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## 4. Women and National Action Plans (NAPs)

The discussion in Chapter 3 has painted a somewhat gloomy overall picture of the ability of women to translate increased activism during conflict into involvement in formal mechanisms of peace-building as well as political participation more broadly. However, as the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005–2015 (PoA) notes, there have been some concrete accomplishments:

‘In response to the target set by the Fifth Meeting of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women’s Affairs (5WAMM), requiring that by 2005 at least 30 per cent of those in political and decision-making positions should be women, 12 Commonwealth countries had achieved women’s representation in parliament of between 20 and 30 per cent by October 2003, with three (Mozambique, New Zealand and South Africa) consistently attaining the 30 per cent target. Since 1999, 24 countries have recorded an increase in female parliamentary representation, and there has been an appreciable rise in the number of female Ministers and Deputy Ministers.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2005: 19)<sup>1</sup>

National action plans (NAPs) can help countries be accountable to the laudable ideals and vision laid out in UNSCR 1325. This chapter provides a review of countries that have implemented NAPs and explores the differences between implementing countries recovering from conflict and countries primarily engaged in peacekeeping activities overseas.

### Women’s involvement in the adoption of NAPs

As already mentioned, NAPs have been adopted in 5 of the 54 Commonwealth countries. These are Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Uganda in sub-Saharan Africa and Canada and the United Kingdom in the industrialised North.

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## Rwanda

Rwanda is often cited as a success story in terms of translating women's roles in peace-building into political representation following conflict. In so doing, it offers support to the thesis that conflict can provide women with new opportunities. Given that many men were killed during the genocide, the resulting demographic shift (around 70 per cent of the population were women when it was over) meant that women assumed roles traditionally ascribed to men such as heads of households as well as taking up occupations typically dominated by men such as mechanics and cab drivers (Mzvondiwa 2007).

Although women did play a role in carrying out the genocide, their participation was minimal with 2.3 per cent of genocide suspects being women (Powley 2003). However, Tutsi women were targeted during the conflict and suffered from rape, abduction and torture as well as death. Forming the government in the aftermath of genocide, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) prioritised women's inclusion in governance and peace-building. Thus the Rwandan case also illustrates the importance of a proactive government in ensuring that women retain the new spaces occupied during conflict.

The Rwandan Government made sure to formalise roles for women within political institutional structures. A total of 20 out of 80 seats were set aside for women, and there are posts throughout various levels of government charged with addressing women's concerns as well as providing training in gender awareness (Mzvondiwa 2007). Some of the reasons for emphasising women's inclusion in post-war governance structures stem from the same essentialist arguments outlined above, namely that women are more naturally oriented toward forgiveness and reconciliation, as well as the argument that since they were most affected by the violence, they would be most likely to want to work to overcome it (Powley 2003). Thus, Rwanda shows that essentialist-based arguments can nevertheless result in increased inclusion of women in political participation. Furthermore, some would argue that the critical mass of women is contributing to the passage of legislation that addresses women's concerns. Women have been able to successfully lobby for greater allocation of health-care spending, for example, as well as enact changes to land inheritance laws to be more favourable to women (Norville 2011).

In addition, Powley (2003) found that RPF exposure to Uganda's political system, which also prioritised women's inclusion through a quota system, helped to foster a similar sense of the importance of gender inclusion. This suggests that encouraging Commonwealth countries to adopt NAPs can have the beneficial effect of helping to institutionalise and normalise the perception that women should be included in political institutions.

However, while Rwanda has done well in ensuring women's political representation, with mechanisms in place even before the launching of the NAP for 1325 in May 2010, some commentators have noted that its record in involving women in peace negotiations has not been equally good. For example, women were not well represented in the Gacaca<sup>2</sup> court system and although the post-genocidal courts

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do allow for greater representation, women's influence remains comparatively low (Binder et al. 2008).

### **Sierra Leone**

One of the key benefits of NAPs is that they can be developed within a country's specific historical, political and social context, as reflected in Sierra Leone's plan launched in March 2010. Spearheaded by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, in close partnership with civil society organisations led primarily by women – the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding-Sierra Leone (WANEP) and the Mano River Union Peace Network (MARWOPNET) – the development of the plan also involved a broad spectrum of stakeholders including other government line ministries, parliamentarians and UN agencies.

