
CSSF Women, Peace and Security Helpdesk

Women and Civil Society Voices in the UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security

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The Women Peace and Security Helpdesk, managed by Saferworld in partnership with Conciliation Resources, GAPS UK, University of Durham and Women International Peace Centre (WIPC), was established in December 2021 to increase capability across the UK Government on WPS policy and programming in order to make its work on conflict and instability more effective. If you work for the UK government and you would like to send a task request, please email us at wpshelpdesk@saferworld.org.uk. If you do not work for the UK government but have an enquiry about the helpdesk or this report, please email us at enquiries.wpshelpdesk@saferworld.org.uk

Direct Audience:

To be used by FCDO and MOD to inform the development of the NAP

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Summary

This task's findings are the result of 22 consultations with women's rights organisations (WRO) and civil society organisations (CSO) in three different countries: Somalia, Afghanistan and Myanmar. They reflect their concerns, needs and recommendations in relation to the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda. The findings speak about the need to conduct participatory and intersectional gender-sensitive conflict analysis and meaningful consultations with WROs and CSOs based in conflict-affected contexts to design UK government's policy and programmes. This should be a normalised practice undertaken by all teams at the UK government, and monitored by accountability mechanisms reporting on how have findings informed UK policy and practice.

In addition, there is a generalised lack of funding and resources dedicated to the implementation of the four pillars of the WPS agenda and irregular capabilities from different parts of the UK government to integrate such commitments into their work. A comprehensive and coordinated approach to WPS, including linkages to other strategies and instruments, within the UK government teams would be a step forward to address the majority of the needs and experiences of women and girls. This requires UK government teams across Whitehall and within each institution to integrate WPS commitments and coordinate more effectively, not just on funding but on diplomatic action, policy development and military and security action.

The prevalence of GBV was another concern raised in all three contexts, particularly taking into account the political complexities they are currently facing. WROs and CSOs are demanding a response to GBV beyond protection and particularly including aspects of prevention and participation. They emphasize the need to work on the root causes of GBV, alongside WROs and CSOs that have been working to prevent and end violence against women and girls across all three countries and which should be supported to continue leading on their work.

In fact, the type of funding currently given - subjected to specific projects and does not include funding for core functions and organizational development - undermines the ability of WROs and CSOs to sustain their growth and capacity, as well as their ability to adapt and respond to changing contexts. Easily accessible long-term, direct and core funding would allow for investing in the resilience of civil society, specifically WROs, to continue working on their self-identified priorities.

Finally, efforts to increase and ensure the participation of women, girls and WROs in economic, social and political spheres in the three countries was raised as crucial to ensure effectively delivering on the WPS agenda. This includes women at all levels (grassroots and local to national and international levels) as well as women and WROs involved in conflict and conflict prevention in through different roles (peacebuilders, partisan women, women in security and justice institutions, etc). Participation of women, WROs and networks from conflict-affected countries should also be a priority when designing, implementing and monitoring UK government's policies and programmes.

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Background and introduction

The UK Government commissioned the Women, Peace and Security Helpdesk to consult with women's civil society organisations and activists on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) priorities in their local contexts. The task has been assigned to Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS), who is a partner in the Helpdesk. The consultations' methodology, analysis and recommendations build upon previous FCDO-funded initiatives in which GAPS and its members have conducted research & consultations, including those that fed into the 2019 report '[The 10 Steps: Turning Women, Peace and Security Commitments to Implementation](#)'. These include the 2020 report '[Now and the Future – Pandemics and Crisis: Gender Equality, Peace and Security in a COVID-19 world and beyond](#)' as well as validate and build on GAPS' 2018–2020 annual WPS shadow report and '[The Key to Change: Supporting Civil Society and Women's Rights Organisations in Fragile and Conflict Affected Contexts](#)' recommendations.

These new consultations were conducted in three of the UK's WPS focus countries: Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Somalia and took place in February 2022, in line with the NAP development timeline and context-specific factors. They took place in the form of Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted by gender & women's rights experts in Somalia and Afghanistan, and by Saferworld country staff with gender expertise and who had conducted recent research on WPS in Myanmar.

This summary report highlights key findings and analysis from the in-country consultations, setting out the common priorities, challenges and concerns that women working for WPS and other civil society face in each country. The findings and recommendations are intended to inform the upcoming development of the UK's fifth NAP on WPS, ensuring it is firmly grounded in the realities of women in fragile and conflict affected settings (FCAS) so that proposed objectives, priorities, and activities respond directly to their self-defined needs, priorities and support their initiatives.

