1888 1889 and 1960 – was an attempt to meet the call for more nuanced understandings of the various ways in which conflicts affect women, to provide greater protection for women in conflict situations and to ensure that women are included in all aspects of peace-building and conflict resolution processes. In addition, the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005–2015 (PoA) outlines a variety of closely linked objectives designed to attain gender equality more generally, while one of its four areas of focus is gender, democracy, peace and conflict. Although these resolutions and the PoA are far-reaching in scope, to date their effectiveness is hindered by low implementation.

Since UNSCR 1325 was adopted in 2000 only 33 countries[1] have developed national action plans (NAPs) for its implementation, as called for by the Security Council in two Presidential Statements (United Nations 2004; 2005). Of the 54 members of the Commonwealth, only 5 countries have done so to date. Given that conflict has affected a number of Commonwealth countries, with numerous negative impacts on women and girls, there is a strong need for all member states to adopt and implement these resolutions. This need is exacerbated by the continued minimal presence of women in conflict resolution and peace-building processes in general.

The Commonwealth Secretariat is committed to assisting its members to develop NAPs to implement UNSCR 1325 and the PoA in light of the urgency of the situation. The purpose of this book is to contribute to these efforts. Chapter 2 outlines theories on the role of women in conflict, peacemaking and post-conflict reconciliation to contextualise the discussion and also provides more information on UNSCR 1325 (which is supplied in full in the Annex). Chapter 3 presents a number of case studies of countries undergoing and/or recovering from conflict where, despite their extensive engagement in work for peace and other activities to bring an end to violence, women

have not been included in formal peace-building and conflict resolution processes. It also offers a number of reasons for why this has been the case.

Chapter 4 then examines countries in which women's engagement in conflict resolution has led to the adoption of NAPs. A central question considered here is what practices or linkages contributed to the achievement of greater numbers of women in decision-making organs generally or in peace-building more specifically. However, it is important to note that the adoption of a NAP does not necessarily mean that women were involved in formal processes of conflict resolution and/or the signing of peace agreements. Thus this chapter also examines whether – and, if so, how – NAPS have contributed to strengthening women's engagement in conflict resolution, peace-building and overall political participation. The final section of the chapter examines the two examples in the Commonwealth of countries that have implemented NAPs although not experiencing conflict domestically.

Chapter 5 then uses paragraphs from UNSCR 1325 to trace the progress selected Commonwealth countries have made in attaining the goals outlined therein. Some possible scenarios are also suggested concerning the future prospects for women's political participation in these countries.

Finally, in light of the examined impact of NAPs on women's participation in peace processes in particular and political participation more generally, Chapter 6 frames some recommendations for the Commonwealth Secretariat, strategic partners and member states.

This publication is informed by a desk review of relevant research that examines the role of women in conflict prevention, resolution and peace-building in general. The assessments made are based on the author's interpretation and analysis of this research.

Note

1. As of November 2011, according to the NGO PeaceWomen. More information, including links to the existing plans, can be found at: www.peacewomen.org/pages/about-1325/national-action-plans-naps