Discussion Paper

Australia’s second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security
Australia’s next National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security

Australia’s first National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security will expire mid-2019. The National Action Plan is a whole of government policy, coordinated by the Office for Women, to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) and related resolutions under the Women, Peace and Security agenda. The National Action Plan sets out Australia’s actions to integrate a gender perspective into peace and security efforts; protect women’s and girls’ human rights; and promote their participation in conflict prevention, management and resolution.

National Action Plans are globally recognised as the best mechanism to guide government effort to implement the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

To support the development of the second National Action Plan, the Australian Government is seeking input from a wide range of stakeholders, both through national roundtables and through the online consultation website. The purpose of this paper is to prompt discussion and raise issues for consideration. It is not intended to be an exhaustive set of issues or questions.

In addition to the roundtables and online consultation process, the Australian Government will review findings from the 2015 Independent Interim Review of the Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, the forthcoming Final Review (due later this year), and the Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security Annual Reports, to inform the development of the second National Action Plan.

Your consideration of this discussion paper and your contributions are greatly appreciated.

What do we mean by ‘Women, Peace and Security’?

Women and girls are disproportionately vulnerable in areas where there’s conflict and instability. For example, violence against women, including sexual violence, has been used as a weapon of war and a means of exercising power. Additionally, we know that the maternal mortality more than doubles in conflict or post conflict settings, while the rate of girls’ primary school enrolment in these environments is just 76 per cent as compared to the global rate of 91 per cent. Natural disasters can also affect women and girls differently: the poorer women are, the less likely they are to survive a natural disaster.

The barriers many societies place on women’s lives also limit the prospects of peace and security in those same societies. We know that when women are involved in finding solutions — when their knowledge and experience is harnessed — that we have a much better chance of achieving real and lasting change. For example, an analysis of more than 150 peace agreements has found that when women are involved the agreement is more likely to last longer.

At its heart, the Women, Peace and Security agenda means gender equality should be at the forefront of what governments do to prevent conflict, respond to national disasters and contribute to peacekeeping and peacebuilding.
Developing Australia’s next NAP: A Principled Approach

In this section, we identify the principles guiding the design of the next National Action Plan. These principles offer a starting point for discussion, but are not intended to capture the range and breadth of issues.

In designing Australia’s next National Action Plan, we have an opportunity to strategically coordinate our efforts and direct cohesive whole of government implementation. In developing the next Australian National Action Plan, the following principles have been identified through a series of initial workshops:

- build on the achievements of, and lessons learned from, the first National Action Plan;
- align with Australia’s strategic priorities and strengths;
- meet Australia’s obligations under United Nations Security Council resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, and align with existing international commitments, including CEDAW and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- strive to achieve normative change based on the Women, Peace and Security four pillars: prevention; participation; protection; relief and recovery;
- be based on an overarching theory of change;
- comprise activities within the Commonwealth Government’s remit;
- draw on knowledge and expertise of civil society;
- be flexible enough to effectively incorporate new issues under the changing WPS landscape including future UNSC WPS Resolutions;
- address intersectionality1; and
- have an effective and streamlined, fit for purpose, monitoring and evaluation approach which integrates with, but does not duplicate, other government strategic plans and reporting frameworks.

Consultation Questions

1. Would you add or amend any of these principles?
   a. If yes, why?

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1 Intersectionality refers to the complex, cumulative and systemic ways in which multiple forms of discrimination, on the basis of race, sex, class, sexual orientation and identity and poverty status, for example, intersect with the experience, incidence and impact of discrimination and other gendered harms to women and girls, in different ways.
Scope of the next National Action Plan

The nature and context of global peace and security is very different today than when Australia’s current National Action Plan was developed. Recurrent intrastate conflicts, expanded terrorist and extremist networks, the increasing prevalence and ferocity of natural disasters, and the mass displacement of people define contemporary global security.

The international policy framework has also changed a lot since the release of Australia’s current National Action Plan. For example, in October 2013, the UN introduced General Recommendation 30, which clarified that the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (often referred to as the ‘international bill of rights for women’) applies to situations of armed conflict and political crises, to prevention and resolution of conflicts and to the various complex peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction processes. Additionally, several new Women, Peace and Security resolutions have been adopted by the UN Security Council since the current National Action Plan was developed: UNSCR 2106 (2013) which focuses on securing prosecutions for sexual violence; UNSCR2122 (2013) which puts in place measures to ensure women’s participation and leadership in conflict prevention, peace processes and throughout post-conflict recovery; and UNSCR 2242 (2015) which identifies Women, Peace and Security as a cross-cutting issues, urging Member States to apply a gender sensitive approach across peace and security policy and operations.