This report makes five key recommendations to the UK government on priority themes to consider and include in the next NAP, many which will apply to other contexts not included in these rounds of consultation.

Partners and expert consultants

Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) is the UK's Women, Peace and Security civil society network. We are a membership organisation of 16 NGOs and experts in the field of development, human rights, humanitarian, and peacebuilding. We were founded to progress the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Our role is to promote and hold the UK Government to account on its international commitments to women in conflict areas worldwide

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with local people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national, and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. In Myanmar, interviews were conducted by Melissa Booth, Saferworld's Country Manager and who has a gender background, and Naw Anthea, Saferworld's Gender Advisor in Myanmar.

Shukria Dini (Somalia) is a gender expert, Founder & Executive Director of Somali Women's Studies Centre (SWSC), a non-profit organization based in Mogadishu & Kismayo, Somalia. She has over 15 years' experience in gender development and mainstreaming initiatives, capacity building for women and youth, research and monitoring and evaluation on development projects and gender and politics, GBV, women's public and political participation in Somalia. Shukria has been researching and writing on Somali women's issues contributing to the understanding of the challenges facing them. She has wide knowledge and experience working with Somali women and understands the dynamic of their marginalization and participation in decision making processes, state-building, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, access to education and justice.

Yalda Royan (Afghanistan) is a senior women's rights activist with 16 years of work experience in senior advisory and management positions with different credible local and international non-government organizations. Her professional background includes expertise in designing and leading gender initiatives, women's empowerment, and equality, with specific expertise in women's rights, gender and civil society, advocacy, women's political participation, gender mainstreaming, gender-based violence, conflict resolution and peace and security. She is one of the few women's rights activists who holds a master's degree in gender and women's studies from Kabul University.

Methodology and tools

This report focused on eight to ten consultations with WROs and CSOs in three UK WPS NAP focus countries: Afghanistan, Somalia, and Myanmar. The consultations took place as key informant interviews with in-country experts in all the countries. Eight interviews were conducted in Afghanistan and ten interviews conducted in Somalia. However, given the time constraints and the current political situation in Myanmar only four interviews had taken place with WROs and CSOs. The small window to reach out, schedule and conduct interviews with civil society given that most have left or are working underground proved difficult. This has impacted the depth of the findings and the wide reach to those WROs and CSOs working on WPS. Therefore, these interviews will be supplemented with previous Saferworld research done in 2021 in Myanmar on WPS.

The report lays out five key recommendations that respond to the current and emerging WPS priorities that stemmed from the analysis and findings from the interviews with CSOs and WROs in all three countries. The guiding questions asked in the consultations ranged from what are current WPS priorities to sub themes such as legislations, security and justice with the four pillars of the WPS in mind.

Recommendations and findings

1

Conduct gender-sensitive conflict analysis and ensure inclusive, meaningful consultations

Gender-sensitive conflict analysis and meaningful consultations with women's organisations and civil society should form the basis of all WPS and conflict prevention and peacebuilding, humanitarian and development policy and programming in FCAS, as a first and priority step to address the gendered drivers of conflict and responding to gender dynamics and impact of conflict.

- A. *Undertake participatory and intersectional gender-sensitive conflict analyses (GSCA) as a requirement for strategy, policy and programme development and monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL). GSCA should be conducted by context specific teams working on specific FCAS and emergency responses, as well as by those teams focusing on specific thematic areas or policy streams. Governmental guidance on conflict analysis and related processes, such as the Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability, should include strong and concrete tools on meaningful gender integration.¹*
- B. *Fund and support inclusive, meaningful consultations with women and civil society systematically in the design, monitoring and evaluation of all UK policy and programmes in FCAS, disseminate findings of these consultations across UK Government (including posts, country offices and missions and thematic teams) and among those consulted, and develop an accountability mechanism to report on how findings and recommendations have shaped UK government policy and practice.²*
- C. *Address the gender norms, practices and systemic and structural dynamics that drive conflict, violence, and exclusion as a key priority in effective and equitable programming, policy and action in FCAS.*

Both GSCA and inclusive, meaningful consultations must be grounded in the practical application of tested tools and methodologies. This requires the UK Government to provide practical tools, guidance and resources to its staff and implementing partners, as well as to have internal capacity to support teams to conduct these and implement its findings. This expert support to conduct gender-sensitive conflict analyses and