The NAP established five priority pillars:<sup>3</sup>

1. Contribute to reduced conflict including violence against women/children;
2. Protect and empower victims/vulnerable persons especially women and girls;
3. Prosecute perpetrators effectively and safeguard women's/girls' human rights to protection (during and post-conflict) as well as rehabilitation;
4. Contribute to the increased participation and representation of women;
5. Ensure effective co-ordination of the implementation process including resource mobilisation, monitoring and evaluation of and reporting on the NAP.

As such, it highlights key areas for intervention and evaluation. The collaboration of so many varied stakeholders and the extensive involvement of local and international partners can help provide a strong framework for awareness raising, capacity building and overall monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the NAP, but it will take time for the effects of the plan to be identified and assessed.

### **Uganda**

Uganda has suffered a long history of violence that can be traced as far back as independence. The present conflict has lasted over 20 years, with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) under rebel leader Joseph Kony being particularly brutal and committing acts of unspeakable violence. Women and children have been especially affected, subject to abductions, widespread rape and murder. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) an estimated 7,500 girls have been abducted and more than 1,000 babies born in captivity (cited in International Crisis Group 2006). In 2005 the conflict took a new turn as the LRA moved into the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and it has contributed to further destabilisation and conflict there as well as in Sudan (Binder et al. 2008). The conflicts have also led to widespread displacement and refugee flows.

However, as has been seen in other situations of conflict highlighted above, women were not only victims but also played active roles. The absence of men meant that women stepped into positions traditionally held by men including combatants, breadwinners and household heads (ibid.). Additionally, women have played instrumental

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roles in trying to bring the conflict to an end and address some of its impacts. Women in the north have been involved in a range of activities geared toward promoting peace, including demonstrations against violence and facilitating reconciliation between community members and former LRA members. Women have also worked to address the needs of victims of violence through, for example, the creation of a reception centre where formerly abducted girls are offered counselling services and life skills (International Crisis Group 2006). Most of their activities have been at the community level with very few opportunities for involvement in national-level peace talks, to which they have not been invited. Nevertheless, women do attend such talks. For example, and despite not being accorded an official voice in the negotiations, women travelled from various locations in Uganda by bus, donkey and on foot to peace talks being held in Sudan in 2006 to articulate their demands for peace (Nieuwoudt 2006; Norville 2011).

Although a key negotiator in trying to bring an end to the conflict is a woman (and former government minister), she appears to be a rare exception. This marginalisation is despite the fact that Uganda has been recognised as having one of the strongest and best organised peace movements in the region, one that builds on largely self-funded local activists who receive training and support from a Kampala-based NGO, Isis Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange (Isis-WICCE). These peace animators in turn train other women to identify and mediate in community-based conflicts (International Crisis Group 2006). What is lacking however, is support (both political and financial) from the Government as well as donors for such locally grounded initiatives as well as inclusion in broader peacemaking activities. Although Uganda released the 'Uganda Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 and the Goma Declaration' in December 2008, such support is not yet apparent.

Uganda's NAP attempts to incorporate the provisions of the documents it cites and focuses on implementing a legal and policy framework to advance women, improve access to health facilities, increase the availability of psychosocial services as well as medical treatment for women survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, and ensure adequate budgetary allocations to implement all the resolutions. Even before releasing the NAP, Uganda also had a quota system in place to ensure women's political participation through the reservation of a seat in every district (30) for women candidates. As of July 2011, women constitute 34.9 per cent of the legislature (IPU 2011). However, a central concern is that much of the plan has yet to be implemented, and that while on paper women appear to be equal to men, in practice inequality remains. Women need training to be able to perform well in the positions they occupy and to make a difference. Women are also still discriminated against – for example, while women are present within the military and serve alongside men, they face abuse and ill treatment (Kagumire 2010). Furthermore, despite their presence in the formal institutions of governance, much like in Rwanda they remain underrepresented in formal peace negotiations (Binder et al. 2008).

Women also continue to experience high levels of sexual and gender-based violence despite the existence of punitive laws and policies. This supports research showing that given the conditions of impunity that exist during periods of civil

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conflict, sexual violence can continue to rise even after official ceasefires (Norville 2011). However, having the policies on the books at least provides a framework through which abuses of the resolutions can be addressed and punitive measures pursued against perpetrators.