In 2015, UN Member States unanimously adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that includes the Sustainable Development Goals. The 2030 Agenda makes clear the linkage between peace and development: ‘There can be no sustainable development without peace, and no peace without sustainable development’ and includes two goals relevant to the Women, Peace and Security agenda: Goal 5 (gender equality) and Goal 16 (inclusive peace and justice).

The current National Action Plan is focused almost exclusively on actions by the Australian Government taken overseas. It does not include activities undertaken by state, territory or local governments. This reflected an implementing context that placed the Women, Peace and Security framework (as set out by the various UN resolutions) in fragile, conflict, post-conflict and humanitarian contexts - situations where the Commonwealth Government has the responsibility and the capacity to take action.

Creating effective National Action Plans can include articulating the links between security and peace building priorities, and other efforts to improve gender equality.

In Australia, the National Action Plan is not the only strategic policy framework that coordinates government activity relevant to women’s safety, participation and leadership. For example, all governments in Australia have signed up to the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010 – 2022 which identifies strategies to ensure Australian women and their children live free from violence in safe communities.

In 2017 the Australian Government released its strategy for achieving the G20’s goal of reducing the gap between men and women’s workforce participation by 25 per cent by 2025 (Towards 2025: Boosting Australian Women’s Workforce Participation). This strategy prioritises effort across several areas important not only to improving women’s participation in paid work, but also enhancing their financial security and leadership opportunities.
Although the Australian National Action Plan is focused externally, there are some important exceptions including actions to increase the representation of women in the Australian Federal Police, Department of Defence and Australian Defence Force, as well as providing support to domestic civil society organisations to engage in peace and security initiatives and raise awareness of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. However while Australia is a peaceful nation, it is impacted by transboundary issues like countering violent extremism, health pandemics, climate change and displacement.

As of March 2018, 74 countries have adopted National Action Plans. There is no one single approach to National Action Plans.

Finland recently has launched its third National Action Plan. It has four mainly externally-focused areas, including in Afghanistan, Kenya and Nepal, and aims to strengthen the meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, mainstream gender in security sector, and improve the protections of women and girls.

In 2017, the Philippines adopted its third National Action Plan. This plan explicitly applies to non-international armed conflict and implements guidance from the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women by also covering actions relevant to “other situations of concern, such as internal disturbances, protracted and low-intensity civil strife, political strife, ethnic and communal violence, states of emergency and suppression of mass uprisings, war against terrorism and organized crime...” (UN CEDAW, Recommendation 30).

Australia’s current National Action Plan prioritises effort across five key themes, based on the UN’s women’s, peace and security pillars. These themes are

1. **Prevention** - incorporating a gender perspective in conflict prevention activities and strategies and recognising the role of women in preventing conflict.
2. **Participation** - recognising the important role women already play in all aspects of peace and security, and enhancing women’s meaningful participation.
3. **Protection** - protecting the human rights of women and girls by working with international partners to ensure safety, physical and mental wellbeing, economic security and equality, with special consideration for protecting women and girls from gender-based violence.
4. **Relief and Recovery** - ensuring a gender perspective is incorporated in all relief and recovery efforts in order to support the specific needs and recognise the capacity of women and girls.
5. **Normative** - raising awareness about and developing policy frameworks to progress the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

Many other countries have adopted a similar approach in developing their National Action Plans. For example, New Zealand and Nepal both have National Action Plans which place equal priority on effort against the UN pillars of prevention, protection, relief and recovery and peace building. However, some countries have opted to give particular prominence to certain themes or priorities. One example is Sweden, whose National Action Plan is structured around the four UN pillars but also explicitly identifies the single overriding priority as being women’s meaningful participation, particularly in peacebuilding efforts. Having a thematic priority is one possible way for Australia’s next National Action Plan to organise implementation, without losing the flexibility to respond to emerging peace and security challenges.

We know that high impact National Action Plans convey a sense of purpose to guide implementation and responses to changes in the peace and security context. A clearly defined vision and goal will help
focus Australian efforts in terms of setting policy, developing priorities, taking steps towards implementation, and monitoring and evaluating progress. It will promote a common understanding of the purpose of the National Action Plan both within government and beyond.