¹ Durable peace programme (DPP), 'Listening to women peace builders – perspectives on women, peace and security from Kachin and northern Shan state, Myanmar', October 2020

² Durable peace programme (DPP), 'Listening to women peace builders – perspectives on women, peace and security from Kachin and northern Shan state, Myanmar', October 2020

implement findings is key to ensure analysis is implemented meaningfully and sustainably by UK government departments. The UK should acknowledge the existing expertise in countries that they are working in for their expert support. Gender norms, including notions of masculinities and femininities, and how these shape behaviours, practices and institutions at all levels are central in shaping the political, economic, and psychosocial dynamics that drive conflict systems and violence. Targeting these gendered root causes of conflict and violence should be a priority for all UK Government programmes, policies and actions in FCAS as it will mean the strengthening of conflict prevention and improve the sustainability of peacebuilding interventions.

In Myanmar, where women are often working underground due to security threats, participants asserted that donors must design consultation processes that go beyond a tick-box exercise to ensure that the perspectives of women active in grassroots mobilising are sought out. Women are not a homogenous group, and participants explained that 'elite Women' (who may hold privileged positions due to norms surrounding specific ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, or educational identities) are unable to represent diverse and marginalised women's priorities within peace and security but are even more likely to be called upon to "represent" women in an attempt to avoid risks to community-based stakeholders. Participants expressed that the national level WPS narrative and priorities are often not in alignment with the grassroots level, and there is a lack of consensus in terms of immediate needs and priorities of women and girls. Women's grassroots work on self-defined WPS priorities such as conflict prevention and peacebuilding as they relate to livelihoods, COVID response and public health, and support for domestic responsibilities is felt to be largely ignored.

Women and WROs are at the forefront of community-level and informal conflict prevention efforts. Their current roles include: development of conflict early warning systems, negotiating with armed and political leaders to prevent the escalation of conflict, advocating to decision makers on issues of gender, peace and security, negotiating with armed actors to mediate issues such as taxation, and mediating community and household-level disputes such as road accidents and gender-based violence (GBV) to protect survivors and prevent social tensions and mitigate further harm. Despite this broad range of issues that women and WROs are leading, participants believe their efforts remain under-acknowledged, as most public reports on WPS in Myanmar focus on either GBV (increasingly conflict-related sexual violence) or elite-driven, high-level of women's participation in peacebuilding but pay little attention to broader conflict prevention efforts³.

In Somalia, participants emphasised the need for the international community to work closely with women, WROs and CSOs to identify and address all root causes of conflict and violence, including gendered ones. Participants emphasized the need to tackle discriminatory and patriarchal social norms, practices and systems which inhibit the meaningful participation of women and girls in all aspects of political and social life. In previous consultations in Somalia in 2021, they also mentioned that funding trends forces them to work on humanitarian response and GBV and that there's little support or understanding on how important it is for them to work on longer-term, strategic and gender-transformative change. They want to be considered as crucial partners in promoting gender equality and peacebuilding and to be included in all critical decision-making spaces.

³ Durable peace programme (DPP), 'Listening to women peace builders – perspectives on women, peace and security from Kachin and northern Shan state, Myanmar', October 2020

In Afghanistan, participants have stressed the need for up-to-date GSCA and a good monitoring system to record the human rights violations that are taking place, including against women and girls' and women's rights activists and defenders. Most WROs and CSOs have ceased operating and those working are doing so underground without any support or funding, except the little money there is for humanitarian response. Participants have stressed that there are new governmental and military structures in place that are exclusionary to women, no suitable legal and justice systems, and no room for women in the Taliban's vision for Afghan society. Despite this, donors have been slow to support the Afghan women's movement in this crisis and participants asked that the international community must place great emphasis on ensuring a comprehensive gendered response to the Afghan crisis and women's meaningful participation in its design, implementation, and MEL.

2

Adopt a comprehensive, coordinated, and accountable WPS approach

The UK Government should fund and implement the Women, Peace and Security agenda in its entirety, ensuring that it is accountable for commitments in UNSCRs and related international instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Youth Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda and the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).