## **NAPs in countries at peace: a different experience**

For countries at peace, NAPs appear primarily oriented toward the engagement of soldiers deployed with overseas local populations. A brief review of the NAPs in Canada and the United Kingdom illustrates these points. While the NAPs reveal commendable commitments, including increasing the numbers of women peacekeepers in overseas missions, there are constraints within countries that must first be addressed. Women tend to enlist in low numbers in the armed forces, which naturally has ramifications for the number of women that can be assigned to overseas posts. It is therefore important to provide incentives for such enlistment in developed countries that contribute troops to peacekeeping missions (Norville 2011). There is evidence that increasing women's participation as peacekeepers has a number of benefits including reduced rates of sexual abuse of civilians by troops (ibid.). Female peacekeepers can not only provide women with a greater sense of security but also, by serving as role models in the local community, help empower women to push for the right to participate in formal peace processes.

### **United Kingdom**

The United Kingdom initially developed its NAP in 2006 but revised it in 2010, coinciding with the 10-year anniversary of 1325. In contrast to the previously mentioned Commonwealth countries, whose background of conflict resulted in plans with heavy domestic orientation, the UK plan has significant external emphasis, focusing especially on the country's work in conflict resolution and peace-building through deployment of peacekeeping troops. While the plan ensures that the four pillars of prevention, protection, participation and relief and recovery are covered, it principally provides guidelines for British engagement in the field (national and bilateral) and within multilateral institutions such as the UN and European Union (EU).

At the national level, elements of the plan include provisions for the training of British troops so that peacekeeping and peace-building operations are gendered. They also call for (an increase in) the inclusion of women in British military and police personnel deployed in peace support operations, as a step to making sure that women fully participate in any peace-building missions in which they are involved, and for political support of multilateral institutions. At the bilateral level the plan outlines actions being taken in specific field contexts, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in support of 1325; at the multilateral level, it sets out a framework to support the overall strengthening of UN and EU measures in the implementation of 1325. The UK is currently reviewing its national action plan.

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## Canada

Canada's NAP was launched in October 2010 and shares many similarities with that of the United Kingdom in terms of a focus on overseas engagement since the country is also at peace domestically. The emphasis is on ensuring that personnel receive gender training so they can better understand and address issues related to women, peace and security in the field. It is also hoped that this will lead to interventions that emphasise the participation of women and girls in formal peace-building operations as well as ensure their equal access to development assistance. Moreover, the plan does not only cover the Canadian military; it also targets Canadian NGOs and recommends they adopt codes of conduct in their work to address issues of sexual exploitation and abuse in humanitarian crises.

## Benefits of NAPS

Although the above has pointed to some of the constraints faced even by countries with NAPs, there are a number of benefits as well. One of the central tenets of 1325 is the inclusion of women at all decision-making levels including parliament and the judiciary. In many post-conflict countries, high numbers of women are reported in political positions. As already mentioned, Rwanda has the highest number of women parliamentary representatives worldwide. Women's representation has increased in other post-conflict countries as well. In Kosovo, women make up 28 per cent of parliamentary and municipal assemblies; 25 per cent of seats in the 2005 elections held in Afghanistan were reserved for women; and in the same year, women in Iraq gained 31 per cent of seats in parliament (UN Facts and Figures, cited in Binder et al. 2008).

While women's rights in these countries are still not fully guaranteed (for example, women including parliamentarians still face intimidation and abuse in Afghanistan<sup>4</sup>), numbers can nevertheless be important. Scholars have theorised that having a 'critical mass' of women represented politically – 30 per cent is widely recognised as the minimum necessary – makes a difference in terms of implementing gender-friendly laws and policies (Dahlerup 1988; Jaquette 1997; Sainsbury 2004). Along these lines, Powley (2006) found that women in the Rwandan Parliament have been able to advocate effectively to address problems faced by children and families, resulting in some gains at the level of policy outcomes.

Such gains are important since discriminatory national laws remain one of the primary barriers that constrain women's position in post-conflict societies. In sharing her experiences at a United States Institute of Peace conference on best practices for women's engagement in conflict, a female Ugandan Member of Parliament (MP) talked of being able to organise with other women MPs and advocate for gendered policies addressing women's needs in post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Among their successes were advocacy for trauma counselling, inclusion of maternity wards in the construction of planned hospitals and funding for women to start up their own businesses (Norville 2011).