While addressing the need for protection will remain central to the next National Action Plan, long-term transformational outcomes for women should be our focus. One option is for Australia’s next National Action Plan to increase its focus on women’s voice and agency across implementation, placing gender equality and women’s human rights at the centre of Australia’s commitment to the agenda. With this in mind, a possible goal and vision statement for Australian’s next National Action Plan could be as follows:

**Vision:**

“**Efforts to prevent and resolve conflict, and to promote peace and stability, are made more effective and sustainable through the routine consideration of gender, and the full and equal participation of women and girls**”.

**Goal:**

“**Australia will take deliberate actions to enable the full and meaningful participation and leadership of diverse women and girls across conflict prevention, protection, and relief and recovery. Australia will integrate a gendered approach to policy development, implementation and evaluation across WPS related policies, programs and responses**”.

**Consultation Questions**

1. Do you think the next National Action Plan should implement the WPS agenda pillars equally?
   a. Or should effort be focused on one pillar? If so, what should be the focus?

2. Do you agree that women’s full, equal and meaningful participation should be central to how Australia implements the Women, Peace and Security agenda?
   a. What would women’s full, equal and meaningful participation look like when implementing the WPS agenda?

3. Are the proposed vision and goal statements clear and focused to help coordinate government activity and measure progress?
   a. What areas of improvement would you recommend?
   b. Are there other priorities that are just as important, or more important?

4. How do we ensure the National Action Plan can accommodate the rapidly changing global peace and security environment?

**Ensuring accountability and transparency**

High impact National Action Plans are characterised by strong mechanisms to ensure government is accountable and transparent about implementation and progress. This includes:

- Having clear roles and responsibilities and an oversight function for holding implementing bodies to account.
• Fair representation of civil society in design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation.
• A compelling and clear vision and goal for the National Action Plan
• Having sound systems in place to collect, analyse and report on data, and ensuring that monitoring is focused on outcomes and results.2

Australia’s current National Action Plan establishes a range of mechanisms aimed at ensuring accountability and transparency. To help guide implementation, the National Action Plan establishes an Interdepartmental Committee, chaired by the Office for Women, and including representatives from all implementing agencies (the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Defence, the Attorney-General’s Department, the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Civil and Military Centre). The Committee includes representatives from Australia’s civil society partner, the Australian Coalition for Women, Peace and Security. The National Action Plan also commits the government to providing support to the non-government sector to prepare and publish ‘shadow reports’ on Australia’s progress.

The current National Action Plan sets out how progress will be measured and reported on. It includes a monitoring and evaluation framework that identifies a number of quantitative measures, as well as the government agencies that are responsible for implementing them. Every two years, a formal report setting out progress against these measures must be prepared and tabled in the Australian Parliament. The National Action Plan also requires the government to independently review the success of the plan twice within its lifetime. The first review was finalised in 2015 and the second and final review is currently underway. The 2015 Interim Review of Australia’s National Action Plan identified a number of areas for improvement, including setting a clear goal for the National Action Plan, measuring outcomes and effectiveness (rather than inputs and outputs) and investigating the use of qualitative measures.

In addition to reporting domestically, Australia also prepares numerous reports on progress to meet its international commitments. For example, Australia is required to report to the UN on our progress in implementing the relevant Security Council resolutions to Women, Peace and Security. In addition (and taking into account General Recommendation 30), Australia provides four-yearly reports to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women which cover efforts to specifically address the needs of women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations. This year Australia will also undertake its first voluntary report to the UN on the Sustainable Development Goals, which will include chapters on Sustainable Development Goal 5 (realising gender equality) and Sustainable Development Goal 16 (inclusive peace and justice). While robust reporting is important for accountability, duplicative reporting can divert resources from other activities.

**Consultation Questions**

1. How can we use existing international frameworks to strengthen and streamline the reporting of our implementation of WPS commitments to improve accountability to key stakeholders, including the Australian public, Parliament and the United Nations?

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2. How can the government better include the Australian public in the implementation of the next National Action Plan?

3. Taking into consideration the important role that civil society organisations, networks and non-government organisations have in implementing the WPS agenda and their role in accountability and transparency, how can we better engage with these stakeholders, and what could be done differently?
   a. What are the roles and responsibilities of non-government stakeholders in National Action Plan accountability and transparency mechanisms?

4. What do you want to know about implementation of the National Action Plan?
   a. How can we improve how we communicate with interested stakeholders?