- D. *The WPS agenda enshrines human rights, peace and security issues. The UK Government should recognise and implement the WPS agenda within a human rights framework and articulate long-term, sustained, and demonstrable commitments to effectively implementing the fundamental human rights standards enshrined in the WPS framework.*
- E. *The UK Government should ensure that all four pillars of the UNSCR 1325 are considered when implementing peace and security strategy, diplomatic action, policy and programming. Conflict prevention and human rights should receive funding and political attention in line with more traditionally supported work streams such as relief and recover, GBV prevention and response and women's participation.*
- F. *Establish a dedicated WPS fund to support work on the four WPS pillars, as well as to advance gender equality, women and girls' rights and women's empowerment work as part of NAP implementation, in addition to existing peace building resources. This should represent a minimum of 15% of all peacebuilding funds (multilateral and bilateral) and should not affect other peacebuilding funds to report on WPS commitments.*

There is a need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach to WPS which meets the entirety of the needs and experiences of women and girls' and WROs in FCAS. This requires UK government teams across Whitehall and within each institution to integrate WPS commitments and coordinate more effectively, not just on funding but on diplomatic action, policy development and military and security action.

In Somalia, participants emphasised that there are gaps in the implementation of UNSCR 1325. At a national level there is no political will to advance WPS and no funding for the women's movement to do any networking or advocacy on it, therefore there is no

capacity to advance the development of a Somalia NAP on WPS or implement WPS related work. It was suggested that there is a need for a monitoring mechanism to track the work that is being implemented under the WPS umbrella because if there is activity being implemented by the Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development there is no knowledge of this among stakeholders. The only civil society network working on this, the Somali Women Leadership Forum's (SWLF) has had no funding for years and cannot drive this forward. Because of this, the implementation of WPS agenda is perceived as donor-driven by the government and male leaders. Somali participants voiced that the key priorities that the UK should focus on to meet their WPS commitments are: 1) increased direct, core and flexible funding for CSOs and WROs including networks, 2) enhancing women's participation in formal decision-making at all levels; 2) women's economic empowerment, and 3) access to justice-building state institutions that are inclusive.

In Myanmar, interviewed activists expressed frustration at the limitations of what is recognised as WPS-related work in a country with no civilian government and in active conflict, and at the potential for formalised WPS programming to be co-opted by the military junta. They described the work that WROs and other civil society are doing providing aid, facilitating dialogues at community levels, referring GBV cases to services, and welcoming women into more decision-making roles with some authorities (e.g., camp management and coordination), and working to change norms that act as barriers to their participation. These self-assessed needs and reported activities clearly come under the WPS agenda and should be supported through providing core and flexible funding, as well as diplomatic support. Participants reiterated the need for *'all four pillars of WPS to be resourced (when designing implementation of the WPS agenda) since the pillars are mutually reinforcing – for example, in protection: shelter, emergency services, prevention: advocacy with the National Unity Government's Ministry of Defence (MoD), GBV referral procedures for NUG to disseminate to communities; participation in the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) for women's participation.* Linked to this, participants emphasised how CEDAW remains one tool to report on women's rights in the current situation, which women's rights activists have contributed to for years through shadow reporting, and the need to connect it to the umbrella of WPS. They called for WPS and women's rights implementation to be understood beyond state responsibility, and applicable to donor policies and practices UN, INGO and women's groups as collectively responsible for its implementation.

Another issue that presented as a need in Myanmar was that of trauma healing, transitional justice efforts, and psychosocial support placed under a WPS umbrella, especially for young people and activists who, due to their active political role in the current situation, are exposed to traumatising situations and actions, sometimes on a daily basis.

In Afghanistan, experts interviewed had a strong sense of hopelessness and abandonment regarding international support. Participants highlighted that there is no space for women since the takeover by the Taliban, they expressed that there is no participation of women in public or private life. UNSCR 1325 is not being implemented and there is a crucial need for implementation as women rights are under threat and they are at risk of GBV.

'It seems very irrelevant to even raise the question of implementation of UNSCR 1325 or any other national or international policies that Afghanistan had committed to. [The] Taliban has repeatedly violated [the] rights of women in the past six months all

over Afghanistan, from forced expulsion of certain minorities to intimidating, humiliating and murder of women and girls from different categories⁴