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The design of NAPs to facilitate implementation of 1325 can potentially contribute to the overall improvement of women's status in society since the resolution addresses a range of concerns that have served to undermine women's roles and adversely affect their well-being and empowerment.

While not necessarily resulting in women's engagement in formal peace processes, quota systems for women in politics are in place in at least two of the countries with NAPs (Rwanda and Uganda), reflecting the call in 1325 for increased political participation and representation of women. Women's political engagement can help to create conditions that encourage greater attention to their rights and roles once conflict has ended, and women can build on this momentum to encourage governments to adopt NAPS.

However, given that there are other countries where women were engaged in conflict resolution activities that have not translated into the creation of NAPs, the existence of such groups of women alone is clearly not enough. One thing the three post-conflict countries with NAPs have in common is political structures that are supportive, at least in theory, of women's rights; it appears then that both activism and supportive political structures are necessary to facilitate the adoption of NAPs. This calls for a committed government – one that recognises and appreciates women's efforts, believes that these efforts have been crucial for building peace and is willing to grant greater political representation to women through institutional mechanisms such as quotas to ensure that these efforts are successful. Greater political representation in turn can lead to changes in laws and policies that constrain women: for example, as mentioned above, women in Rwanda have actively campaigned for the revision of discriminatory laws as well as the implementation of other laws that promote women's socioeconomic development (Powley 2006).

In terms of countries at peace, the two examples looked at – Canada and the United Kingdom – are troop-contributing ones for which NAPs function as an effective way to guide conflict mediation activities in the field and ensure a gender perspective is part of all activities, from peacekeeping to peace-building. This in turn can help reinforce domestic mechanisms to improve women's involvement in peacekeeping processes and political participation more generally. Moreover, such countries can put political pressure on UN agencies and other multilateral institutions to implement 1325 at the highest levels and make sure they follow through on commitments, especially regarding the appointment of women in high-ranking positions within peacekeeping missions. This is especially important since humanitarian intervention often determines how resources are allocated following conflicts and where priority is placed. Ensuring that interventions at all levels are gendered – from peace-building mechanisms to humanitarian aid to development assistance – is a crucial step in reinforcing the message that women count. Moreover, where women are involved substantially in conflict resolution, peacemaking and peace-building processes, the likelihood of sustainable peace increases.

As the case studies illustrate, however, simply implementing NAPs is not the sole answer to the question of how to increase women's participation in peace-building processes and political representation and redress existing gender-based inequalities.

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While NAPs are an instrumental component of holding countries accountable to 1325, a number of underlying factors need to be addressed that can hinder their effective implementation (or the adoption of NAPS in the first place). Women still face significant barriers in Rwanda and Uganda, for example, even though the governments are committed to ensuring their political representation. In both these countries, participation in peace-building processes remains low despite high numbers of women in government. The same is true of Sierra Leone, although there are fewer female parliamentary representatives there. Sexual and gender-based violence still require urgent attention and women continue to have limited educational and economic opportunities, to name just a few issues. While the value of a NAP is that it establishes precedents and sets in place legal structures that can reduce the constraints women face, as well as monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to keep track of the effectiveness of these instruments, underlying barriers that hinder effective implementation must also be dealt with.

## Notes

1. Seven Commonwealth countries have over 30 per cent at the time of writing including Rwanda, which tops the table internationally at 56.3 per cent (IPU 2011).
2. The Gacaca courts are open-air community trials established in 2001 to help the Government expedite the huge numbers of prisoners accused of genocidal acts. They are based on traditional or grassroots systems of communal justice where judges come from the community and trials are public events. The courts operate alongside the ICTR and handle cases of defendants who, while not implicated in the planning of genocide, nevertheless participated in acts of killing. The public nature of the trials, as well as the involvement of victims in the sentencing of those found guilty, is also meant to promote national reconciliation and healing.
3. The full Sierra Leone National Action Plan can be accessed at: [www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/NationalActionPlans/sierra\\_leone\\_nap.pdf](http://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/NationalActionPlans/sierra_leone_nap.pdf)
4. Sitara Achakzai, a female Afghan politician, was killed by the Taliban in 2009 (HuffPost 2009) and another prominent female politician, Malalai Joya, has received numerous threats against her life (BBC News 2005).