Prior to the takeover, Afghanistan was the first country to have a NAP in the region, albeit that there was little implementation at national and local levels. Most ministries, governors and governmental entities did not play their role in its implementation. Afghanistan has a strong, vibrant, and highly skilled women's movement, and participants called for the UK to engage with those WROs, CSOs and activists who are still in Afghanistan, including by providing them with core and flexible funds, and the diaspora to decide the next steps in terms of WPS in Afghanistan and to sustain the work they advanced for years. They repeatedly mentioned the importance of a coordinated WPS approach: *"The UK and the international community should continue to place pressure on the Taliban to reinstate the Ministry of Women Affairs, and to put the WPS agenda on the table as part of their commitments to women's rights. This should be a pre-condition to any meetings and discussions about the future of Afghanistan. The UK must also ensure that its own delegation, when they meet with the Taliban, includes women in the top negotiation team".* Women should not be represented only on the sidelines with only civil society but should be part of all discussions. *'You cannot pass the message of women's right and that women's rights is important for you if do not have women in your delegation and Taliban will not take issue of women's rights seriously.'*

3

Address the root causes and drivers of gender-based violence (GBV)

The UK should adopt and fund an integrated approach to addressing GBV prevention, protection and response that cuts across its humanitarian, development, and conflict prevention/peacebuilding policy and programming.

- G. Increase funding to ensure GBV minimum standards and services are in place in all FCAS from the beginning of emergency response and into protracted situations of conflict and transitional phases (e.g., reporting and coordination mechanisms, referral pathways and access to services).*
- H. Ensure that different groups of women and girls and other GBV survivors, including people with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, have access to and are meaningfully engaged in the design, monitoring and implementation of such integrated approach.*
- I. Support and fund integrated and comprehensive GBV responses in all FCAS, including minimum standards in all emergency responses which prioritises GBV services from the start, tackling root causes of GBV, legal and policy reform, women's protection and empowerment funding and programmes, and building the capacity of other service providers to deliver a comprehensive multispectral response to GBV and gender equality.*
- J. Increase funding to WROs, including core and unrestricted funding, to ensure they can continue delivering GBV services (particularly in emergency crises) while*

⁴ Afghan Participant, Feb 2022

tackling root causes and preventing GBV through integrated and holistic approaches at home, community, and higher levels.

UK aid cuts have had a disproportionate impact on women and girls, including survivors of GBV and those at risk of experiencing GBV. Funding to addressing GBV represented only 1.1% of the total funded global humanitarian overview from 2021⁵, despite evidence that risk of GBV had risen during the pandemic and an increased demand in service provision⁶. As the nature of crises is changing and conflicts become prolonged and climate-related shocks more frequent, GBV prevention and response requires an integrated and coordinated approach between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding departments and funds across and within the UK government and beyond.

In Somalia, WROs have been on the frontline responding to GBV cases, even during the increase of cases throughout the pandemic⁷. They play a critical role in preventing, protecting, and responding to GBV and face barriers, including harassment, intimidations and even attacks by perpetrators and their families. Participants shared how they are pressured to stop representing and supporting GBV survivors and are often accused of exaggerating rape cases; labelled as agents who are serving foreign entities and are portrayed as dangerous activists and/or organisations because they are empowering women and girls.

They called for UK support on supporting an enabling environment for GBV work:

'The international community can support and pressure the Somali government to pass and enforce the laws to prevent GBV and sexual gender-based violence (SGBV) from happening and effectively respond to perpetrator⁸.

WROs have been advocating to revoke the Law on Sexual Intercourse Related Crimes (which breaches international and regional provisions against rape and sexual violence) and pass the Sexual Offences Bill (developed in consultation with women, civil society and the international community). This is being met with a huge backlash in the federal parliament. Participants have identified this law as crucial to protect victims of SGBV but funding to work on advocacy and lobbying to pass it is minimum.

In Myanmar, participants raised concerns that a military-led state structure will increase risks and prevalence of sexual violence under the regime and related conflict, noting that the 2019 Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar found that conflict-related sexual violence was used as a systemic tactic of war against the Rohingya. The military has now seized the country's central governance structure, but wields no legitimacy or authority to govern, which makes the military-led State Administration Council (SAC) even less likely to address cases of any form of GBV, and civil society leaders ready to reject any claims otherwise. Furthermore, with the absence of functioning governance institutions in many places, women will be even less likely to report such cases than before. There is also evidence of an increase in GBV and SGBV during the pandemic which will be further exacerbated by the coup. GBV prevention and response should be prioritised in all emergency and conflict prevention funding, policies and programmes inside Myanmar.

5 UN OCHA, 'Protection-Gender Based Violence', 2021.

6 IRC, 'Why Not Local? Gender-based violence, women's rights organisations, and the missed opportunity of COVID-19', 2021.

7 GAPS, Saferworld and SWDC, 'Now and the Future Gender Equality, Peace and Security in a COVID-19 World- Somalia', November 2020

8 Somalia Participant, Feb 2022

In Afghanistan, participants noted that GBV was and remains a serious issue. There has been an increase in all forms of GBV and child, early and forced marriages. There has also been an increase in disappearances, attacks and violence against women activists and human rights defenders, not only physical but also online harassment on social media such as shaming, cursing, humiliation and threats. Despite this, participants noted the absence of GBV emergency response and services (including minimum standards) since the Taliban takeover and are very critical of the lack of dedicated funding to women's organisations who are providing what GBV services they can. While donors, including the UK, continue to fund humanitarian aid, many humanitarian actors are avoiding GBV response due to sensitivities with the Taliban and WROs are getting little to no funding. There is no clear reporting mechanism after the Ministry of Women Affairs was abolished and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) has ceased working. Furthermore, the media no longer reports on VAWG cases. Participants have expressed that there is a real need for the international community to negotiate and diplomatically push for women organisations to formally be allowed to resume work, and to fund them with core and flexible funds. Their role in prevention and protection is crucial to VAWG work in Afghanistan. In absence of these WROs, women are neither safe nor protected.

4

Funding for Women's Rights Organisations and civil society

Funding for civil society, particularly WROs, should be a priority in the upcoming NAP. In all topics participants discussed, the topic of how lack of core and flexible funding is the main barrier in advancing their work came out strongly. WROs should be directly supported with core funding to recognise their critical role for long-term transformative change, to support and sustain their work even during crises. It should be flexible when responding to opportunities and address emerging factors that compound gender equality, peace and security in humanitarian and conflict-related settings.

- K. Prioritise funding to WROs that is core and flexible, and which will allow WROs and women-led organisations and movements to: a) strategically advance their priorities in FCAS beyond delivering on donor, UN or INGO programming priorities and service delivery; and b) flexibility to adapt and respond to shocks and crises by reducing reporting requirements and allowing budget reallocations and programme adaptations so that they can focus on community/context demands and needs rather than donor demands and priorities, as well as work on strategic WPS issues in the longer term.*
- L. Establish a dedicated WPS fund which benefit WROs in FCAS and track spending in FCAS to identify how UK funded work is supporting gender equality and WPS, but also what percentage of it is going to those doing most of the crucial work, WROs.*
- M. Donors should remove restrictions for funding CSOs that do not hold formal NGO registration and should simplify application processes, lessen, and harmonise due diligence, and develop simpler proposal templates and standardised reporting formats and systems that are accessible.*

Funding for women's rights organisations and civil society was a fundamental issue that was raised in all three of the consultations. The lack of direct, core, long-term, flexible funding prevents them from advancing WPS at all levels. Committing to increasing core funding to WROs and CSOs in the long term allows for strategic, feminist movement building based on local needs and priorities. Movement building is essential to supporting intersectional and feminist movements which create change and represent diverse rights, including (but not limited to) young women, older women and girls, refugees and IDPs and religious and ethnic minorities, with due regards to issues of socio-economic position, marital status, and disability⁹.

Participants raised that current 'projectisation' of funds undermines the ability of WROs and CSOs to sustain their growth and capacity, as well as their ability to adapt and respond to changing contexts, especially in insecure and quickly changing political environments. Long-term funding allows for investing in the resilience of local civil society, specifically WROs, which is especially important when women's rights are more than ever at risk and more likely to be traded away¹⁰.

WROs and CSOs have multiple and essential roles working at the local, national, and international level which are constantly adapting to changes, crises, and shocks to ensure that their work, and the services they provide, continue according to self-defined needs and priorities. The funding they receive needs to reflect this understanding of the nature of how WROs and CSOs work.

In Afghanistan, the loss of funding available to WROs and CSOs has severely impacted their work in a deteriorating environment. WROs in Afghanistan are at the frontline responding to COVID-19, the political situation, the increasing persecution of women and girls, women's activities and WROs and severe humanitarian need. CSOs and WROs have tried to stay active and find alternative ways to continue working despite the challenges that they are facing after the Taliban takeover. But the current financial crisis and restrictions on Afghanistan has severely impacted them. WROs which were already hampered by limited funds, are also now suffering from donor restrictions of funding for work inside Afghanistan, as well as restrictions on access to bank funds. Participants have expressed during interviews that humanitarian response has neglected GBV and women's rights grossly, and that any future funding should be channelled through different mechanisms and not through banks as there is not a transparent system which allows CSOs to access them. Participants also identified that direct funding is needed for the vital work to be carried out such as the capacity building for WROs and CSOs, the continuation of documenting HR abuses and the implementation of the WPS agenda.

In Myanmar, interviewees revealed that since the 2021 coup they have not seen or experienced any significant increase of funding and that the donor trend to engage directly with WROs and CSOs needs to move from rhetoric to practice. There needs to be sustainable and context-specific funds to support and strengthen their work. These funds need to be meaningfully flexible, which requires donor risk-sharing by relaxing requirements for registration and certain financial compliance issues. Otherwise, WROs and women themselves are placed in serious risk of detention, harassment, asset freezing, and worse. The current crisis makes donors more likely to commit to short-term funding, which creates heavy burdens on WROs and does not help them plan and work strategically. As mentioned above, participants also expressed the need to avoid WPS

⁹ AWID, 'Toward a feminist funding ecosystem: A framework and practical guide', September 2019

¹⁰ UNWomen, 'Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations: Connections between Presence and Influence', 2021

funding being co-opted by the current military regime for the purpose of their own political legitimacy pursuits. To that end, grassroots, and cross-border WROs and CSOs should be funded directly, with the local actors setting the agenda, the minimum standards in GBV, all emergency responses which prioritise GBV services, tackling root causes of GBV, women's protection and empowerment funding and programming, and building the capacity of other service providers to deliver a comprehensive multisectoral response to GBV and gender equality. WROs have a strong record of human rights documentation and international advocacy in Myanmar. Acknowledging the importance of funding and supporting them to continue this role safely is essential.

In Somalia, participants highlighted that there is limited funding available for WROs and CSOs' self-defined priorities and COVID-19 has further exacerbated this. This is impacting the long-term vital work that WROs have been working on such as root causes of gender inequality, VAWG, insecurity and poverty. Furthermore, the accessing and applying for funding is also a challenge for most WROs and CSOs in Somalia, especially with an increased use of commercial contracts, which are complicated for them to apply for and engage with meaningfully, even with a partner who can. Participants have expressed that there is a lack of core organisational capacity as the lack of long-term core funding has not allowed them to build organisational core functions or retain staff with capacities such as such as monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL), finance, fundraising, compliance and due diligence, and management and operations.

5

Ensure meaningful participation of women and girls

Women and girl's meaningful participation at all levels of socio-economic and political life should be supported by the UK government, including in local, national and international peacebuilding; local, regional and national politics; economic policy and empowerment; security and justice; and peace processes.

- N. *Support ongoing women-led grassroots and local initiatives and organisations to politically mobilise women in influencing peacebuilding and reconciliation processes along high-level women's participation work.*
- O. *Ensure that women from all backgrounds and political spheres are integrated into peace processes as negotiators and mediators at all levels, and their needs, concerns and suggestions are reflected in all peace agreements.*
- P. *Go beyond gender sensitive to gender transformative approaches to improving women's political participation, by supporting programmes that challenge gender norms that perpetuate violence, gender inequality and women's exclusion.*
- Q. *Support for women's systematic engagement in peace talks must be included in the terms of reference of every mediator, envoy, and leader of peace mission, and performance in this regard should be regularly reported on in all forums, including the Security Council.*
- R. *Support women and girls to access education, employment, work skills and training through financial resources.*

The right of all women in FCAS to meaningfully participate in the decisions that frame and impact their lives is essential for delivering on the WPS agenda. This includes women at all levels (grassroots and local to national and international levels) as well as women involved in conflict and conflict prevention in through different roles (peacebuilders, partisan women, women in security and justice institutions, etc).

Participation efforts must consider women's intersecting identities such as ethnicity, disability, religion (or religious groups/sets), class, age (youth and older persons groups), sexual orientation and gender identity, geographic location (rural and urban, in recognised and unrecognised territory), political affiliations, migration status and social-economic status and ensure that they are consulted. Some of the key factors that prevent women from being able to participate equally and safely in all spheres of life include patriarchal attitudes, behaviours and traditional norms, GBV, and structural barriers such as access to resources and closing civil society space. Donor and WPS international trends can also affect who gets to participate in specific settings or spaces/platforms. Global rhetoric on women's participation remains strong, however in practice little has changed, at both international and national levels - this has been particularly evident in internationally supported peace negotiations¹¹.

'Women were historically excluded from the Myanmar military and the institutions they built. They never put women in any positions of influence in their history... Women leaders often get squeezed out in these kinds of situations. Leadership increasingly is seen as men with combatant experience – this is what qualifies someone to be a leader in a militarised context'¹².

Women's rights are not part of the Myanmar military's agenda, and any small progress or gains made on women's rights in Myanmar over the past decade are perennially at risk. There is an increasing concern that, even though the military may appoint a few women, the regime's long-term survival will lead to a serious impediment for women's rights. Myanmar's 10-year National Strategic Action Plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW) expires at the end of 2022. The expiration of this plan without a credible successor could mark a devastating blow to an already limited process. The military-led attempt to develop a new plan is likely to be antithetical to the commitments enshrined in the NSPAW – and will be a major setback to its original principles and ambition. Participants asked the UK and the international community to engage in dialogue with existing and emerging pro-democracy structures that promote women's leadership and representation in all aspects of revolutionary leadership and decision-making bodies and reiterate the evolving priorities and objectives of Myanmar's women's movement¹³.

In Somalia, with the current national elections going ahead, participants expressed concerns of women being excluded from seats across all regions of Somalia, both due to discrimination and violence but also because of structural barriers such as fees to run for elections.¹⁴ Women candidates have encountered a number of challenges including blocks from registering, getting the certificates to be able to run for parliamentary seats, denial of nominations from both heads of states and clan elders, and a lack of funding and support as well as facing intimidation, harassments and violence. Participants have

11 UNWomen, 'A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325', 2015

12 Saferworld, 'We are hard to ignore now': Women's participation in Myanmar's resistance movement from February–March 2021' June 2021

13 Saferworld, 'We are hard to ignore now': Women's participation in Myanmar's resistance movement from February–March 2021' June 2021

14 Somalia, 'Women's rights and participation in Somalia's 2021 elections', December 2020.

expressed that the exclusion of women will mean that women are underrepresented and will not have met the informal quota (currently not legislated) of 30 per cent.

'The belief that women should stay home and take care of their families is still present in the mind-set of many people in our community'¹⁵

Despite their vital frontline contributions to crises, from COVID-19 pandemic to a range of other emergencies, Somali women and WROs continue to experience inequalities, misrepresentation, and denial of economic and political decision-making opportunity because of poverty, ongoing political insecurity, a deeply clan-based culture and patriarchal norms. Participants called for *"through diplomacy with the Somali government and federal member states, the UK government should advocate for an increase in women's participation and support WROs' advocacy efforts more broadly during this pivotal moment"*. The key issues revolve around the women's quota in the upcoming election, adopting the quota in the Provisional Constitution and passing the Sexual Offences Bill in Parliament to replace the Law on Sexual Intercourse Related Crimes. They also asked the UK to support WROs' pressure on the Federal Government of Somalia to develop a National Action Plan on WPS, crystallising the participation of women and WROs in decision-making processes at all levels.

In **Afghanistan**, participants have expressed that there is no respect for human rights under the Taliban and in particular for women's rights since the Taliban takeover. On a national level the Taliban have imposed severe restrictions on women and girls, banning women from returning to work or travelling in public and girls above the age of twelve are not allowed to go to school. Furthermore, the move of the Taliban to abolish the Ministry of Women's Affairs, (MoWA) marks a symbolic end to the formal role that women have played in government over the last 20 years and sends a message that gender equality and women's rights has no importance.

On the international level, participants called for WROs and women-led organisations [to be] given platforms for Afghan women to participate. They are best placed and best equipped to advise and support humanitarian missions and negotiation. The Oslo talks have been divisive both in Afghanistan and abroad, and while several Afghan women had attended it was not enough, the talks failed to ensure the wider participation of Afghan WROs and CSO – and left many feeling isolated.¹⁶ This has also been the case with previous internationally facilitated engagements with the Taliban. One participant stated that

'the UK should set preconditions with the Taliban on any further economic negotiations, that they must meaningfully engage with women, the way that UN agencies operate with the Taliban with Humanitarian aid, this will then allow for women participation'.

¹⁵ Somalia, 'Women's rights and participation in Somalia's 2021 elections', December 2020.

¹⁶ WILPF, 'Oslo Talks should translate into concrete feminist action for the Afghan People', January 2022